

The Westbury Times

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Election News

It's Gulotta In a Landslide

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You can forget all about the prognostication of all the pundits and political analysts. Forget too, all those television and radio spots, and the campaign literature that bulged from area mail boxes.

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Republican Juggernaut Remakes Townships and Saves Balboni

You can forget all about the prognostication of all the pundits and political analysts. Forget too, all those television and radio spots, and the campaign literature that bulged from area mail boxes.

When all was said and done, last Tuesday night, election night, 1997, the simple truth was this: the people are abundantly satisfied with the job performed by County Executive Thomas S. Gulotta, and his landslide was accompanied by huge victories across the board for local Republicans, leaving a wounded Nassau Democratic party to regroup in their wake.

As of 2:49 Wednesday morning, with just over half of Nassau's election districts accounted for, Gulotta's lead was 118,125 votes to Democratic challenger Lewis Yevoli's 56,615.

Right-To-Life and Libertarian candidate Vincent O'Neill received 3,406 votes, while Liberal candidate Aaron Schein received 960.

As expected, all of Nassau's incumbent legislators were re-elected, save one, Democrat Edward Oppenheimer.

In the Second Legislative District, incumbent Democrat Roger Corbin out-distanced his Republican challenger, C. Sheldon Bassarath, 4,118 votes to 1,925; in the Eleventh Legislative District, incumbent Democrat Barbara Johnson defeated Republican Amy Haber, 8,033 votes to 7,330.

Perhaps the most lopsided of all the county legislative races was in the Ninth Legislative District, where Richard Nicoletto garnered 12,787 votes, the most received by any county legislator.

His Democratic opponent, Richard Mannheimer, of Mineola, received 3,705 votes, while Independence party candidate Patrick Tobin received 332.

The much-watched state Senate race was also significantly impacted by the county executive's Juggernaut, Republican Michael Balboni winning 32,659 votes to Democrat Doreen Banks' 27,581.

Despite Banks' being out front on the pro-choice issue and Balboni's trying to portray himself as neutral, Right-To-Life candidate Charles R. Cuddy was a non-factor in the race, securing only 899 votes.

A Day and Night In Early November

As Election Day dawned Tuesday morning, there was little suspense about what the ultimate outcome in Nassau would be.

"Defeat is in the bag," said one prominent Democratic official, about four days before the actual vote.

"All we really have to hope for now is victories in the state Senate race and in the First Legislative District. Even North Hempstead, where we should be strong, looks like it's going to be tough."

"Unfortunately, we had a Democrat at the head of our ticket who in many respects seemed to actually be working against us," said Nassau Democratic Chairman Stephen J. Sabbeth.

"I've always felt that if you declared your candidacy, you had an obligation to run hard - even if the odds were against you - for the sake of the entire ticket. Our candidate didn't feel that way.

"You know, I can't help but think of Bob Dole last year," Sabbeth continued. "He had to know, weeks before the presidential election, that he wasn't going to defeat Bill Clinton, and yet he felt a responsibility to other Republicans, nationwide, and continued to campaign hard right to the bitter end.

"In politics, you really have to respect a guy like that. Unfortunately, Lew Yevoli has turned out to be no Bob Dole."

Just after 9:30 a.m. on Election Day, Tom Gulotta and his wife, Betsy, drove their green Ford Explorer to the Park Avenue Elementary School in North Merrick, their local polling place, to cast their votes.

Feeling confident thanks to a significant, double-digit lead in the polls, and buoyed by the warm weather and partly cloudy skies, the incumbent greeted many of his fellow voters as if they were old friends.

Watching the Gulottas depart moments later, followed by a gaggle of reporters and television crews, many of those still waiting to vote wondered if this election would be the harbinger of more significant and important races to come for Gulotta, who has now been county executive for a decade.

Though he spoke of being an underdog to reporters, and said he still held out hopes of winning, Lew Yevoli's appearance to vote at the Old Bethpage Elementary School two hours later was viewed more as a swan song.

