Candidate Gillibrand stumps in Stamford

By Trish Adams

At a Stamford fund-raiser at The Gallery Saturday evening, Congressional candidate Kirsten Gillibrand spoke about the issues, her priorities, and what she's learned from voters as she travels the far flung 20th Congressional District. At The Gallery, she addressed a crowd of more than 70 and raised at least $1,500 for her campaign.

Gillibrand takes pride in noting that her family has been in this region for more than five generations, and says that, for her, the race this fall is about "the future of our children and what kind of country we are going to be in 20 years. Central among Gillibrand's district specific initiatives is leveraging the need for new energy technologies to build up potential industries and expertise here, from fuel cell to hydro to fusion.

Setting priorities

Ten counties are a lot of turf, and in her travels, Gillibrand is careful to listen to voters' common gripes and hopes. "There are some things people care about everywhere I go: they care about the price of gas and home heating oil, they care about property taxes that keep going up and they care about health care costs. Those are three things that I think everyone in our district can agree need to be addressed and are not being addressed."

Gillibrand's first major policy position statement is her Ethics IOU, available on the campaign website. "I heard one congressman say, 'What are we going to do if the lobbyists don't pay for lunch?'" recounted Gillibrand, "and I thought to myself, 'Pay for your own lunch! That's what everybody else does!'" Her ethics platform, IOU, stands for "It's Our Understanding." "It's my personal commitment to all of you, and it includes not going on vacations with lobbyists; we should make all lobbyists' gifts illegal. You're in Congress to be a public servant, you're not there to feather your nest and have a luxury lifestyle." Her Ethics IOU also bans internecine lobbying influence, should a staffer or a family member become a lobbyist. "If one of my staff wants to become a lobbyist," said Gillibrand, "they won't be lobbying me."

Finding commonalities in a district that stretches from Essex County to the north, to the east of Hudson counties and then west to Delaware and Otsego counties and south to Dutchess is not easy. But Gillibrand has discovered that people in the district are independent-minded and that independence shows when they vote. "We have many Republicans in the district," says Gillibrand, "but they vote for Democrats when they believe in what they stand for. In the last election, Eliot Spitzer and Charles Schumer won this district with more than 60 percent of the vote, which means that half the Republicans who voted, voted for a Democrat." Gillibrand is eager to have house parties all over the district: "I'll come to your home to meet your friends, and please invite all your friends, your Democratic friends, Republican friends and Independent friends."

The Gillibrand campaign is not apologetic about its fund-raising moxie either. The campaign has already raised more than half a million dollars, a necessary strength for a challenger taking on an incumbent war chest. "It's one of the reasons that we have a viable race," Gillibrand maintains, especially in a scattered district that must rely on paid media to get its message out. "The voters in the district need to hear that they have a choice; they need to hear what I stand for and what John Sweeney stands for."

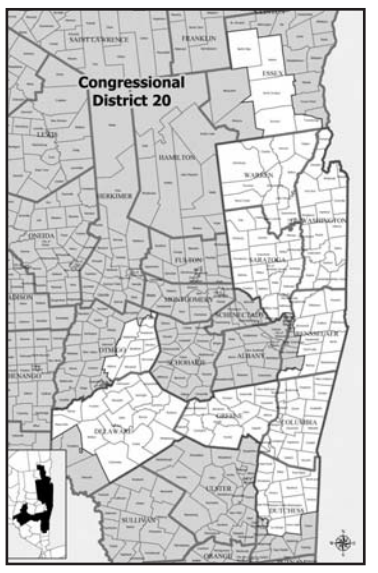
War: where do you stand?

For the left wing of the Democratic Party and many activists, the Iraq War is *the* issue. Even though Gillibrand realizes that "the administration isn't going to listen to me," she made a complete accounting of her position on the war. For Gillibrand, the key is how to build "a successful exit strategy." She told attendees, "I've spent an extraordinary amount of time over the past six months on this issue. I've talked to peace activists, to many veterans who've just come home from Iraq, to generals at West Point, and to foreign policy advisors, to understand the dynamics. In any military conflict, you need a clearly defined mission. I think the mission now should be self-determination for Iraq. The second thing you need to do in any military conflict is to identify your end points, which this president has not been willing to do."

