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ABOUT JONATHAN TAMARI



Jonathan Tamari is the Inquirer's correspondent in Washington, where he follows the Philadelphia area's interests and representatives. Tamari comes to D.C. after two years as a beat writer reporting on the Philadelphia Eagles and the NFL (where, a political source once told him, there are at least rules against hitting below the knees). He previously wrote about politics and government from Trenton, reporting on the characters and color of New Jersey state government. Jersey born and bred, Tamari now lives in the capital city, where he is looking for stories, places to run, soccer bars and good meals. Reach him at jtamari@phillynews.com or follow him on Twitter @JonathanTamari.

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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2012

In Eagles-Steelers scrap, who do Pa.'s U.S. senators back?

The Eagles play the Steelers Sunday, and for most of Pennsylvania, the decision about who to root for isn't so much a decision as it is a fundamental act of identity.

When you're a Senator who represents the entire state, though, and would love votes from both Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and their rabid fan-bases, well, loyalty might be a little more complicated.

The teams represent the two biggest cities in the state, and they each have fan followings that are intense, proud, sensitive to slights and probably include a fair number of people more apt to remember who a politician roots for than, say, how he feels about U.S. foreign aid. Both cities wrap so much of themselves in their NFL teams.

So, of course, I had to ask Pennsylvania Sens. **Pat Toomey** and **Bob Casey** who they had in this week's battle of Eastern and Western Pennsylvania (if only to cause a little trouble). Toomey's staff said he's a long-time Eagles fan. The Republican lives in Zionsville, not far from the Eagles' Bethlehem training camp, so perhaps that plays a role.

Staff for Casey, a Democrat and Scranton native, didn't offer an answer. (His Washington office has hints of a Pittsburgh sports tilt – the waiting room includes a prominent photo of Casey as a child with Pittsburgh Pirate legend Roberto Clemente – but let's assume that one picture isn't a conclusive measure of sports loyalty).

To be fair, Casey has more at risk – Philly and Pittsburgh are Democratic strongholds, and he's in the midst of a re-election campaign against Republican Tom Smith, a Steelers fan who boasted about that fact while at a summer event in Philly, with U.S. Rep. Jon Runyan, the former Eagles offensive lineman, nearby on stage.

Is it a big deal? No. Likely to change an election in any significant way? Certainly not.

But that's all the more reason to just pick a side. A candidate's willingness to choose says a little something about how comfortable he is laying out his personality, and a little about how much he worries about the widespread, but always futile, game of trying to never offend anyone, anywhere.

While thinking about the upcoming game, I was reminded of a New Jersey gubernatorial debate in 2005, where the loyalty question is even tougher, since it involves the Giants and Jets in North Jersey and the Eagles in the South. Jon Corzine and Doug Forrester were each asked about their favorite team. Corzine's answer was immediate and definitive: Giants. Fair enough. Next question.

Forrester, who came from the central part of the state, said something to the effect of: I have affection for the Giants and Eagles. Wow. Problems.

First, no sports fan in the history of sports fans has ever described his loyalty as "having affection" for his team. Second, there are no Eagles fans who have anything but disdain for the Giants, and vice versa, and anyone with any knowledge of either team knows that.

Instead of simply choosing a side, Forrester lost everyone. What should have been a straight forward, light bit of insight into his personal side turned into a gaffe that made him look like a man who would say anything to win, and feared even the slightest bit, most inconsequential bit of ire from anyone.

Which is the biggest mistake of all, because while sports fans love it if you, too, cheer on the same team that they do, they also appreciate team loyalty and respect real differences, if you come by them honestly.

Like, hopefully, most voters.

Posted by Jonathan Tamari @ 12:33 PM [Permalink](#) | [1 comment](#)

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2012

Poll: Runyan with 10 point lead on Adler

U.S. Rep. **Jon Runyan** (R., N.J.) has a 10 point lead on Democratic challenger **Shelley Adler** in their campaign for a South Jersey House seat, according to a Stockton Polling Institute survey of likely voters.

Runyan is up 49-39 in Jersey's third district, which includes parts of Burlington and Ocean counties. National Democrats have made the seat one of their prime targets, but the poll, released Wednesday afternoon, indicates that Adler has a lot of ground to make up in the four-and-a-half weeks before Election Day.

"With 12 percent of voters undecided, candidate Adler still has an opportunity to close the lead on Runyan, though Runyan is clearly in a better position," said Daniel J. Douglas, director of Stockton's the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy.

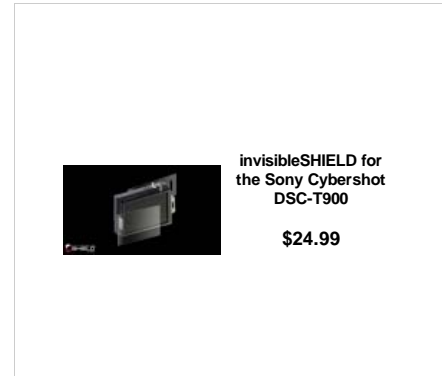
He said the poll is the first independent poll on the race to be released to the public.

