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Piper Will Stand to be Paid in New York's 23rd C.D. Solidarity America By John Funciello

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Note: By the time you read this, the election will have occurred and we should know the outcome, but, no matter who is elected, the people of the 23rd C.D. will see some major changes in their own lives and the lives of their many small communities. Here are a few points that may not have been considered.

There's a lot of buzz around the election of a new congressional representative in New York's 23rd Congressional District at the national level - TV pundits, politicians, and analysts of all kinds - but the state of the people's lives is not often mentioned.

This huge district, spread across the northern part of the state, is not what you'd call the high rent district. There is a lot of poverty and its people, along with citizens of the rest of rural New York, have been trying for generations to find their way to a share of the benefits of prosperity.

While there have been some periods of prosperity in New York, as in the rest of the country, mostly it has been boom and bust for the past half-century. But the people of the 23rd and the Empire State's other rural districts have endured, as they do today.

A robustly Republican district of a strange physical conformation, the district has been represented by a Republican since around the time of the Civil War. The last of these

representatives, John McHugh, was tapped by President Obama to serve as Secretary of the Army and he accepted.

Thus, the scramble for a replacement and the very bloody fight among Republicans on the party's right wing (is there another?) to select a candidate to run against the Democrat.

Just a few short weeks ago, it looked as if the candidate chosen by the local Republican county committees, Dede Scozzafava, would be the shoo-in that has come to be expected in the district. Republican politicians at the national level, respecting the choice made by the locals, endorsed Scozzafava and thought the thing was done.

However, Republicans on the fringe of the right and their echo chambers in talk radio and television had a different idea. To them, Scozzafava was too liberal. She had had the temerity to support rights of workers to form unions and, of all things, to support abortion rights.

There were other issues, but those two apparently were enough for the likes of Sarah Palin and others from the far edges, to proclaim their undying support for the Conservative Party candidate, Doug Hoffman, an anti-tax, anti-spending, anti-abortion - and you can go down the line of any number of right-wing issues on which Hoffman is in line with Palin and Dick Armey, a former congressional leader who now runs an organization that promotes such things as tea parties on and for the right.

In the eyes of dairy farmers who are the primary sources of economic activity in large portions of the 23rd C.D., New York - the nation's third-largest dairy state - and its representatives have not done enough to save them from foreclosure. Milk prices are at the levels that they were a few decades ago and, if the cost of living is considered, they are the lowest in a few generations. Large meetings have been held around the district on that issue alone. The situation is desperate for most of them, and the same is true for other farmers and most of the rural citizens in Northern New York.

The kind of Band-Aid approach that most government agencies and politicians have proposed is nothing more than that. What's needed is the kind of stimulus that was provided, mostly without strings attached, to Wall Street banks, financial manipulators, and insurance giants. Nothing less will do.

It will be interesting, no matter who wins, Democrat Bill Owens or Conservative Doug Hoffman. Dede Scozzafava suspended her campaign several days ago, on the basis that she had little support in funds or from her party. She endorsed Owens as the best candidate for the district.

If the Democrat wins, will he be able to deliver to his district what is needed in the way of economic relief to the district, for schools, farms, small businesses, transportation, health care, and clean air and water? All of these are desperately needed, even though there are small areas in the district that have seen a small increase in economic well-being, the Fort Drum area, near Watertown.

Of course, that boost is from the U.S. war economy that has been supported by both Democrats and Republicans in Congress. If the nation's political leaders feel that the seemingly endless war and defense spending flags, that could mean an economic

downturn for the area. It happened in the eastern part of the district a number of years ago, when the Plattsburgh Air Force Base was closed.

If the Conservative wins and is faithful to the Palin-Army (and his own) right-wing philosophy, the district could be in for a further slide. He'll have to fight to cut or curb government programs for such things as aid to farmers, whose products are in the "free-market" system and, therefore, if they can't survive, they should just find other lines of work.

For example, unemployment is typically high in the 23rd C.D., as it is in the other rural areas of the state (most of the state). The Republicans in Washington have just voted against any extension of federal unemployment benefits for people who have been unable to find any job, and have trouble putting dinner on the table.

If Hoffman is to the right of those GOP members of Congress, what would he have to do to show his right-wing bona fides? Ask the unemployed to return some of the money that they've received in the past six months?

The 23rd Congressional District did not get in the shape that it's in overnight. It has been a long time coming and conservative Republican policies - prodded by their members on the right - are what put them there.

Yet, decade after decade, generation after generation, they put the same kinds of people in office, from the same party, pushing the same kinds of policies and expecting a different outcome.

Since the long-ago demise of the small boot and shoe factories and dress factories and logging and mining across the breadth of the 23rd, there has been little except farming and seasonal tourism (unless you want to consider the relatively low-wage jobs of government, schools, and the health "industry").

Recently, there have been reports that the abandoned farms around Fort Drum are being bought up for building of housing for the military, dependents, and civilians who work at the base.

In some ways, it's like a military-industrial-complex-inspired gold rush. As in all gold rushes, it won't last forever. That small bit of prosperity is fleeting and, when it's over, the district will still be facing economic woes, or it might be set on a new course by a different candidate with different ideas.

The district's future won't be a picnic if they elect the Democrat, because the problems are of such long standing. But, if things are bad now, especially for dairy farmers who are the mainstay of many of the local economies, how much worse will they become if the Conservative is elected and remains true to his ideology and that of his mentors, Sarah Palin and Dick Army.

At least, if all seems lost, farmers can sell their land to the Pentagon.

BlackCommentator.com Columnist, John Funicello, is a labor organizer and former union organizer. His union work started when he became a local president of The Newspaper Guild in the early 1970s. He was a reporter for 14 years for newspapers in

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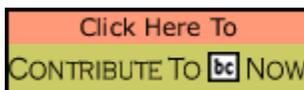


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