In many respects, his appearance - and his very much anticipated sound bites - had about them the air of the perfunctory. Unfortunately for the Democratic candidate, the i's and t's being dotted and crossed this Election Day, were not those of a victory speech. In a very real sense, as he waved and drove off, Lew Yevoli had provided the epilogue for his own political obituary.

"There's an awful lot in politics that you can't control," said Fran Reiter, campaign manager for New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, in a New York Observer article which appeared the week before the election. "You should do the things you can control extremely well and aggressively."

In a way there are valid comparisons to be made between what happened in Nassau and what occurred in New York City on election night.

Like Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, who also defeated his Democratic challenger, Ruth Messinger, in a landslide, Gulotta was blessed with a superb field operation, money - a \$3.5 million war chest - and was muscular in his use of incumbency, proposing his sixth tax cut in a row, lending both his name and county money to initiatives like Operation Downtown, and trumpeting Nassau's lowest crime rate in 26 years.

Giuliani, by comparison, had just over \$1 million to spend on his field operation - and that was to spread his message to a population eight times that of Nassau.

The key to Gulotta's victory, however, wasn't tax cuts or quality-of-life issues, it was that people trust him to deal with, if not actually solve, their problems, and appreciate his penchant for getting out among them at every opportunity.

"Tom Gulotta would appear at the opening of an envelope," Lew Yevoli said.

Unfortunately for the Oyster Bay Town Supervisor, that was just fine with most voters.

As Ethel Hall, a 98-year-old Westbury resident said in explaining her vote for Gulotta, "I think he has a very nice touch with people. No matter what's going on, he gets out to where they are. He doesn't have an excuse for not being there. He gets close to the people."

Giuliani over the past several weeks had employed much the same technique - actually appointing 80 surrogate speakers to go to places the mayor's schedule kept him from reaching.

Another important component of both campaigns was that the candidates, though heavily favored, never neglected to express their gratitude to those who either endorsed them or

expressed their support for their efforts in other ways.

No one who signed the June petition to get Mayor Giuliani on the ballot, for instance, was denied a thank you note from the mayor in the mail; neither were all those the campaign registered to vote.

Gulotta's campaign was equally sophisticated, with personal computers augmenting every station of the phone banks set up in his East Meadow headquarters. Every potential voter who responded positively to a campaign phone call received a thank you note just a few days later. Those who declared themselves undecided also received follow-up attention.

Lastly, both the mayor and the county executive employed a strategy of media saturation, starting out with ads poking at their opponent's records, and then ending on a high note - and everywhere one turned in Nassau County, they were sure to either see a Gulotta street sign or to be handed a piece of Gulotta campaign literature.

"What you see in our East Meadow headquarters is really just a portion of our over-all effort," said Michael Marr, Gulotta's chief campaign strategist, a few days before the election. "Our thrust here is to reach into the heart of the county executive's constituency, North Merrick and the surrounding areas, and get them to come out and vote.

"In conjunction with this effort, the county GOP and the local organizations in the respective executive areas will also conduct their own 'get out the vote' efforts. We're fortunate, in that sense, because the county organization is so good and we can work in tandem with them."

According to Nassau County Republican Chairman Joseph N. Mondello, the sweeping scope of the party's victories - Gulotta ultimately received 67 percent of the votes cast in his race and even the party's losers garnered between 45 and 47 percent - came "quite simply, [because] we worked our hearts out."

"It was a good Republican year, the economy remained strong, but in order to secure these kinds of victories - in Glen Cove, for instance, in winning all the judgeships - we had to do something above and beyond.

"Despite feeling positive about the outcome beforehand, on Election Day we really worked it and squeezed it."

The biggest night of Gulotta's re-election campaign was actually the Wednesday before the polls opened. On that night the county executive squared off for the first time against his three opponents- in addition to Yevoli they were Right-To-Life and Libertarian candidate Vincent O'Neill and Liberal Aaron Schien - in an hour-long debate broadcast live by News

12 Long Island.

As the county executive pleaded his case on television, campaign strategist Marr said, more than 100 volunteers gathered in East Meadow to prepare Gulotta's largest mailing of the campaign for delivery to the post office and vigorously worked his phone banks.