Stockton surveyed 614 likely voters from Sept. 28 to Oct. 2. The findings have a 4 percent margin of error.

Not surprisingly, voters are unhappy with Congress (only 10 percent approve of its job performance) but, as is often the case, like their local Congressman.

The poll found 51 percent of likely voters in the district have a favorable opinion of Runyan, compared to 26 percent who see him unfavorably; 21 percent were unsure or unfamiliar with him.

Thirty-nine percent had a favorable view of Adler; 26 percent have an unfavorable opinion and about a third are unfamiliar with her or unsure of their opinion.



Posted by Jonathan Tamari @ 2:44 PM Permalink | 6 comments

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2012

Cost of the cliff: \$3,500 average tax hike, study says

The fiscal cliff is coming – and a report out this week says it could cost the average household \$3,500.

That was the finding by the Tax Policy Center, a nonpartisan group whose [study offered some of the most specific potential consequences](#) of a big issue that has often been debated in abstract terms.

To get specific: tax breaks that expire at year's end are set to raise overall taxes by \$536 billion – 21 percent -- and cost middle income families an additional \$2,000 on average, the nonpartisan Center found. Nearly 90 percent of Americans would be see taxes rise by some amount "if we topple off the cliff," the Center wrote.

The biggest increases would come from the end of the Bush tax cuts of 2001 and 2003 and the payroll tax cut approved in 2010, and are part of the fiscal cliff that will dominate discussions after the Nov. 6 election.

The cliff is D.C. shorthand for the combination of tax increases and automatic spending cuts set to hit by the end of the year unless Congress and the White House can forge a compromise to avoid it. I recently wrote about [the automatic cuts, which would hammer defense spending and domestic programs alike](#). The Tax Policy Center report adds detail to the tax end of the equation, calculating what would happen if all of the tax cuts in question are allowed to expire (a result everyone says they want to avoid).

Among the poorest 20 percent, taxes would rise by \$412 on average. The richest 20 percent would get hit for \$14,173. The top 1 percent could pay more than \$120,000 in added taxes.

Those are some big numbers. But just about every elected official wants to avert the worst of the spending cuts and any tax hike that's going to cost the average family more than three grand. Odds are the impending damage prompts a last-minute deal after the election that at the very least punts the issue to next year. The New York Times [reported this week that Senators from both parties are already working on a deal](#) to raise money by changing the tax code (read: closing loopholes and deductions) and cutting some spending, but likely in a more targeted way than the "sequestration" set to take effect.

So, if you're looking for reasons to hope, most people here think Congress will just barely avoid the full force of the cliff. (Picture the movie scene where the main character's car goes hurtling into a canyon, only for the hero to leap clear, grab a branch and scramble to safety: now, just for fun, picture Harry Reid and Mitch McConnell trying it).

But it also seems likely that at least some taxes will rise, and the details could have significant impacts on family budgets.

The [2010 payroll tax cut, for example, seems almost certain to expire](#), the Times reported. Neither presidential candidate has talked about further extending it, according to the Tax Policy Center.

If it goes away, the resulting tax hike would hit 77 percent of all taxpayers, with the dollar cost ranging from an average of \$120 at the bottom end of the economic scale (the bottom 20 percent) to \$1,950 in the top 20 percent. The middle quintile would pay \$672 more, according to the center.

More controversial are the Bush tax cuts. Both parties want to keep them for most Americans, but there is debate about whether upper income families should pay more. Republicans generally say tax rates should stay the same across the board – no increases.

Democrats, including President Obama, want to see rates rise on some, but they differ on what the threshold will be. Obama has talked about increasing taxes on families with incomes of \$250,000 and up. Other Democrats from wealthy cities say the cut off should be higher, because \$250k doesn't go as far there. (Shelley Adler, a Cherry Hill Democrat running for Congress, says the tax hikes should only hit those making \$1 million and up).

This debate has the potential for the biggest tax impact on most Americans. While the end of the Bush cuts would only cost the bottom 20 percent an extra \$53 a year, the second quintile would pay \$558 more; taxes would rise by \$888, \$1,453 and \$3,841 for the third, fourth and fifth quintiles of taxpayers. In all, 71 percent of taxpayers would pay more if the Bush cuts expire entirely, according to the Tax Policy Center.

Again, that seems very unlikely to happen. But to avoid it, Congress and the White House will have to work out a deal, which usually seems pretty unlikely itself.

Posted by Jonathan Tamari @ 11:08 AM Permalink | 4 comments

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2012

Fattah: public should "remember" who backed Voter ID

Critics of Pennsylvania's voter ID law have long said it was a political gimmick intended to swing this year's election. Now Congressman Chaka Fattah seems to be urging a political consequence, telling voters to "remember those who attempted to block access to our precious vote."

In a statement released this afternoon, the Philadelphia Democrat called the voter ID law "ill-advised and anti-democratic" and hailed the judge's ruling blocking it from taking full effect in November. (Angela Couloumbis has [the full details of the decision here](#)).

