



N.J. Gov turns to 'feisty Jewish grandmother'

By [Felice Maranz](#) · August 3, 2009

It's been an interesting month for Jews in New Jersey.

While everyone's eyes were on arrested mayors, kidney-dealing rabbis and cash-stuffed cereal boxes, the state reached a political milestone: Governor Jon Corzine's pick of Loretta Weinberg, a self-described "feisty Jewish grandmother," for lieutenant governor marks the first time a Jewish woman is running for state-wide office in New Jersey.

Weinberg is poised to become one of the most visible people in one of the most important elections in the country this year.

There are only two 2009 races for governor, New Jersey and Virginia. Incumbent Democrat Corzine trails his Republican challenger, Chris Christie, in the polls and the Republicans smell blood, hoping a victory in one of the country's bluest states would signal defeat for President Obama.

Corzine, who took so long to announce his choice he was dubbed "the Hamlet of Drumthwacket" by a Republican blogger, had reportedly been considering several African-American candidates. If he had gone with "The Apprentice" star Randal Pinkett -- whose name was among those circulating as top candidates -- surely the pick would have been hailed as a significant "first."

Even before word broke about "Operation Bid Rig," Christie (a former U.S. attorney general for New Jersey) had introduced tough-on-crime Monmouth County Sheriff Kim Guadagno as his running mate.

Only two weekends ago, when New Jersey voters were still swamped with lurid scandal details, did Corzine announce Weinberg -- who is, incidentally, a prominent former Madoff investor -- as his pick for the newly-created position. (Newly-created after New Jersey found itself with temporary office-holders when Corzine was out of commission after a near-fatal car crash and Corzine predecessor Jim McGreevey resigned in the wake of keeping his Israeli lover on the state payroll.)

Democrats haven't run a woman for state-wide office since 1930, when, according to [Politickernj.com](#), "they picked 32-year-old Thelma Parkinson to run for a two-month unexpired term in the U.S. Senate in 1930. She lost to Republican Dwight Morrow (Charles Lindbergh's father-in-law) by a 59%-39% margin." Democrats haven't sent a woman to Congress from New Jersey since 1979.

The only woman ever to serve state-wide in New Jersey is former governor Christie Todd Whitman (Republican); none has served as a U.S. senator. There are currently no women from New Jersey serving in Congress. Only five women have ever represented New Jersey in Congress -- two Democrats and three Republicans, including Millicent Fenwick, who, with her pearls and pipe, remains one of New Jersey's few memorable female political characters.

In New Jersey, women tend to get elected when men get arrested. According to Rutgers University's Center for American Women and Politics, in 2004 New Jersey ranked 43rd out of 50 states in terms of women serving in state legislatures. After a spate of what the Center's director Debbie Walsh termed "legal problems" led to the departure of entrenched male officials, women were elected in record numbers. New Jersey now ranks 11th in the nation.

Weinberg is considered a "reformer" and, according to the *Star Ledger*, Corzine, a former head of Goldman Sachs, is looking to Weinberg to help distance him from corruption. If re-elected, Corzine said he plans to give Weinberg authority over the "family agenda," including health care and consumer protection.

"I am not a part of any insider political club," the paper quoted Weinberg saying, presumably not counting New Jersey's state legislature, where she's served since 1992. "The old boys' club didn't let me in, and God knows many times they tried to kick me out."

It remains to be seen whether Weinberg will inaugurate the lieutenant governor's club (of one) in November. While New Jersey's half-million Jews are largely Democrats who voted overwhelmingly for Obama, Corzine and his Jewish grandmother are going to need to appeal to both "the base" and to legions of highly taxed, underemployed voters tired of scandals.