A new wrinkle toward the end of the campaign included special rounds of calls into Manhasset - a community perceived as a Republican stronghold within North Hempstead and therefore important to stimulate into voting - and into the Fifth Legislative District where disenfranchised Republicans helped to elect a Democratic representative - Edward Oppenheimer - two years ago.

"In any campaign, you start off trying to convince all the voters with your message and you pay a lot of attention to the uncommitted voters," Marr said. "As you get closer to Election Day, however, you really start to focus on your core supporters.

"Traditionally, uncommitted voters break toward the non-incumbent, especially when they are still uncommitted a few days before the election," he continued. "After all, if you currently hold the office you're running for, they know your record and your priorities for your next term have been laid out before them.

"In a lot of ways then, you just begin to hope they won't come out to vote at all," Marr concluded.

Which in reality is what the vast majority of registered voters decided to do this year. Though absentee ballots continued to trickle in at week's end, official estimates put the total voter turn-out for this year's election in Nassau at roughly 37 percent - down significantly from 1993, the last off-off-year election, when 52.5 percent of those registered to vote went to the polls.

And while Gulotta's victory was a landslide and an unmatched personal success, as was Nassau DA Denis Dillon's huge margin over Democratic challenger Jon Kaiman (114,435 votes to 51,517), strong Democrats in so-called "safe districts," Legislators Roger Corbin, Judy Jacobs, Lisanne Altmann and Bruce Nyman, all did as well, if not better, vote-countwise, as their Republican counterparts.

After having a few days to reflect on his victory, Tom Gulotta offered this post-election assessment.

"I have to tell you, I probably enjoyed this campaign more than any other I've been in, and the reason is the reception I received from our residents," he said during an interview with this newspaper on Friday.

"Our residents this year were very warm and very embracing, and I think, supportive of both my record and our administration's record - a record of tax cuts or freezes in each of the past six years, the lowest crime rate in 26 years, our record of job creation, and the welfare rolls having been cut by some 37 percent.

"At the same time, I think they responded to our vision of Nassau County, a vision based in realizing their hopes and dreams of the future," Gulotta said.

Though the county executive's landslide didn't sweep all Republican candidates into office behind him, it did significantly impact local races in the towns and cities - particularly those which traditionally lean Democratic.

Asked about strategy, Gulotta again talked of philosophy.

"I haven't yet looked at a breakdown of the returns, but it appears that we won in almost every community in the county," he said. "I think that that's a result of our governing with the intent to reach out to all spectrums, political and otherwise, to people of all backgrounds, strata, and political affiliation.

"You see, over the course of a campaign, you try to have people identify your strengths and accomplishments not only with yourself, but with your political party. You talk about cutting crime and cutting taxes, and you point out that it was a Republican administration that did it.

"At the same time, those very issues, cutting taxes, cutting crime, creating opportunity so that young people can continue to live in the communities they grew up in, so that seniors can still afford to live here, so that, ultimately, families can stay together - those are common themes shared by every human being."

Mike and Doreen

Of all the races impacted by the Gulotta landslide, perhaps none needed that to feel that impact more - if you're speaking from the Republican perspective - than that in the Seventh Senatorial District where Assemblyman Michael Balboni was caught up in a neck-and-neck race with North Hempstead Councilwoman Doreen Banks.

The two were vying for the seat left vacant by the death of State Senator Michael J. Tully this past August, and until mid-afternoon on Election Day, the race appeared to be incredibly tight.

At 3 p.m., for instance, the turnout in two communities that were being closely monitored, Great Neck and Manhasset, considered Democratic and Republican respectively, was up from the last off- off- year election by 1.5 and 1.8 percent.

