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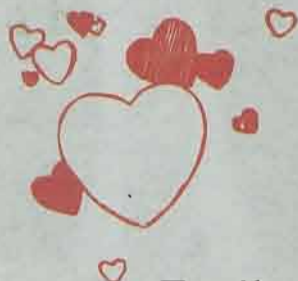
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THE RACE FOR ATTORNEY GENERAL

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

holds—before President George W. Bush nominated her to the Supreme Court.

Maloney claims both the means and the plan to cobble together a winning coalition of so-called “Deaniacs,” along with gay, Irish, female and younger voters, together with a cross section from those particularly interested in children’s issues.

“I think it takes 235,000 votes to win this race, and you better know where

they’re coming from, and you better know their names, frankly,” he said.

O’Donnell leaves the political calculations to her son and campaign manager, Jack, a former aide to Sen. Charles Schumer. Not a complete political novice, though, she was appointed U.S. attorney by Clinton and was a lawyer for John Kerry’s 2004 presidential campaign. Her husband John is a state Supreme Court justice.

She talks of her years in the legal trenches, trying cases and working with

Andrew Cuomo, Questions & Answers

This is the first in a series of interviews with candidates for state attorney general.

By Emily Liebert

Since withdrawing from the gubernatorial race in 2002, Andrew Cuomo has been flying under the political radar. Now, four years later, he’s back and running for attorney general.

As President Bill Clinton’s second secretary of housing and urban development, Cuomo established a reputation as an aggressive reformer, transforming the agency from a bureaucratic backwater to a model for government reinvention. He came to the position after serving as assistant secretary for community planning and development during Clinton’s first term.

Prior to his White House tenure, the Queens native founded Housing Enterprise for Less Privileged in 1986. HELP, which provides education, job training, treatment for drug and alcohol abuse, mental health services, and emergency and transitional housing for the homeless. The program was named a national demonstration model by the United States Congress within two short years. In 1988, Cuomo left his law practice to run HELP full time, and in 1991, Mayor David Dinkins named him to lead the New York City Commission on the Homeless.

Our Town: What have you been doing—professionally—since you withdrew from the 2002 governor’s race?

Andrew Cuomo: I’ve been working for the real estate development firm Island Capital Group. I’ve also done a lot of work on the Rockefeller drug reform issue and started the Drop the Rock campaign with Russell Simmons, which actually brought energy to that issue that hadn’t been generated in years. We did a rally down at City Hall with about 30,000 young kids, so it really spawned a lot of

interest. Ultimately, there was a reform effort passed, not everything we would have hoped, and one of the issues I want to revisit. I worked on the anti-death penalty campaign last year because the death penalty was thrown out. There has been a move to reinstate it, and we organized a coalition to stop that. So far there’s no death penalty in New York. It hasn’t been reinstated. And, this year, I worked on an effort to stop the president from cutting the [Housing and Urban Development] budget. It would have had a devastating impact on cities all across the country.

OT: If elected, what are your top priorities?

AC: One will be continuing to protect New Yorkers, especially in light of the federal government’s failure to do so, across the board. Number two is to reform Albany. The attorney general can and should play a big role in cleaning up Albany.

OT: Given what Spitzer has done on Wall Street, do you think they’re going to pay more attention to your race?

AC: Oh, yes. I think they are a prime, focused audience.

OT: What would you do differently than Spitzer?

AC: One of the things you do in office is respond to the needs of the times, and different times hold different needs. So I will respond to the needs of the times. Under Eliot, Wall Street became an issue. The problem developed and he presented the solution. The priorities of today are, as I said, stepping in where the federal government fails and reforming Albany. The attorney general has broad authority, as we’ve seen. He enforces existing laws and he can propose new laws.

OT: How have your experiences as former secretary of Housing and Urban

other law enforcement professionals around the country.

"Other people may have experience in small parts of what the office does, but no one has the kind of experience that I bring to the job," she said.

O'Donnell is not alone in trying to custom-tailor a definition of the position which directly matches her background. Major policy differences between the Democrats have been absent to date, and with all six pledging commitment to the party's usual hot-button issues like abortion and the environment, it is unlikely any will arise.

And so, depending on whom you ask,

the attorney general could be the people's lawyer, the people's advocate, the people's moral authority, the people's arbiter of dysfunction in Albany, the people's prosecutor or the people's progressive lodestone. Most go with some combination of the items on that list.

Those who have actually served in the office see this diversity of definition as perfectly reasonable.

"The office of attorney general is constantly in metamorphosis," said Robert Abrams, who held the position from 1979 to 1992. While he focused on issues like protecting the environment and

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Andrew Cuomo

Development for Clinton, founding and running Housing Enterprise for Less Privileged (HELP), and as an assistant district attorney in Manhattan prepared you to be AG?

AC: I think I'm the only candidate who has federal experience and experience in Albany, number one. Number two, in terms of cleaning up government and Medicaid fraud, which is top of the agenda for the attorney general's office, I spent eight years cleaning up HUD, an agency that they wanted to close when I took over because it was just rife with waste, fraud, and abuse. I've practiced law with the Manhattan district attorney and private law. I've also been in business, which is important, because you want to see a lot of these issues, especially financial ones, from both sides of the table.

OT: You served as your father's campaign manager for his 1982 race for governor of New York. What was that like?

AC: It was actually a fun campaign. He was running against Koch and everyone was against my father. We were the candidate of organized labor, the populist candidate, if you will. Grossly outspent. Just a total underdog. So it was one of those campaigns where we had nothing to lose; it was actually liberating in some ways.

OT: Is dad giving you advice on the AG race?

AC: Yes. His advice is always valuable. My father is great with the English language and he'll have comments after a speech—what he thought worked, what he thought didn't work. I don't necessarily always agree, but he's always worth listening to. Even if you disagree with him, he's still interesting to talk to just because he'll make you think about your position differently. I've worked with Clinton, Gore, Kerry, Mondale, and Dukakis and—though I may be jaded as his son—he's one of the most gifted people I've ever met. ■

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