"Pennsylvanians should always remember those who attempted to block that access to our

precious vote and who have sought to disenfranchise large numbers of voters," Fattah said, not-so-subtly encouraging voters to hold the law against the GOP.

From across state lines, Delaware Sen. Chris Coons also jumped into the fray, issuing a statement calling the law "a transparent attempt to keep these voters out of the voting booth," referring to seniors, minorities, the poor and the young.

The Democrat said the law would have the "collateral damage" of excluding "hundreds of thousands" of qualified voters.

"Pennsylvania's voter ID law is a step backward on our nation's road toward equality," Coons said.

So far, none of the Republican members of our regional delegation in Washington have issued statements on the ruling, but the Pennsylvania GOP called voter ID a "commonsense reform."

"We will work to encourage voters to bring their photo identification with them to the polls," said PA GOP chairman Rob Gleason. "Poll after poll has shown that Pennsylvanians from both political parties overwhelmingly support Voter ID legislation because, despite the empty rhetoric to the contrary, this legislation is still about ensuring one person, one vote. Our Party remains committed to the citizens of the Commonwealth and we will do all that we can to ensure free and fair elections."

Posted by Jonathan Tamari @ 2:17 PM [Permalink](#) | [31 comments](#)

MONDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2012

Poll shows problems for Lautenberg rivals

One of the more popular parlor games in Jersey politics these days is handicapping the field of which ambitious Democrats may try to take a run at U.S. **Sen. Frank Lautenberg** in 2014.

Lautenberg, the thinking goes, has one of only three statewide elected offices, and with the formidable **Gov. Christie** in one, and U.S. **Sen. Robert Menendez** in the other, and looking likely to win re-election next month, a bevy of ambitious Democrats are hungrily circling the 88-year-old Lautenberg, seeing his seat as the one most within reach.

A recent poll from Monmouth University and my old friends at the Asbury Park Press, though, shows serious challenges for a couple of the people mentioned as likely Lautenberg rivals, including **South Jersey's Steve Sweeney**, the state Senate president who has made no secret of his ambitions for higher office.

The poll is focused on Christie and the Democrats who might run against him next year, but the numbers also give us a picture of where the big names stand statewide, and it's clear that Sweeney and **Congressman Frank Pallone**, another potential Lautenberg challenger, have a lot of ground to cover to make a real run for a seat in DC's most exclusive club.

Their big weakness is name recognition – a critical attribute but one that is difficult to build in a state that is split between two media markets that focus on Philly and New York much more than the unruly neighbor in between. Sweeney, from Gloucester County, is familiar to just 35 percent of voters statewide (and only 19 percent view him favorably). Pallone is at 25 percent name recognition, with a 17 percent approval rating.

Compare that to Cory Booker, the Newark mayor who is often mentioned as a potential statewide candidate in 2013, against Christie, in 2014 for Senate, or for both. He is familiar to 62 percent of voters, according to Monmouth U, and 49 percent of view him favorably. Former Gov. Dick Codey, a state Senator these days, is known to 48 percent of voters. From there, the figures drop off a cliff for Democrats like Sweeney and Pallone. (Inquirer colleague Matt Katz has a breakdown of the implications for the looming governor's race over at The Christie Chronicles).

Lautenberg wasn't included in the Monmouth poll but the Inquirer's recent New Jersey poll found that 62 percent of likely voters were familiar with the long-time Senator, and 34 percent said they saw him strongly or somewhat favorably.

It's not an apples-to-apples comparison, since we're dealing with two different polls and the Inquirer looked at likely voters only, but we can get a sense of the overall landscape: Lautenberg isn't overwhelmingly loved, but he's known a lot better than his potential foes, other than Booker.

It all means that while Democrats watch Lautenberg, hoping he'll retire, hinting that they'll primary him if he doesn't, the combatant senator might not be run out of DC so easily, despite his age (he'll turn 90 at the start of his 2014 re-election fight) and the fact that he's not that well liked for someone who has held statewide office for the better part of 30 years.

(Republicans would also have something to say about the 2014 race, but other than Christie no one from the GOP has won statewide in Jersey since 1997).

So much hinges on Booker. He appears to be the strongest challenger to Christie, and even if he can't beat the governor, a strong performance could make him the presumptive Democratic nominee for Senate in 2014.

On the other hand, a bad loss to Christie might soften up Booker and open the door for other challengers, such as Sweeney and Pallone.

But to win statewide, those two would each have a lot of ground to make up when it comes to that most basic element of winning – making sure voters actually know who you are.

Posted by Jonathan Tamari @ 12:38 PM Permalink | 2 comments

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2012

Rendell rips Fitzpatrick, GOP over Mumia attacks

Former Gov. Ed Rendell blasted Republicans and GOP Congressman Mike Fitzpatrick Friday for a new political attack attempting to tie Fitzpatrick's opponent to convicted cop-killer Mumia Abu-Jamal. He said Fitzpatrick should denounce the effort.

"I'm angry, I'm just angry," Rendell said in a phone interview. "(Politics) has been my lifelong profession, to see it sink to this level, it's just disgusting."

