Gillibrand says region will elect Democrats – if residents like them

◆ **GILLIBRAND**
Continued from Page E1

He voted in favor of CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement). I think that harms the workers and the agriculture and the industry of this district. Those numbers have been proven out. He ran on a record of saying he was going to be opposed NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) and other trade agreements, and it only took him a few years to change his tune. My view is it's due mainly to the fact that he's beholden to someone else, not to people of this district. He's voted against job training, and people's jobs get sent overseas. He's voted against a number of economic development initiatives that would have helped this region. He votes against Amtrak funding. He votes in favor of policies and bills that directly harm us, and that includes voting for the president's bills on the environment, on the Clear Skies Act, which directly pollutes our region.

Q. He voted on the Clear Skies because it was better than nothing, but he tried to get something different.

A. Well, he failed, and moreover, he shouldn't have supported a bill that pollutes this region, which he did. The other issue where I'm very concerned about Congressman Sweeney's record is on health care. This is why I made such a big deal about his ski trip with the pharmaceutical lobby. He is beholden to that lobby, and his voting record shows it. He voted with the president on this drug bill, which was drafted by the pharmaceutical lobby and did nothing to lower costs for our seniors. He voted against the government being able to negotiate for the lowest prices and to buy in bulk. That is a regulation that makes absolutely no sense. And what's really happening, and this is what my lawyer background also brings to bear, is this is price fixing and this is manipulation of the market.

Q. The campaign has gotten off to a somewhat raucous start. What is your approach to campaigning and how do you see the upcoming campaign going from here on out?

A. This is going to be a campaign about ideas and solutions and policy, and I'm not going to engage in partisan bickering and I'm not going to engage in personal family attacks. I think it's been inappropriate that the only attacks that the congressman has made against me are against my family. I certainly don't speak about his.

I think my bringing up of his trip with the pharmaceutical lobby was a legitimate issue that people should care very deeply about. A free vacation with these lobbyists, that kind of influence just creates an appearance of impropriety, and we shouldn't allow it in our system.

That's why one of the major parts of my campaign is going to include an ethics package, which I am going to release in the next couple of weeks. It will include that I will never take a trip with a lobbyist, I will never take a gift from a lobbyist and I will call for an independent ethics council to investigate allegations of wrongdoing by congress members. People should know that when I'm going to Washington and talking to other congress people and proposing legislation, that I'm doing it in their interest, and they will always know what I'm doing and why I'm doing it. They should never have the question of who I'm listening to.

Q. You talk a lot about the pharmaceutical industry. Around this area, the medical device industry is a very big employer, a number of plants, and you have some of the same lobbyists representing the pharmaceutical interests that are representing the medical device industry. How will you juggle that and balance that as a congressperson?

A. I think what we need in our process is disclosure. One of the things I'm going to be proposing is that you disclose all your meetings with lobbyists. If every member of Congress disclosed their meetings with lobbyists, you'd have no question. But those should be formal meetings in a conference room, where you're being responsive because you want to hear issues important to the district. They need to know who you're meeting with, when you're meeting and what was said, and what promises were made. And that's the one thing Congressman Sweeney's unwilling to do.

Q. One issue that's been raised is fund-raising. Who do you plan to raise money from, and will that make you beholden to the same interests that you accuse Mr. Sweeney of being beholding to?

A. I will be beholden to no one but the people of this district. I will raise money throughout the district and throughout the country, because there's a lot of people here who want a change in government, and they want a balance of power in Washington. So I will get support from many people, I'm sure.



DEREK PRUITT FILE PHOTO—DPRUITT@POSTSTAR.COM

Congressional candidate Kirsten Gillibrand talks with fellow Democrats during a Washington County Democratic Women's Club meeting in Hudson Falls in October.

Q. If the pharmaceutical lobby were to contribute to your campaign, would you accept it?

A. I probably would, but I wouldn't be beholden to them, because when I accept a contribution from anyone, it's going to go on my FEC filing and everybody in the world will know exactly how much that interest gave to me.

Q. This is different from Congressman Sweeney, how?

A. Because I'm not going on a vacation to Utah with them and listening to them and them alone for a long weekend while they pay for my lavish lifestyle and my fancy vacation.

Q. One of the things that looms large over everything including Congress is the war in Iraq. What is your stance on that? What positions have you taken or would take on that?

A. The war is clearly one of the most important issues for the people of this district. It's something they feel very strongly about. I am so grateful for the men and women who go to defend out country and help bring democracy to another country. I'm so proud of what they do for our country, and I want to support them, and that's why I am an avid supporter of veterans' benefits. John Sweeney has voted against our vets continuously throughout his time in Congress.

Q. Do you have an example of voting against the vets?

A. Many votes. He's voted against health care benefits for them and their family. He's voted against education benefits for when they come back, housing and job-training initiatives for when they come back. And he's voted against fully funding the VA. His votes do not support veterans at all.

The first thing I would do (regarding Iraq) is clarify what the mission is. The mission now is to make sure the Iraqis can have a self-determining government. They need to have self-determination and try their best to form a democracy in their own country so that they can have self rule and protect themselves and have their own security forces. What we need to do is create a comprehensive plan as to how we're going to succeed on that mission and leave. The next thing I would do is define what your end-strategy is. And I think the components of that have to include that the United States will have no permanent basis in Iraq and that the United States will have no claim on Iraqi oil. Those are two things that the administration has been unwilling to say.

The first thing you can do is you can start drawing down troops now, redeploying those who are in the region that are not fighting for security right now, redeploy them immediately so the process is troops leaving Iraq. The Sunnis will see America, number one, isn't here for our oil. America, number two, is not staying forever. And America, number three, just started redeploying troops, they've just started leaving Iraq. When you have those three things, you drive a wedge between the current coalition which is fighting against the Americans and is the heart of the insurgency. Once you do that, you can then start moving toward continuing the effort that America has been making to build this as a constitutional government and a democracy.