Assuming, as political analysts do, that communities vote according to their registration, such statistics indicated that the race was still a dead heat, though the tide was infinitesimally in Balboni's favor.

By 6 p.m., however, the mix of Democratic to Republican votes had shifted significantly, and Martin Brennan, Doreen Banks' campaign strategist, who up until then had 300 volunteers working in Great Neck, began reshuffling his troops, redirecting them to Port Washington, Roslyn, and Herricks.

"I think, overall, I'm feeling confident," he said after sending a group of Nassau Community College students out for a sweep of Westbury and New Cassel. "Not that I'm saying I'm confident that we'll win at this point... but I am confident that we've followed exactly the game plan we needed to follow to position ourselves to win."

As Brennan spoke, several additional van loads of volunteers were dispatched to do last minute canvassing for voters. Just a few blocks away, at Balboni headquarters on Jericho Turnpike in Mineola, a similar effort was underway.

The only difference was, where the Banks campaign had vanloads of volunteers pouring into nearby neighborhoods, the Balboni camp had busloads.

"It just goes to show you how important the state campaign committee has said this race is," Stephen Sabbeth said of the buses parked outside Balboni headquarters on election night. "The mechanics orchestrated by [State Senate Majority Leader] Joe Bruno, in terms of bringing in upstate volunteers has been absolutely unbelievable."

Like Martin Brennan, Sabbeth said, "We did everything we could to win this race. Nothing that could have been done wasn't done. Unfortunately, the absence of a strong Yevoli effort hurt us considerably, and May Newburger's poor showing was inexplicable."

But to truly understand the final hours of the campaign leading up to Balboni's eventual victory, one has to understand political realities.

Despite all of the money that's spent on television and radio advertising, palm cards and other kinds of propaganda, when push comes to shove at election time, relatively little stock is actually put in the candidate's ability to persuade.

Instead, in the last week, and particularly during the last weekend of any campaign, all of a political party's attention is focused on local "election districts."

An election district, for the uninitiated, is the smallest political subdivision, and consists of approximately 700 resident voters. In that respect, it is far smaller, even, than a local school district, and is often comprised of only 20 to 25 blocks.

But if in size they are diminutive - there are 1072 in Nassau and 256 in the Seventh Senatorial District alone - their stature in politics is supreme. The most recent edition of the Democratic Committee Person's Handbook describes them as the place "where elections are won or lost."

What makes them so important? The fact that all registered voters are listed in local enrollment books available from the County Board of Elections, and that the district's manageable size makes it relatively easy to identify the names, addresses, and phone numbers of potential supports.

Armed with that kind of data, concrete decisions about strategy soon follow.

"We monitored the senate race from very early on," Chairman Mondello said. "In fact we tracked it daily and made daily decisions about the race based upon the information we had coming in.

"Based upon the information we had, although Mike wanted to defend himself against Doreen Banks' attacks on his voting record, particularly when it came to assault weapons, we decided we had to go positive on his record and focus our presentation on his warm and appealing personality."

"What we've done this weekend is switched from the mind to the body," Martin Brennan said that last weekend of the campaign. "At this point, what you can communicate through the media is very limited.

"Instead what you have to do is get your grass roots organization together and begin to focus on your door-to-door pull operation - bring out those voters we know will support us from strong Democratic areas like Great Neck and Westbury and New Cassel."

Unlike the Gulotta-Yevoli race where a certain amount of new voter registration was done, the Balboni-Banks contest was predicated, because of the short time frame it transpired in, upon getting right to the candidates' messages.

"Because we only had eight weeks, we felt we had to go right to the contrast between the two candidates," Martin Brennan said. "At the same time, we took a very personal approach to

the undecided voters, putting them in direct contact with Doreen, and, in the case of our telephone canvasers, having the same volunteer call those voters they spoke to during the very first telephone canvases."

While their organizations were gearing up for the last big push, both candidates returned to areas they hoped to do well in on Election Day.