The bottom line for Gillibrand contains two crucial end points: no permanent American bases, and no American stake in Iraqi oil. And she agrees with military experts she's consulted that "we should start redeploying troops: it sends a message to the Iraqi people that we're leaving, and that they need to take their own security seriously." Gillibrand would advocate for reconstruction contracts to go to all three major ethnic groups in Iraq so that "they would all have a stake in their own country." Right now, reconstruction contracts are in American hands. Although Gillibrand says that redeployment details need to be left to the military, she believes that "troops could be home in a year or two," and that for the sake of Iraqi self-determination, that exit is critical. Her remarks were met with strong approbation by her audience.

On Social Security, Gillibrand responded bluntly: "Americans are not interested in privatizing Social Security and President Bush is trying to do it without our consent." When asked if he would be able to do so, Gillibrand widened the discussion: "This Congress has given so much power to the executive, more than any other Congress, starting with the resolution, when Congress gave away the authority to start a war. The new Supreme Court Justice, Samuel Alito, believes in the power of the executive and he will support it. Congress needs to take back its oversight authority. Right now we have three branches that are all controlled by the same party, and they have abdicated that role. We should never let that happen because our government is founded on the separation of powers and if we don't insist upon that as an American people, we are going to have results that we don't agree with."

On tax cuts, Gillibrand said, "It is morally reprehensible that we are running a $9 trillion debt," with she feels, more pork in the budget than ever and with powerful congress people pushing through indulgent earmarks. She noted that $200 million slotted for a bridge to a remote Alaska island, pushed by the chair of appropriations committee, would have been enough money to check every cargo container coming into the country. "None of the 9/11 Commission's recommendations have been implemented," she said. She thought that middle class families were due for a tax cut, but she felt that millionaire families don't need the $70,000 tax cut currently slated for them. That money could cover home heating assistance for our seniors, Gillibrand claimed.



On the current voter "mood," Gillibrand admitted that people she meets are very angry at the current administration. "But," she added, "they're hopeful that someone is going to run and take on the establishment, that they will have someone to listen to them — because they haven't had that in so long."

The event at The Gallery was hosted by the Stamford Democratic Committee, the Delaware County Democratic Committee, and Democracy for Otsego and Delaware Counties.

You can learn more about the Gillibrand campaign, her ethics IOU and her positions at www.gillibrand2006.com.



FRONT AND CENTER — Although she's a Democrat, Gillibrand says she's eager to hear from voters of every political persuasion. She has faith that Republicans and Independents in this district are independent-minded and will vote for a Democrat if "they believe in what you stand for." (She also has some facts and figures from recent elections to underpin that faith.) Among the crowd on Saturday were some regular Democratic stalwarts, including Democratic Committee Chair Bill Buccheri (front row, left), and Kelly Keck, standing right, Delaware County coordinator for the Gillibrand campaign. — Photos by Trish Adams



PASSIONATE INTENSITY — Wherever she goes, candidate Gillibrand must deal with the reality that many progressives and Democrats are frustrated, angry, and impatient for change. The first step, she says, is just to listen.

Susan Zimet plans a run for State Senate in our district

By Trish Adams

Susan Zimet, a Democrat who is planning to run for State Senate in the 42nd District seat now held by Sen. John Bonacic, came out to Stamford Saturday night to meet and greet constituents. Zimet served two terms as supervisor of New Paltz, the first woman to hold that job, before winning election to the Ulster County Legislature. She now hopes to take her reformist energy and budgeting discipline to the state capitol.

Zimet's meteoric rise in the New Paltz political scene was part of a larger Democratic resurgence in the county where Democrats now hold a majority in the county legislature for the first time since the late 1970s.

One issue that galvanized Zimet is the escalating burden of property taxes for people of her district and the enormous financial burden faced by localities and county government, where unfunded mandates and declining federal resources are pushing up tax burdens and limiting resources for services and education.