There's no reason why we can't be out of Iraq in the next year or two. If you focus specifically on your mission of giving them self-government, and if you have the guts to do the things that I've outlined, it would make your chances of success multiple times higher than it is now.

Q. As a congressperson, how do you get these ideas across, especially if you're a Democrat in a Republican-controlled house, with a Republican president for at least the next couple of years?

A. Well, you have your voice, and the one thing John Sweeney is not using is his voice. He doesn't stand up to this administration. He doesn't hold hearings on issues that are really important to the administration. And he doesn't call for accountability. You know, we should be having much more thorough investigations into all of the issues that are troubling people.

Q. Other than national issues, what issues closer to home do you plan to deal with?

A. Creating jobs, lower the cost of gas, and lower the cost of medicine and health care. When I talk to small-business owners, their biggest concern right now is the cost of health care. Because not only can they not afford it for their employees, they can't even afford it for themselves.

On building jobs, I really want to build jobs in this district that relate to these new products that we're going to build. That's going to be energy conservation products and energy independence technologies. We have the base to do it. You know, we've done it. That hydro power plant's at 50 percent capacity right now. The one in our district. Why not at 100? What are we doing to make sure all of the gas stations in our state and in our district, you can actually use if you want to get Ethanol or if you want to get the new fuel cell technologies that we're going to develop? They're not there yet. That new infrastructure needs to be built. But I think that if we do it, we will build jobs for this district because we have an industrial base. Both of my grandfathers worked in manufacturing plants in the region and they keep closing. Our production lines keep getting shut. And I think that Congressman Sweeney supporting NAFTA does not help. We have the most competitive workers in the world, but when they're forced to compete on a playing field that is tilted. It's not fair. And that's why our production lines are closing down.

Q. Particularly in this Republican district, people are still uncomfortable throwing an incumbent out of office for any reason in favor of an unknown quantity — particularly an incumbent in the majority party who serves on the appropriations committee. Can you give voters who are on the fence about switching a reason to convince them to take this risk?

A. Quite simply, despite the fact that he's in the majority and is on a committee, he doesn't use his power, position or vote to help the district. He doesn't actually support the interests of the district. He doesn't articulate the priorities of the district and he doesn't vote in favor of the district. So you've got a congressman who might have a position of power, but he doesn't use it for the benefit of the people here, so he should be fired.

Q. What about his bringing home the bacon, so to speak, from his seat on the appropriations committee. He's often praised for delivering money for transportation projects, hospital projects, etc., etc.

A. If you actually compared him to all congressmen across the nation, he's in the bottom half in terms of performance. He likes to pride himself in bringing home funds for the district. But his performance on bringing home the bacon isn't quite what he says it is. It's quite poor.

Q. On debates. How many and when will they start?

A. I would love to do debates. I'm happy to do an many as I'm able.

Q. What kind of schedule?

A. I can start tomorrow as far as I'm concerned. I'd love to do debates. I think it's important.

Q. Do you think the congressman is going to be willing to debate you?

A. I think he'll have to. I don't think that he will have a choice at the end of the day. I think the people will demand it and I think he'll have to accommodate it.

Q. Why get into politics? You've obviously had a very successful career. You're a partner in a law firm and you have a young family. There's a lot of stuff you could be doing, I'm guessing. Why politics? Why now? Why this district?

A. I could have a very nice private lifestyle with my husband and my young son and enjoy my law practice, but I've really just reached a point personally that I felt I couldn't accept what's happening in Washington anymore. ... It's not an easy choice. But I really feel like the future of our country is at stake and the future of my son and the future of all families are on the line, and I cannot accept another four years or another two years or another year of literally everything going to help big business and corporate America get rich. And that every piece of legislation that has come out of this Congress and out of this administration is about making the wealthy interests wealthier. It couldn't be more clear.

Q. A lot of people would say, even with a good chunk of money, a Democrat in this district doesn't have a snowball's chance.

A. I would disagree. And the reason why I disagree is this district has a history of electing Democrats when they like them. I believe I will win because I do believe people are going to stand up and say that they have had enough and they're tired of the cronyism and they're tired of the corruption and they're tired of business as usual and they want someone who's going to offer real solutions and honest representation. If I can make sure that everyone in our district knows it, I think people of our district will vote for me.

Q. You've talked about your mother being a hunter and bringing home the Thanksgiving turkey, literally. What's your views about gun control, gun rights, that whole issue?

A. Well, I'm very pro-Second Amendment. I'm very proud of our hunting heritage, particularly our region's heritage in that, most folks that I know do hunt and fish. My family does, avidly. So I'm very protective of the Second Amendment and will be.

Q. Did your mother ever shoot anybody?

A: I think she's a better shot than the vice president. (Laughs). She definitely would know a bird from a person, I'm quite sure. And she wouldn't miss the bird if she was shooting for the bird.



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THIS WEEK'S POLL QUESTION

If the election were held today, whom would you vote for to represent the 20th District in the U.S. House of Representatives?

A. John Sweeney
B. Kirsten Gillibrand
C. Some other Republican
D. Some other Democrat
E. An independent
F. No one; I would not vote.

Vote at poststar.com

LAST WEEK'S POLL QUESTION

Who should the new National Guard armory being built in Queensbury be named after?

A. It should be named after Nathan Brown. (18.3 percent)
B. It should be named after another specific soldier. (0.9 percent)
C. It shouldn't be named after any one individual. (77.9 percent)
D. I don't know. (2.8 percent)