Rendell first raised the ad at a Democratic rally in Philadelphia Friday morning, where he called on Fitzpatrick to denounce the attacks on Democratic challenger Kathy Boockvar and for the GOP to drop the accusatory Web post and robo-calls launched Wednesday and Thursday.

"This ad is the worst type of guilt by association – It smacks of the worst type of politics," Rendell said in the interview. "Kathy has no association, absolutely, with Mumia, in no way or form helped Mumia."

Rendell, the former Philly mayor and district attorney when Abu-Jamal was prosecuted, said Fitzpatrick "should be embarrassed by it and he should be ashamed."

"It has all sorts of overtones. It just stinks," Rendell said, adding that he has offered to do robo-calls helping Boockvar in a hotly contested House race based in Bucks County. Both parties see the race as the one that gives Democrats the best chance to add a seat in the Philadelphia region.

The National Republican Congressional Committee, which launched the attack, fired back, citing legal work Boockvar's husband did representing one of the witnesses who recanted her testimony against Abu-Jamal.

"So Boockvar's husband accusing the Philadelphia police of pressuring witnesses to the murder of Officer Faulkner is NOT disgusting, but making note of that fact IS? With all due respect, Mayor Rendell needs to take a closer look at the facts and then do some soul searching." NRCC spokesman Nat Sillin wrote in an e-mail. "Some things are just not worth defending even if party loyalty seems to require it."

The GOP accusations hinge on work done by Jordan Yeager, Boockvar's husband, in the mid-1990s and early 2000's. In 1996, 14 years after Abu-Jamal's conviction, Yeager represented Veronica Jones, a witness who recanted her original testimony against Abu-Jamal. Yeager, working with a Philadelphia firm at the time, accused police of pressuring Jones by enforcing old warrants after she changed her story.

None of the GOP accusations cite any work Boockvar has done or her own words.

In an interview Thursday night, Fitzpatrick would not directly answer if he thought the Abu-Jamal ads were fair or if he would denounce them.

"Is it true?" he asked in response to questions about fairness.

"This race is not about campaign ads – it's about the truth and it's about jobs and the economy and which candidate has the best plan to get people back to work," he said. Asked what the ads had to do with those issues, he responded, "I'd refer that question to the NRCC."

(The NRCC is the GOP's national arm for House races).

[Reaction from Fitzpatrick and Boockvar](#), along with the prosecutor involved in one of the key cases cited by the GOP critiques, are included in today's story online and in the Inquirer. My Thursday morning [blog post has details of the accusations](#), but before the candidates personally weighed in.

Boockvar called the attack "the atomic bomb of distraction" Thursday night and said it shows that Republicans are worried about losing the closely-held seat.

Boockvar's husband also once represented Frances Goldin, a prominent literary agent who included Abu-Jamal as a client. Goldin had been arrested on minor charges in 1999 while protesting Abu-Jamal's sentence. At the time Yeager defended the agent, he and Boockvar shared a small law practice.

In an interview with the Inquirer, Boockvar was asked if she was concerned that her practice would defend someone protesting on Abu-Jamal's behalf.

"Even when we were in the same practice we had totally different case loads," she said. "Frankly, it wasn't a case I was involved in. It wasn't a memorable thing. This was not a Mumia case, this was a small protest."

She said she has never met or spoken to Abu-Jamal. She was in her teens when he was convicted, in 1982, though protests have continued long after.

Included in today's story, the prosecutor in that case said Goldin's charges were on the level of a traffic ticket, and that Yeager's work was based on the protest, not Abu-Jamal's conviction.

Posted by Jonathan Tamari @ 12:30 PM [Permalink](#) | [32 comments](#)

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2012

GOP tries to tie Boockvar to Mumia



In the congressional district, Kathryn Boockvar is the Democratic challenger, Mike Fitzpatrick the Republican incumbent.

Republicans injected one of the region's most emotionally charged murder cases into a tight Bucks County-based Congressional race late Wednesday night, attempting to tie Democratic challenger Kathryn Boockvar to convicted cop-killer Mumia Abu-Jamal because of legal work Boockvar's husband performed in the mid-1990s and early 2000s.

The Republican attack, which includes a Web site post Wednesday and automated phone calls to voters set to begin Thursday, accuses Boockvar's "husband-

and-wife law firm" of representing "one of the leading activists" for Abu-Jamal. It also highlights her husband's work as a lawyer "for a witness to the murder who accused the cops of pressuring her," according to a script of the call, which provides little context. (

"Call Kathryn Boockvar ... and tell her that's too radical for Bucks County," says the call, sponsored by the National Republican Congressional Committee, the GOP's House campaign arm. (UPDATED: The full script is below).

Boockvar campaign manager Jon Blair responded with this statement:

"Congressman Fitzpatrick and his partners in Washington can make all the baseless accusations they want, but it won't distract the intelligent voters of Bucks and Montgomery counties from the Congressman's actual record, including voting to protect companies that outsource our jobs, flip-flopping on Social Security, voting twice to turn Medicare into a crippling expensive voucher system, and trying to redefine rape," he said. "These concrete facts, not wild charges, prove that Congressman Fitzpatrick is the wrong fit for the people of the Eighth District."

