

Astorino for Governor?

Westchester county exec may figure in race against Cuomo

By **ROBERT GOLOMB**

“Four more years,” hundreds of cheering supporters of Westchester County Executive Robert Astorino, chanted at his White Plains cam-

REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK

paign headquarters as the polls closed election night this past November.

By 10:30 p.m., less than two hours later, Astorino's Democratic challenger, New Rochelle Mayor Noam Bramson, conceded defeat.

The Republican Astorino's still growing crowd of enthusiastic supporters realized that the 46-year-old incumbent's re-election to his second four-year term had been secured by what proved to be a 56 percent to 44 percent landslide in the final count.

Days after the election, a significant number of both Democratic and Republican insiders, and a host of political journalists, began to speculate that the next campaign for Astorino might occur not in four more years — in a race for a third term for county executive — but rather next year, in a race against one-term incumbent Democrat Andrew Cuomo for governor of New York State.

That speculation has continued to grow since November, even as Democrats and Republicans offer opposite takes on what still remains a hypothetical Astorino vs. Cuomo contest would look like.

The general talking points offered to the media by officials in the Democratic Party is that Astorino, despite his strong showing this past November, would in such a contest be defeated in an embarrassing blowout.

Pointing to a poll taken in mid-November by the highly respected Siena Research Institute, which reported that Cuomo enjoyed a 39 point lead in a prospective race against Astorino, and contending that the socially conservative Astorino's pro-life position would alienate the moderate Democrats and independent voters he would need to win in overwhelming numbers to have even a remote possibility of winning in a state in which Democrats outnumber Republicans in registration by 16 points, many of these Democratic partisans argue that Astorino would have virtually no chance of making Cuomo a one-term governor.

Republicans view such a race differently, as would be expected. New York State Republican Chairperson Ed Cox has expressed enthusiasm about an Astorino candidacy. And reliable sources within the Republican Party have told me that many state Republican office holders and party officials, while not wanting to offend Donald Trump who has said he might be interested in seeking the Republican nomination for governor, will immediately jump on the Astorino bandwagon if the Westchester county executive declares his candidacy, and, as is widely expected, Trump announces he has made the decision not to run.

These same sources informed me that, while most Republicans view



Astorino vs. Cuomo: Will this be the governor's race in November?

A recent Siena College poll found that 50 percent of voters rated the governor's job performance as fair or poor, while only 49 percent gave him the mark of excellent or good — a precipitous drop from the 74 percent job approval he enjoyed only a year ago.

The guarded optimism coming from prominent Republicans, my sources tell me, is based upon their hope that Astorino, who has little name recognition in the state outside of Westchester County, will be able to take advantage of the governor's sagging popularity once he becomes the official Republican nominee and consequently becomes better known throughout the state.

Yet, despite all the conjecture that surrounds his possible candidacy, Astorino, the married father of three young children, has over the past two months consistently told the media that he will not make his final decision about entering the race until sometime in February. Astorino has also consistently stated to the media that the two factors that will affect that final decision involve how he believes entering the race would affect his family, and whether he could raise the necessary funds to run against Cuomo, who has been reported to already have over \$25 million in his reelection campaign war chest.

Thus when I interviewed Astorino in his office recently, I began by asking him the following two-part question: “How are you currently going about determining whether running for governor would be the right thing to do for your family? And how are you going about the process of calculating whether you will be able to raise sufficient funds to run a viable campaign?”

Appearing very much at ease as

he sat comfortably on a black hard-back chair, Astorino described the personal and political considerations that will weigh into his final decision.

“My family comes first in every decision I make,” he said. “I can say that Sheila [his wife] is supportive of the idea. ... And she and I have spoken with [New Jersey]

Governor Chris Christie and his wife, who have young children. ... The advice they gave was encouraging. But when young children are involved, decisions are never easy.”

But, unlike family decisions, Astorino views the issue of campaign financing to be cut and dried.

“Twelve million dollars is the minimum amount required to run a strong campaign,” Astorino said. “I have been talking with people throughout the state, and I am beginning to believe that through the contributions of traditional Republican contributors ... and most importantly, through the small contributions of many ordinary citizens

tion skills he believes he has developed during his career in radio to articulate to voters the contrast between the governor's record and his own.

“I believe I would have the ability as a candidate to be able to differentiate my record with that of the governor's,” he said.

“Beginning the day I was sworn into office four years ago, my administration's primary focus has been to achieve what we call the three P's.” He described these as protecting taxpayers, preserving essential services and promoting economic growth.