For Balboni, this meant campaigning door-to-door with a phalanx of volunteers in that Republican-friendly portion of Westbury known as Breezy Hill.

As in other canvassing efforts by the candidate, the routine was simple: his volunteers would fan out, knocking on doors and leaving flyers, and whenever a live person was encountered, Balboni himself would be summoned to make his pitch for a vote in person.

Doreen Banks, meanwhile, was similarly occupied in Roslyn and Albertson, not far from her East Williston home, hitting a Waldbaums parking lot and a soccer field in Seasingtown, before heading up to Great Neck for a walk through a community rich with Democratic voters.

"At this stage of the game, it's all about energizing your ardent supporters." Brennan explained.

When the final walk-through was done, Brennan declared it a "spectacular success," despite several rain squalls that moved through the area.

On Monday, the day before the election, Steve Sabeth projected that the Banks camp had likely spent between \$650,000 and \$750,000 in the race and he said he expected to be far outspent by the competition.

Unfortunately for the Democrats, Brennan's "spectacular success" and political money added up to very little when faced with two-fisted Republican fusillade - Tom Gulotta's landslide and the Republican organizations' superlative grass roots operation.

By shortly after 10 p.m. on election night, it was clear to both chairmen that Balboni would win by something close to 10 percentage points. Over the course of the evening, as the polls closed and the votes were counted, Mondello said he received four telephone calls from Governor George Pataki and at least one each from Joe Bruno and U.S. Senator Alphonse D'Amato.

"They were all jumping up and down with joy," Mondello said. "We really needed this win to preserve our majority in the state Senate."

After the votes were counted, Martin Brennan offered his analysis.

"There were probably several reasons for our loss, but chief among them would have to be our getting caught up in the Gulotta tidal wave," he said. "The second piece was their ability to mobilize the PM prime voters, getting to those people returning home from work who were most inclined to support them.

"Between 4 and 5 p.m., it was neck and neck. We might have even been ahead. That's when we sent 70 to 80 canvasers into Roslyn. The problem was, you just can't find as many voters in that area, or in Floral Park, at that hour, as you could in some of those Republican areas.

"I'd say that as the night went on, we were both increasing the numbers of our voters going to the polls, but they were pulling out votes a lot faster than we were.

"Those two things are the major things that come to mind. Balboni's margin of victory in the 22nd Assembly District, Elmont, Floral Park, and Franklin Square was probably critical, and the Port Washington area was also interesting. It was hand-to-hand, bloody combat in there, with his taking some election districts and our taking some election districts, but with no rhyme nor reason as to why certain ones went the way they did."

Brennan continued, "Based upon the timeline we had to work with, we did everything we could to win this race. Given more time, there was a lot more we could have done.

"In the final analysis, we spent as much money as we needed to spend to win, we had a tremendous candidate, we had a very well-developed grass roots network by the end - and we executed our plan flawlessly.

"It's just that in this kind of year, the voters weren't there for us. Our voters weren't energized and, thanks in large part to Gulotta, their voters were.

"For instance, one of Doreen's main strengths over the course of her political career has been her ability to draw crossover Republican voters. This year, with the low turnout, the voters were more hardcore in their affections and the crossover vote, her political capital, just wasn't there."

Asked how he found going up against the legendary Republican "machine" in Nassau County, Brennan said it wasn't much different from going up against the Democratic machine in Albany a couple of years back.

"One of the last races I ran was up in Albany, where we primaried against their Democratic machine. I mean, that

machine has been Albany's political culture forever. And, in a way, it's motivational, and if the local party apparatus is coherent and rational, you can win.

"The problem here is, the party structure is in shambles, and it's hard to win races against Big Brother unless you know what you're doing.

"The surprise to me," Brennan continued, "was how poorly May Newburger did. I take a strange kind of satisfaction from that though; in a weird kind of way, May and Doreen have a very strange relationship. It's almost a kind of 'mirror, mirror on the wall' thing with May. She hates Doreen for entirely arbitrary reasons.