The Republican accusations hinge on work by Jordan Yeager, Boockvar's husband. The work cited by the GOP occurred more than a decade after Abu-Jamal's 1982 conviction, though while protesters still contested his guilt. The GOP does not mention any work Boockvar did herself.

Instead Republicans point to work Yeager did while he and Boockvar were partners in their own firm. In 2000 Yeager represented Abu-Jamal's literary agent, who was arrested and charged with petty crimes while protesting his Abu-Jamal's conviction. The agent, Frances Goldin, was 75 at the time and was one of 95 people arrested in the demonstration. The prominent agent, an Abu-Jamal supporter, later paid a fine and was sentenced to one year's probation.

Yeager, while at a separate Philadelphia firm, worked in 1996 as an attorney for Veronica Jones, a woman who initially gave testimony against Abu-Jamal but later recanted, saying she had been pressured by police when she provided the first version of her story. Yeager told reporters in 1996 police were also trying to intimidate her with arrests on old charges after she changed her story.

The calls make no mention of the time frame of Yeager's work. Republican Web ads include a grainy photo of Abu-Jamal alongside an image of Boockvar, who was in her teens at the time of Abu-Jamal's conviction.

The attack, pulling in one of the most notorious names in the region, illustrates the intensity of the most hotly contested Congressional race in the Philadelphia-area and the pressure the GOP faces in trying to hold the closely divided district.

"Kathy Boockvar's troubling past and long history of radical activism is a clear window into her beliefs and priorities," said a statement from Paul Lindsay, communications director for the NRCC. "If Boockvar is willing to defend Mumia's values, she's not the right person to defend the values of Bucks County families."

Fitzpatrick, in an interview Wednesday night, shortly before the NRCC site posted the new accusations, said he was unaware of the planned attack and could not comment on it.

"I'm not familiar with the call you're talking about and I haven't seen the Web site," Fitzpatrick said. "This race is about jobs and the economy and which candidate is better equipped based upon experience and approach to get people back to work."

Pressed on whether he would then denounce a personal attack, Fitzpatrick said he needed more information to comment on it.

The NRCC posted information about Yeager's legal work on its Web site, "Radical Kathy," which paints Boockvar as a left-wing extremist. Through various forms of media, Republicans hope to reach 200,000 to 300,000 voters on Friday.

The eighth district regularly flips between Republican and Democratic control and political analysts and operatives from both parties say it represents Democrats' best chance to pick up a seat in this area. The district is a moderate one, so both candidates have attempted to claim the middle ground while portraying their opponent as an extremist.

On Wednesday Democrats released a recording of Fitzpatrick at a tea party fund raiser saying, "we need to support people who have a history and know what it is like to sign the front of a paycheck, not the back of a paycheck" and compared that statement to Mitt Romney's ill-received remarks recorded at a fund raiser of his own. Fitzpatrick [told the Allentown Morning-Call](#) that he meant to say "not *just* the back of the paycheck."

The new GOP line of attack takes the campaign fight to a new level.

The main thrust of the Republican message focuses on Yeager's work for Goldin, a publicist for Abu-Jamal, who was convicted of killing police officer Daniel Faulkner but who became an international cause célèbre for many who believe he was wrongly accused.

Goldin, a prominent literary agent, was one of 95 protesters arrested in 1999 during a demonstration outside the Liberty Bell. Yeager later defended her against the charges she faced. He and Boockvar were partners in their own law firm at the time. Public records show that Goldin was charged with petty offenses related to the protest and, along with her one-year probation, charged a \$25 assessment and \$250 fine.

Other Abu-Jamal-related charges on the Web site relate to comments by people in the same organization as Boockvar and Yeager, but not anything they did themselves. One accusation cites an Abu-Jamal forum held last year by a lawyers' group Yeager once worked for, but he was not a member of the group when it hosted the event, according to the Boockvar campaign.

Another point mentions a "colleague" of Boockvar's who wrote a commentary on Abu-Jamal in 2007, criticizing the police. The author was a contractor at a non-profit, the Advancement Project, where Boockvar worked, her campaign said.

Boockvar's opponent in a 2011 race for Commonwealth Court cited that same commentary. Boockvar said then that the writing by a co-worker had "nothing to do with Kathryn Boockvar," according to the Patriot News.

UPDATED - here is the script for the robo-calls being launched by the NRCC:

Hello, I'm calling from the National Republican Congressional Committee at 320 First Street Southeast in Washington, DC 20003, 202-479-7000, with a recorded message about

congressional candidate and legal activist Kathy Boockvar and convicted Philadelphia cop killer Mumia Abu-Jamal.

The husband-and-wife law firm of Boockvar and Yeager has represented one of the leading activists for Mumia Abu-Jamal – and Boockvar's husband was a lawyer for a witness to the murder who accused the cops of pressuring her.

Boockvar's husband himself accused the Philadelphia police of intimidating witnesses to the murder.

