



Forget throwing Buono under the bus, Democratic powerbrokers and party leaders have tossed their gubernatorial candidate out of the plane

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By Carl Golden , June 12, 2013 in Opinion



Close your eyes for a moment and imagine this:

Gov. Chris Christie is at the controls of an airplane that suddenly experiences difficulty remaining airborne. He immediately orders his crew to lighten the plane's load by tossing things out the door.

The crew -- consisting of Essex County Executive Joe DiVincenzo, Hudson County State Sen. Brian Stack, Senate President Steve Sweeney, and assorted Democratic municipal officials -- respond by seizing gubernatorial candidate Barbara Buono and flinging her into the clouds.

All is well and the crew can take credit for saving the plane and everybody in it. There is, of course, an expectation that their bravery will be rewarded by the pilot at some point.

Rather than close ranks and rally behind her in the name of party loyalty, many Democrats simply gave up, went through the motions, or worked against her.

Party-switching and crossover endorsements have become increasingly common, propelled by political or personal self-interest, but the high profiles of the individuals who've announced their support for Christie have made their decisions more unusual than normal.

DiVincenzo and Stack, for instance, are leaders of the two strongest Democratic counties in the state, ones always counted upon to deliver election-deciding pluralities for their party's candidates. That historic edge will be denied to Buono.

While he has not endorsed Christie, Sweeney's antipathy toward Buono's candidacy and his policy differences with her are well documented. Additionally, his political guru is South Jersey leader George Norcross, someone capable of raising significant sums of money in a relatively short period of time while producing high voter turnout.

Sweeney, the speculation has it, would not be as unenthusiastic about Buono as he is without Norcross's acquiescence or at his active direction.

Buono faced a difficult task from the outset. Her fund-raising has been less than robust and, as long as she appears unable to narrow the gap in the polls, convincing reliable party donors to be as generous as they have been in the past remains problematic.

Circumstances have worked against her as well, diverting public and political attention away from her while muting her message and denying her any significant issue-oriented traction.

Christie cavorting at the shore with President Obama -- the national leader of Buono's party -- reminded everybody of the governor's leadership in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, and the special election to fill the unexpired term of the late U. S. Sen. Frank Lautenberg has sucked much of the political oxygen out of the atmosphere.

Buono continues to struggle for the media attention necessary to achieve broader name recognition. Christie's use of incumbency has been extraordinarily powerful, and Buono has been essentially powerless to combat it.

She can look forward to the candidate debates in the hope that sharing the stage with Christie will provide her with the audience and exposure she needs, but Christie is both a skilled campaigner and debater and is not about to allow her to gain the upper hand in a face-to-face confrontation.

Being deserted by leaders of her party simply adds to a burden that already seems more than Buono can bear.