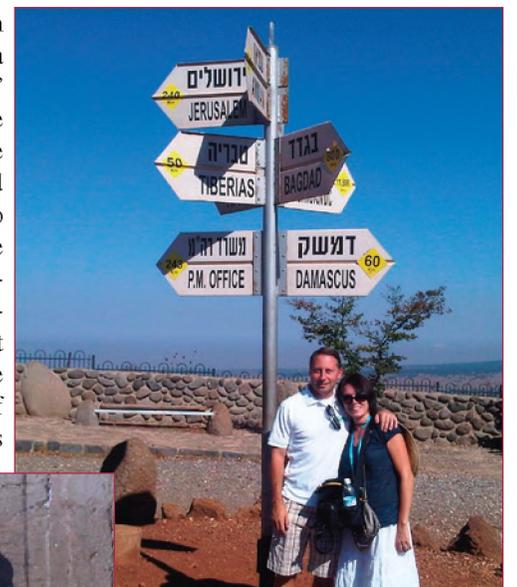
“I would contrast that record of our accomplishments in Westchester County with the governor's record of failure in the state,” Astorino said. “The unemployment rate [in NYS] hovers around 8 percent, higher than even the dismal national unemployment rate. New Yorkers pay the highest taxes in the entire nation. And not coincidentally the New

While most Republicans view an Astorino bid as an uphill battle, they see signs that could portend him pulling off a major upset.

an Astorino bid as an uphill battle, they see signs that could portend him pulling off a major upset, if he does, as most expect him to do, make the decision to enter the race.

One sign centers around his November victory over Bransom. In beating a Democrat by 12 points in a county in which Democrats outnumber Republicans in registration by 2 to 1, Astorino demonstrated his ability to run well with moderate Democrats and Independents, which puts into question Democratic officials' predictions earlier noted that social conservative Astorino would be unable to win the support of these two crucial voting groups in a race against the governor.

Another sign is Cuomo's falling job approval rating. While Cuomo still holds that 2.5 to 1 lead over Astorino, his job approval ratings have been on the decline this past year.



Astorino with his wife Sheila at the top of the Golan Heights (above) and praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem (left).



— Republicans, Democrats and Independents alike — that the \$12 million mark can be reached.”

Astorino, who has had a 15-year on and off career in radio, including holding the positions of show host, executive producer and senior producer, and is seen as being extremely media savvy, told me that in a race against Cuomo he would try to utilize the communica-

York State business climate has been rated as the worst in America.”

In addition to contrasting their records, Astorino, whose resume also includes three four-year terms as a councilman in the town of Mount Pleasant, (1991-2003), and one elected term on the Westchester County Board of Legislators (2003-2005) added that he will try to make the case to the electorate that the policies he would enact if elected governor would be better for the state than those of the incumbent.

Beyond elaborating how his tax policies — which he claimed would help the middle class, spur business growth and add thousands of new

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Governor

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jobs — differs from that of the governor's, Astorino explained how his position on fracking for natural gas is the exact opposite of Cuomo's.

"The governor has been coming up with excuse after excuse as to why he has been preventing natural gas exploration. ... More than 30 states are currently hydrofracking for natural gas and the results have been the creation of thousands of energy sector jobs and cheaper energy costs with absolutely no damage to the environment. Even President

Obama has endorsed hydrofracking ... Starting hydrofracking in gas-abundant upstate, which would lower energy costs and create thousands of jobs, is one of the first things I would do."

Asked if there was anything that the governor has done in office which he approves of, Astorino came up with just one: "Moving ahead with the new Tappan Zee Bridge."

Further than the seismic change in how the state would be run with the enactment of his conservative policies, an Astorino victory, it has been widely written, would turn the national political world upside down, putting an abrupt end to the

presidential ambitions Cuomo is said to harbor and instantly placing the political David-killing-Goliath name Robert Astorino on the list of serious contenders for the Republican presidential nomination in 2016 or beyond. Astorino claimed that he pays no attention to such a hypothetical.

"I give absolutely no thought to talk about a presidential run," he contended. "It is not even remotely in my thought process."

It is, however, already apparently in the thought process of more than a few folks in the media.

Robert Golomb is a nationally published columnist.

Poll predicts Cuomo victory

Gov. Andrew Cuomo would trounce both Westchester County Executive Robert Astorino and developer Donald Trump if the election were held today, according to a Siena Research Institute poll released earlier this week.