Boockvar's colleague at a legal activist group accused the Philadelphia police union of having the state's Supreme Court in its pocket when it comes to Abu-Jamal.

Last year, a group tied to Boockvar's husband, held an event at the Constitution Center honoring Mumia Abu-Jamal. The cop killer called into the event from prison.

Call Kathy Boockvar at (215) 839-9383 and tell her that's too radical for Bucks County.

Posted by Jonathan Tamari @ 8:24 AM Permalink | 77 comments

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2012

Runyan, Adler face off on taxes, women's issues

The ex-Eagles lineman and the Harvard-trained attorney sat across from each other, trading philosophies, accusations and rhetoric.

Freshman Republican **Congressman Jon Runyan**, once a gritty offensive tackle, made the case for a limited government that holds down taxes, trims regulations, including those in ObamaCare, and restricts federal funding for abortion. He cast himself as a man willing to compromise, while blaming the Democratically-controlled U.S. Senate for the lingering gridlock in Washington.

His opponent, **Shelley Adler**, a former Cherry Hill councilwoman and the widow of ex-Congressman John Adler, took sharp, focused aim at Runyan's record, peppering him with detailed criticism of his votes. She accused him of backing tax breaks for oil companies and incentives that make it profitable to move jobs overseas, and called for keeping government out of the abortion debate and for higher taxes on millionaires to help balance the federal budget.

The two met with the Inquirer's editorial board on Tuesday in Philadelphia. They are fighting for a House seat in South Jersey's third district, centered in Burlington and Ocean counties. (PolitickerNJ has an [excellent write up](#) on the race today.)

Runyan rapidly tapped his foot on the floor as she attacked. He responded with firm words, but balanced his imposing frame with soft tones.

The two candidates kept a respectful demeanor – Runyan referring to “Miss Adler” or “the gentle-lady,” Adler calling him “Congressman” – but sharply differed on the issues.

In a few instances they broke slightly from party orthodoxy. Adler, like several Democrats from wealthy areas of the country, argued that taxes should rise on some, but not necessarily on those earning \$250,000 or up, as President Obama has proposed. Instead, Adler said the threshold should be \$1 million. (Democrats from New York and San Francisco have made similar arguments). Runyan is for keeping all income tax rates at their current levels, regardless of income.

Runyan said he could embrace some aspects of Obama's health law, including requiring insurance companies to cover customers with pre-existing conditions and capping rate increases, but he said the bill overall includes too many expensive regulations.

These stances, slight variations on their parties' primary talking points, were the exception, though, as the two largely hewed to the main arguments offered by Republicans and Democrats all around the Philadelphia region. Here are some of their key statements on top issues in an hour-long meeting. (Answers are presented the order they came up during the editorial board meeting):

-- On the country's direction

Runyan: I don't think anybody in this country and even in the third congressional district thinks this country's getting any better. The country I inherited from my parents and grandparents and the growth in this country and the better place – I don't think I have the ability to do that. I don't think most of us would even say we have the ability to turn a better place over to the next generation.

Adler: He said earlier in his remarks that he doesn't see how he can give a better united states to our children and grandchildren. I think we can if we change the Congress.

-- On jobs and fiscal issues:

Runyan: We all know the number one issue is jobs ... We're not creating an environment for anybody in this world that has the ability to create a job to create that job. There's so much uncertainty.

Adler: We need to both consider spending cuts as well as revenue issues (to balance the federal budget). ... You can't have an additional \$300,000, on average, person tax break for millionaires and billionaires and expect that we are going to be reaching the goals that we need to reach with respect to the budget.

-- On the Bush tax cuts:

Runyan: I voted to extend them as currently (in place) and it's been mischaracterized by Mrs. Adler that we're giving tax breaks to people. We're not giving tax breaks to anyone; we're extending the current rates.

Adler (saying she would raise taxes on high incomes, but at a higher point than Obama proposed): The cost of living's higher in New Jersey. \$250,000 is very different in Montana and some of the southern states than in New Jersey ... I am at the target of \$1 million in

New Jersey (for where tax increases would begin).

-- On Obama's health care law:

Adler: The health care bill did not do something that's very important –which is to address the very high cost of health care ... Notwithstanding, I don't believe we should go back to a time where we turn health care back to the insurance companies and take people off of policies that have pre-existing policies, take young adults off their parents policies that are now on there for the 1st time, take away the preventive health care that we now have.

Runyan (saying the government is not even two-thirds of the way through writing the bill's regulations): Every regulation the federal government puts out has a cost – that's a cost to middle class Americans, that's a cost to every business. ... There are 21 tax increases in that bill that frankly don't even pay for half of that bill.

-- On women's health:

Adler: We should keep government out of women's health care decisions. ...

Runyan: When you get into the women's discussion and you saw what happened with the Catholic church, there's a violation of their freedom of religion, and when you mandate a Catholic facility to do a lot of that stuff, you're stepping across that line and you're opening up a box.

Adler: That's why you voted to cut off funding for preventive health care in Planned Parenthood?

Runyan: Planned Parenthood is a separate issue. I agree the health care stuff in Planned Parenthood is great. The abortion part is the problem. ... You can't have federal dollars going to something like abortion.