A reformer by nature, Zimet has been focused on budget discipline, minimizing waste while exploring creative and sustainable economic ideas. She has also worked for better health care for women and veterans and better security support for first responders here at home. She chairs the Ulster County Legislature Ways and Means Subcommittee of Budget Reform and she has been in the vanguard of those calling for the closing of Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant.

Zimet became frustrated with the constraints and burdens placed on local governments by the status quo in Albany, and decided her reformist energies might be more effective at the state level. The state government in "Albany is broken," said Zimet, "and we all know it."

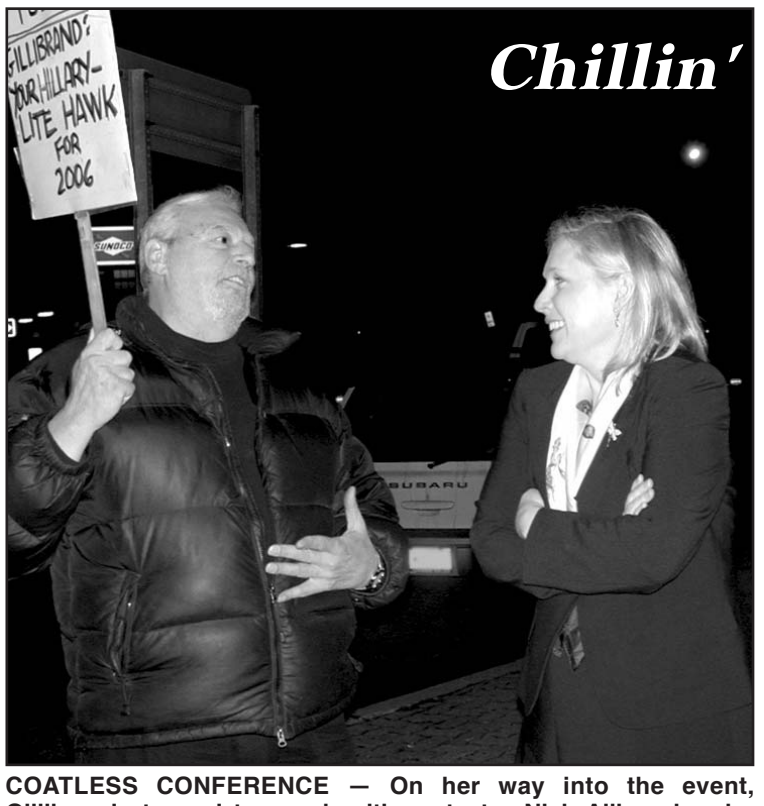
While voters may argue that state senators like Bonacic return thousands of dollars to the district in discretionary "member items," Zimet would rather see that process, and the funds, depoliticized. (There is in fact a lawsuit underway that claims that the dispensation of member items is inherently unfair and creates a climate of favoritism and bias.) "I'd rather see those taxes for member items either not collected from the taxpayer in the first place, or, if they are, distributed right back to the source; our overburdened local programs, such as education and senior services," explained Zimet.

Zimet grew up on Long Island but spent her summers growing up in the Catskills and Adirondacks. She and her husband, Steve Auerbach, were able to filfull a long held dream when they moved to Ulster County in the early 1980s. Susan traded in life as a high powered ad agency executive for a life in New Paltz as a teacher, writer and photographer.

The couple have two children, Andrew (in college) and Hannah, a high school student.



MEETING THE LOCALS — Wanda Cawein of New Kingston (left) shares some Delaware County Democratic insights with Susan Zimet, a former New Paltz supervisor and Ulster County legislator who plans to visit our area often as she undertakes a race for the State Senate. — Photo by Trish Adams



COATLESS CONFERENCE — On her way into the event, Gillibrand stopped to speak with protestor Nick Allbaugh, who wants Gillibrand to take a tougher stance against the Iraq War, an issue she addressed that evening. Her position on the war is detailed above.

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