Neither Astorino nor Trump, both Republicans, have announced definite plans to run against Cuomo, a Democrat gearing up for his first re-election bid.

But the latest Siena poll found that Cuomo holds 48-point leads over both Astorino and Trump.

About 57 percent of those polled said they would vote to re-elect

Cuomo. The poll also found that more than two-thirds of Democrats support Cuomo's re-election and 41 percent of Republicans would vote for the current governor.

Meanwhile, Cuomo appears to be sticking to his pledge not to raise taxes on the wealthiest New Yorkers, despite a pledge by new New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio that the city needs a tax increase on such residents to pay for universal pre-kindergarten.

Cuomo, in fact, is pushing to lower taxes even on the wealthiest New Yorkers. The two appear on a collision course over the issue.

Power

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become a commander, teaching soldiers how to combat terrorism and other threats. In December, she completed three years of service — one more than the required number for Israeli women.

Lt. Amit Danon, a former Israeli national champion in rhythmic gymnastics, became a combat officer in the mixed-gender Caracal Battalion. She is also on the IDF's list.

"She was one of the first women to become an officer in a combat unit," said Risa Kelemer, a commander who also serves in Caracal. Kelemer, who is from Baltimore, said Caracal is the only co-ed combat unit in the world.

"Boys and girls play the same roles," she said, noting that despite this she has felt little tension from the men she works

with. "I encounter more difficulty when I am in civilian life. I meet someone who says, 'You are a combat soldier? Girls aren't combat soldiers!'"

Kelemer does not pretend to be as strong as her male counterparts, though she said she is able to hold her own. When it comes to an operation, however, she said each person has a role. Kelemer, for example, is a trained grenade launcher. Another female comrade is a sharpshooter. Another is a medic.

"Combat is not just running with 50 pounds on your back," said Kelemer, "though we also do that."

Katja Edelman, originally from Kansas and now a student at Columbia University, recently completed her service as a combat infantry soldier in the IDF's canine unit. In that role, she worked with dogs in the field and trained them back at the base. She said that the IDF "has a lot to be proud of

regarding integration of women. ... I felt like I had amazing opportunities in my service and was able to do many of the same things men do. ... It was always important to me to demonstrate professionalism and capability to set the right precedent for a continued and hopefully expanded role for women in the IDF."

Edelman said she did feel pressure to prove herself in the IDF, and she went to extra lengths not to show signs of fatigue "even if the boys were openly exhausted."

"I feel that most women in male-dominated workplaces can relate," she said.

Kelemer's mother, Amian Frost-Kelemer, said she is "incredibly impressed" with and proud of her daughter. But she is also "petrified."

"She believes she can do whatever the guys can do. She is really fast. But the weight they have to carry is not great for a woman's body," said Frost-Kelemer.

"Mentally, there is no issue. Physically, the reality is that as strong as she is, it is about heart — she is there for the heart."

Maayan Jaffe is a freelance writer in Overland Park, Kan. This article originally appeared on JNS.org.

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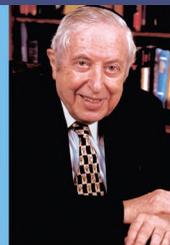
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GURWIN RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

Gurwin Jewish, one of the largest nursing and rehabilitation facilities in the state, is considering constructing an independent living residence on 10 acres just south of its current campus in Commack.

But before any construction can begin, Gurwin is conducting a survey of Long Island residents "to find out what people know and think about continuing care retirement communities and if there is interest from area residents to move into one," Gurwin said in a recent announcement.

Herbert Friedman, Gurwin's vice president and chief executive

officer, said he and his staff will be looking to price the housing units properly and determine what amenities such a complex would need, such as a swimming pool.

"You've got to size it all up right," Friedman said.

Gurwin said in its announcement that it is looking to building a 150 to 175-unit independent living residence, but plans could change as the project goes forward.

Gurwin currently operates a 460-bed facility offering long-term nursing care, short-term rehabilitation and sub-acute care. In all, more than 1,000 people are cared

for daily.

That includes people at the Gurwin Jewish — Fay J. Lindner Residence assisted living facility and others in the nursing and rehab center.

Gurwin said in its statement that the continuing care retirement community it seeks to build would include congregate-style apartments, as well as villa buildings. Plans also currently call for a 35,000 to 40,000 square foot common area.

Friedman said that marketing activities involving the project might take up to a year to complete.

—James Bernstein