(Adler argued that federal law bars using federal money for abortions, but Runyan said there will be overlap when the same facility offers health services and abortion under one roof.)

-- On the Ryan budget plan for Medicare:

Runyan: It inserts competition. It leaves the current Medicare plan as is for those 55 and plus, people are missing that one. ... I know for a fact and the actuaries and the CBO will tell you if you let it go down the current road and do nothing to tweak it, it's not going to be there for anybody in our lifetime.

Adler: He wants to go back to the private system. The private system shut out people with pre-existing conditions. The world he wants to go back to didn't have preventive health care. He somehow wants to keep all the good things, the popular things, but not work on the whole system. ... Medicare is not an entitlement program. It is a program that people pay into and with the expectation that it'll be there when they reach that retirement age.

Posted by Jonathan Tamari @ 10:49 AM [Permalink](#) | 37 comments

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2012

Coming soon to TV: local House campaigns

In a few weeks, get ready for our local Congressional races to hit your TV.

Republicans have purchased \$1.8 million in ads for House races in the Philadelphia region from Oct. 19 to Nov. 6. Democrats, who have the tougher task of unseating incumbents who have largely been made safer by redistricting, have \$3.6 million of air time ready to roll out in a similar time frame.

(Ad purchases are public records).

Democrats see the GOP ad purchases as a sign that Republicans are concerned about defending their local seats, though the air time was first reserved months ago, so they don't necessarily reflect any recent changes in dynamics. Still, Politico reported earlier this

summer that [the Philly-area buy was one of the GOP Congressional campaign's largest](#). That probably partly reflects the cost of TV time in this area, but also the potential for several close contests.

Democrats are pushing for gains in the House by targeting four suburban Republicans in our area: Jon Runyan in South Jersey, and Mike Fitzpatrick, Patrick Meehan and Jim Gerlach in Pennsylvania districts just outside Philly. (We had an [overview of the contests](#) on Sunday.)

Republicans know some of these races could be tight, but have projected a confident posture. The executive director of the National Republican Congressional Campaign Committee, Guy Harrison, told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette in August that "[we don't have to play defense](#)" in the Philly-area, which would allow Republicans to spend resources elsewhere.

Despite that pronouncement, though, they had obviously long expected to put money into our region. Their Philly-area ad buy [was reported as early as June](#).

Even if you're confident of winning, you still have to do some basic due diligence on behalf of your candidates, and have air time reserved to respond in case of surprises or attacks that gain traction. And operatives on all sides agree that some of the races could be close, particularly Fitzpatrick's race against Kathy Boockvar.

Democrats think the ads are a sign their campaigns are working. They have a few recent factors in their favor: news that the GOP has scaled back its efforts in Pennsylvania and President Obama's lead in the state (in most polls anyway).

We'll see in the next few weeks if the races stay tight enough for a finishing kick on the air to make the difference.

Posted by Jonathan Tamari @ 10:18 AM [Permalink](#) | [1 comment](#)

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2012

Congress' unfinished business: a rundown

It was one of the stranger scenes I've seen so far in D.C.

Hoping for a bit of theater, a flock of House Democrats followed Minority Leader **Nancy Pelosi** down the famous steps of the Capitol and stood in the afternoon sunlight last week as she urged Republicans to keep the House in session and work on several major issues that remain unresolved.

Steny Hoyer, the number two Democrat in the House, tried to make a play-on-words using President Obama's "fired up and ready to go!" chant of 2008.

"Fired up – and ready stay!" he proclaimed.

Only the Democrats behind him weren't in on it, and answered his "fired up" call with the familiar "ready to go!" response, apparently forgetting that the point of the spectacle was that they wanted to stay and vote some more.

In the end, the GOP-led House cast its final votes and left town, followed soon after by the Democratically-controlled Senate, leaving several massive pieces of legislation either half-finished or entirely untouched, even though solutions are needed before the end of the year. Some of them are pressing enough that they may come up on the campaign trail between now and Nov. 6 and have a direct impact on our region.

Here's a quick summary of the work left for after Election Day, with a look at what impact the issues have in our region, keeping in mind that for Congress, passing bills is a lot like writing a high school paper: nothing gets done until the last minute.

-- **The Fiscal Cliff:** This is the big one, the **number one issue facing lawmakers** and whoever wins the presidential race, and something that will have to be the top priority between Election Day and year's end. An array of tax cuts are set to expire and sweeping, automatic budget cuts are set hit – for a total of around \$500 billion in tax hikes and spending cuts all at once. The one-two punch would almost [surely send the nation back into a recession](#), according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, would raise taxes on many, many Americans and slash defense spending and social programs. As I wrote this weekend, the prospect of this combination, and the fact that no one has come up with an answer to it, has raised ire and concern from all corners, including Philly **Mayor Nutter**. Ex-defense secretary **Robert Gates** compared the whole situation to a famous scene in *Blazing Saddles* ([check out the story](#)).