"The major outcome of this race may well be that May Newburger owes her job to Doreen Banks," Brennan said.

The Tide Turns In the Townships

As has been alluded, the biggest story of the night - bigger even than Mike Balboni's win in the Seventh Senatorial District - was the impact Gulotta's victories had on the town races.

While victory was always assured in the Town of Hempstead - where incumbent Republican Gregory P. Peterson defeated Democrat George Israel, 49,065 votes to 19,589, and town board members Anthony Santino, Joseph Kearney, and Curtis Fisher were re-elected by two-to-one margins - the Republicans also regained the supervisorship in the town of Oyster Bay and apparently will regain a measure of control in the Town of North Hempstead.

In Oyster Bay, Town Attorney John Venditto defeated Democrat Dal LaMagna in the town supervisor race, 17,735 votes to 12,266, while Republican town board members Angelo Delligatti and Leonard Symons were both re-elected.

In North Hempstead, meanwhile, the Democratic revolution begun by onetime supervisor Benjamin L. Zwirn a decade ago - a revolution that ended 70 years of Republican rule in the town - appears to have ended catastrophically.

In something of a shocker, the contest between incumbent Democratic Supervisor May Newburger and the Republican challenger Maureen O'Connell is still in doubt and Nassau County Republican Chairman Joseph N. Mondello said Wednesday that he believes the final outcome won't be known for at least a week and perhaps two, the polling machines having been impounded and 355 absentee ballots still outstanding.

In no doubt, however, are victories by Republicans James O'Connor and Angelo Ferrara who defeated incumbent Democratic board members John Fabio and Fred Pollack solidly.

O'Connor received 26,364 votes, Ferrara, 26,058, Fabio, 22,599, and Pollock, 22,456.

Republican Linda Green also proved victorious, defeating longtime Democratic Town Clerk Deena Lesser, 24,660 to 23,644.

"I've always run scared," Newburger said in an interview a week before the election. This year, however, several factors contribute to the appearance that the supervisor and her ticketmates never worried much at all about the eventual outcome at the polls. And in the words of one longtime Democratic operative, "a sitting duck incumbent is a losing candidate."

According to a highly placed North Hempstead Democrat, an ally of Newburger's who would speak only on background, the Newburger re-election effort mostly slumbered through the early autumn, even her mailings failing to begin until mid-to-late October.

"If this had been a full-tilt campaign like in year's past, it's entirely conceivable that she could have won decisively and pulled the rest of the ticket in with her," this Democrat said.

"This year though, she didn't have [Former Deputy Supervisor] Larry Aaronson, or [political operatives] Joe Galante and Gerard Terry advising her on a day-to-day basis. So instead of an all-hands-on-deck re-election effort, she allowed the Republicans to catch her napping. Now she's paying the price."

The price is a vote recount that began at the Nassau Board of Elections in Mineola last Friday morning. While the average resident might assume that what's transpiring is a simple re-tally of the votes cast, sources close to the recount say that in reality, the process is far more complicated than that.

To begin with, those doing the recount and representatives of both the Newburger and Maureen O'Connell camps will be looking at three classes of paper: absentee ballots that were received by the board of elections up to about a week before the vote, and which were processed and then sent out to the various polling places across the township; absentee ballots that were returned to the board of elections only days before the election and therefore were stored at BOE until the polls closed Tuesday night, and the rash of absentee ballots that were postmarked Tuesday, but which continued to flow into the board of elections for several days after the vote.

The first thing to be checked, quite obviously, will be whether the total number of absentee ballots returned matches the number sent out by the board of elections before the vote.

The second thing will be the condition of those absentee ballots. Said one source, "We'll be looking at how those ballots are marked, the color pen used to mark them, whether people neatly checked off their selection, and whether the check marks cross over both candidates boxes.

"Both campaigns will be looking at these things, objecting to a number of ballots, often only on principal - you have to file an objection in order to preserve your right to challenge the vote count in State Supreme Court if all doesn't go your way."

