

2008 rivals duel again in 22nd Congressional District

Susan Campriello • Poughkeepsie Journal
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Voters in the 22nd Congressional District will see two familiar names on the ballot Tuesday; this year's race for the seat is a rematch of the 2008 election between incumbent Democrat Maurice Hinchey of Hurley and Republican George Phillips of Endwell.

In 2008, Hinchey defeated Phillips by more than 30 percentage points.

But Phillips said today's government is less effective than it was two years ago, and backlash against the ruling Democratic Party could help him win the seat. Phillips said voters tell him they want career politicians out of office and fresh faces in.

"People are fed up with entrenched politicians," he said. "People are saying, 'Vote the incumbents out.'"

His campaign slogan is "Had Enough?"

Hinchey, however, said he has been a dedicated representative of the people who have since 1993 elected him to serve in Congress.

He said it is important that the region is represented by a senior member of the House Appropriations Committee, on which he has served for several years, and its subcommittees on agriculture, defense and the interior and environment. Hinchey said he can ensure local projects and initiatives are funded through those assignments. He doubts Democrats will lose control of the House.

"If I'm not there, that money will go to someone else's district," Hinchey said.

Hinchey secured federal funds to help cover the design and construction of the year-old Walkway Over the Hudson. The former railroad bridge-turned-state park has increased tourism in the City of Poughkeepsie and the hamlet of Highland, he said, and, with it, the local economy.

He also led the effort to create the Solar Energy Consortium, based in Kingston, a not-for-profit organization that seeks to develop solar technology and encourage solar companies to open in the region. The consortium has already generated

1,000 jobs, he said, adding that the figure will likely double in 2011.

"This is the biggest, most important thing that's happened (in the region)," he said. "This is one of the most important things I've been able to do."

He said he also worked to create hundreds of jobs at Binghamton University and its corporate partners.

Stimulus debated

Hinchey defended his support of the stimulus package approved by Congress in 2009, saying that although the bill was not perfect, it was the first infrastructure investment the government had made in years. The package generated construction jobs and provided money for the maintenance many roadways desperately needed, he said.

Phillips said the stimulus should have focused on tax cuts rather than on pumping money to wasteful or "pet projects."

Local economies will improve when Congress stops squandering billions of dollars by rolling back its current spending spree, he said.

"It all starts with waste in Washington," he said.

Consolidating federal agencies, such as those that regulate lands and natural resources, would save the government money, he said.

The federal government could support small



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businesses by allowing them group buying power when seeking employee health-care plans and by capping taxes owed by small businesses, he said. The amount of that cap would hinge on the amount of money the federal government can save by eliminating its own waste, he said.

Leaders need to do whatever they can to help small businesses conserve resources, he said.

"We just need to have jobs here," he said.

Expanded rail lines between smaller communities in the district and metropolitan areas can also help boost existing commercial centers, he said.

And, Phillips said, gas drilling by hydraulic fracturing could create jobs locally.

Phillips said drillers should be permitted to practice hydrofracking if proper safeguards against water contamination are imposed. He said the Environmental Protection Agency should study the effects hydraulic fracturing may have on water systems in the district, but issuing permits at the federal level might unnecessarily slow the drilling process. Permitting should be managed by the state, he said.

"I think we can get it done on a New York state level," he said. "New York state can get it done."

Hinchey said he could support hydrofracking if drilling activities were monitored and done in a way that did not harm residents. He said drillers in other parts of the country have not been upfront about how drilling affects the environment.

"If anybody is going to drill, they have to be honest about what they're putting into the ground," he said.

Reforms supported

Hinchey supported health-care reforms passed by Congress this year, although like the stimulus, he said, those are imperfect. He said the bill brought a "big improvement" over the previous health-care options because it strengthened home care, made prescription drugs more affordable and encouraged more people to become health-care professionals. But some of the bill's provisions that do not go in to effect until 2012 or 2014 should have taken full effect immediately, he said. Hinchey supported single-payer universal health-care legislation.

Phillips said the health-care bill should have limited medical malpractice lawsuits, which, he said, drive up medical costs.

Phillips does not seek to privatize Social Security but has suggested that the government invest Social Security funds into bonds. He argued his opponent has voted to tax Social Security payments and that the Appropriations Committee has been "raiding" Social Security funds.

Phillips, a high school- and college-level teacher, said the federal government should relax its unfunded mandates on local schools. Mandates pull money away from localities, he said.

School systems should be allowed to offer more choices between educational programs, he said, adding that competition between charter schools and other public schools will help improve programs.

Hinchey said the federal government should focus resources on local education, so schools are not dependent on property taxes.

Changing focus

He said the Obama administration will curtail wasteful spending as it shifts away from military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and onto domestic issues.

Hinchey, a factory foreman who has worked to prevent the exportation of jobs, said money should be spent on domestic security and increasing the

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quality of life in America. A dollar invested locally yields a much higher return, he said.

"(We're) not investing money by pouring it out of the country," he said.

Poughkeepsie resident John Lester agreed, saying Main Streets need revitalization and America should once again become a manufacturing leader.

The Democrat voted for Hinchey last week via early ballot because, he said, the congressman has followed through with promised initiatives.

"(Hinchey) hasn't lied," Lester said. "He has been forthright and-or made a valiant effort to be."

The 22nd Congressional District encompasses the City of Poughkeepsie in Dutchess County, all of Sullivan and Ulster counties, and portions of Broome, Delaware, Orange, Tioga and Tompkins counties.

The annual salary for rank-and-file members of Congress is \$174,000.

Reach Susan Campriello at scampriell@poughkee.gannett.com or 845-451-4518.

Occupation: Factory foreman; congressman representing the 22nd Congressional District (2003 to present); congressman representing the 26th Congressional District (1993-2003); assemblyman representing the 101st District (1975-92)

George Phillips

Age: 34

Party: Republican

Ballot lines: Republican, Conservative

Occupation: Teacher at Broome Community College (2006 to present); teacher at Seton Catholic High School in Binghamton, (2005 to present); aide to Rep. Christopher Smith (2001-05)

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Maurice Hinchey

Age: 72

Party: Democrat

Ballot lines: Democratic, Independence, Working Families

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