Local Impact: Defense contractors in the area, and there are many around the bases in South Jersey, (giants like Lockheed-Martin as well as smaller firms) fear the military cuts and could have to slash jobs if they come to pass. Social services throughout the region could also be hit, with Nutter warning of less money for federal programs such as Head Start and cleaning lead from homes. Businesses, he said, are wary to invest because of the threat of a financial meltdown due to Congressional inaction.

No one wants to see the defense and domestic cuts come to pass, so expect a deal there – most likely a punt that delays the cuts into next year sometime, when Congress pinky-swears that they'll really, really address the issue.

The outcome on taxes is more hazy because so much depends on the political dynamics of who wins the presidency and control of the Senate and House. Romney has run on a message of holding down taxes, so if he wins expect the GOP-controlled House to hold out for his inauguration and make lower taxes one of the first orders of business in a Romney presidency.

If Obama wins, the president will have all the leverage and tax increases on higher incomes look likely. The Bush tax cuts expire at the end of the year, so even if the GOP-controlled House fights him to a temporary stalemate, taxes will still rise on everyone. Then Obama can push for targeted cuts and the GOP will be left to either

support his plan or be seen as the roadblock causing taxes to go up on the middle class. Obama has called for raising taxes income over \$250,000, though some Democrats, particularly from big cities, would like to see a higher threshold.

-- **The Farm Bill:** The bill that **provides subsidies to many farmers and pays for food stamps** technically expires at the end of September, though there is no practical impact until Jan. 1. Farmers and nutrition groups are clamoring for a renewal, and the Senate has passed a five-year plan. But there has been trouble in the House. Republicans from agrarian areas want to see a similar bill approved. GOP deficit hawks want deeper cuts. The Senate insists that a five-year plan is best, in order to give farmers assurances, though the House has talked about a one-year stopgap.

Local impact: The food stamp program is important to local low-income areas. Farmers in South Jersey, growing fruit like blueberries, don't benefit much from the biggest subsidies – for crops such as dairy, wheat and corn, and last I checked there wasn't a ton of farmland in Philly. Some of the federal aid, though, and particularly the dairy subsidies, are critical for other parts of Pennsylvania. **Sen. Bob Casey**, a Pennsylvania Democrat, noted that dairy is Pennsylvania's largest agricultural sector when [he voted for the bill](#).

-- **Post Office reform:** For a combination of reasons – from heavy pension bills to the public's increasing reliance on electronic communication – the **Post Office is losing a ton of money, missing payments on its obligations and is set to run out of cash** around the middle of next year. The USPS wants to close some facilities and cut back on Saturday service, but they need approvals from Congress. Those are ideas many support in general, but no one wants to see their local post office shut down. This issue won't appear in any campaign ads, but it's sure to be one people care about – there aren't many arms of government more visible to the average person than their post office.

Local impact: Just about everyone uses the post office. **Sen. Tom Carper**, a Delaware Democrat, is heavily involved in the issue.

-- **The SGR:** This is one of the acronyms that everyone here throws around like it's a word you learn in elementary school. Cat. Dog. Desk. Chair. SGR.

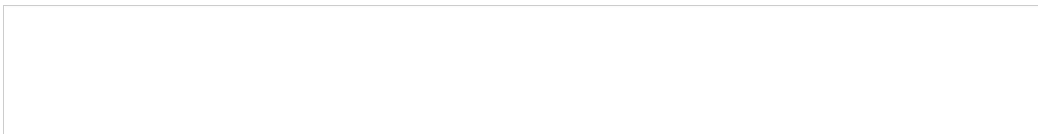
Basically it works like this: as part of 1997's Balanced Budget Act, one supposed savings was cutting Medicare payments to doctors if spending exceeded certain targets (the Sustainable Growth Rate). Of course, once the cuts were actually about to hit, Congress balked upon the realization that they might have to actually make someone angry as they tried to save money. Lawmakers averted the reductions, keeping payments to doctors basically on their historic trajectory.

Every year the cuts are supposed to hit, and every year Congress and doctors dodge the bullet – 14 times. The cost of the fix gets higher and higher each time. Once again, doctors are clamoring for a reprieve and Congress seems likely to provide it, worrying that the **cuts would force some doctors to stop accepting Medicare patients** and hurt the program.

Local Impact: Philly and MontCo **Congresswoman Allyson Schwartz**, a former health care executive with close ties to the medical community, has proposed a permanent SGR repeal to stop the annual fight over the cuts. Expect the local Dem to make a push for her plan, especially if there is a grand bargain to be struck on fiscal issues, but with so many other big decisions left to be made, it might be too heavy of a lift to add this bill onto the pile of work waiting once Congress' recess ends.

Posted by Jonathan Tamari @ 5:23 PM [Permalink](#) | [Post a comment](#)

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today's PHILLY.COM POLL

Do you see North Broad Street as the city's next hip neighborhood?

- Yes, converting the Divine Lorraine Hotel into apartments will be key to other development
- No, area's reputation still works against it
- Yes, west side of Broad Street already home to hundreds, and ritzy restaurants
- No, nearby Loft District has a leg up, plus Reading viaduct as a potential park

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