In addition to the absentee ballots, the recount will also look at affidavit ballots which showed up at the polls, but for whom no evidence of eligibility was found at their polling place. Those signatures will be checked against the master voter registration records at the board of elections. Again, a number of these ballots will also likely be challenged.

Finally, the actual voting machines will be checked, the total vote count being checked against the number of votes cast in the supervisor's race. "Any large variation between those two numbers can be construed as a mechanical malfunction," our source said.

"So you see, when it comes to a recount, there's a lot that can occur due to interpretation."

Postscript

"I may sound tired, but I'm fine," Said Mondello Wednesday morning. "I must say, I enjoyed the outcome last night tremendously and things really seem to have gelled in our favor."

Mondello characterized last Tuesday's victories as among the sweetest he's ever tasted, opining that next to 1994, when he was being challenged for leadership by Gulotta and Nassau County Comptroller Fred Parola, this year's victories rank second in his heart.

"I do feel badly for May Newburger and for Steve Sabeth, I have a great deal of respect for them, but, you know how it is, one year you win, one year you lose. It's just the nature of the business," Mondello said.

Asked what advice he'd give to his Democratic counterpart, Mondello pointed to the uneasy relationship he and County Executive Gulotta have developed in the years since their big falling out.

"Though Tom and I have had our problems over the years, we really put them aside for the good of the party and the good of this election. That's something, I think, the Democrats have to learn," Mondello said.

In the aftermath of last Tuesday election, much has been conjectured about the futures of both Gulotta and Stephen J. Sabeth.

Over the past several days, for instance, Tom Gulotta has been rumored to be front-runner for the lieutenant governor spot on George Pataki's re-election ticket, a potential United States Senate candidate - vying for incumbent Democrat Daniel Patrick Moynihan's seat, and even, though those saying this admit it's a stretch, a possible vice presidential contender in the year 2,000.

Can a Kemp/Gulotta ticket be in the offing in three years?

"I'll believe it when I see the bumper stickers," Gulotta laughed.

"Listen, as far as rumors go, they are just that: rumors," he continued. "The fact is, I love serving the citizens of this county, deeply appreciate their allowing me to serve them again, and hope more than anything to justify their confidence in me," he continued.

"At the same time, as I've said before, you just never know in politics, and therefore I've decided to just take one day at a time."

As for Sabeth, the Democratic chairman seemed little fazed by his party's losses on Tuesday, pointing out that the party has a net gain in public officials over 1990.

He also had no trouble placing blame for this year's debacle.

"Lew Yevoli is the worst thing to happen to this party since Pearl Harbor," he said.

Asked how the party will regroup, Sabeth said he didn't believe there was all that much to do. "Basically, what we're going to have to do is adopt a new attitude, and that's that those who want to be our candidates can't run away from us - no matter who they are. I should never have allowed Lew the opportunity to run.

"That said, I think if people do try to defy that basic premise, I'll be forced to primary them and knock them out of the box."

Throughout the campaign and especially in the aftermath of the vote, a number of Democrats have said they perceive the chairman as damaged goods, and place the blame on him, rather than squarely on Yevoli's shoulders.

"It all comes down to fundraising and Steve just doesn't have that ability anymore," one local Democrat said. "The money people sense that he's on the way out and not a good investment."

When this Democrat was asked if he'd actually looked at the books, however, he quickly admitted he hadn't. "I'm basing my assessment on the turnout at our party's cocktails parties," he said. "And on the resources that have been made available to candidates."

Sabbeth says such assessments are way off the mark. "The truth is we did have fewer fundraisers this year, but the reason was very simple: though Lew Yevoli was running, in essence, against me, I knew that if we had our normal amount of fundraisers, we'd severely impact his ability to raise money for his campaign. There are only so many Democratic donors out there.

"If you look at the record, you'll see that we raised more money this year than last year, and I fully expect to raise even more money next year. It's kind of like the stock market. What I'm telling our investors now is to invest in the long term rather than the short term."

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