

IN FOCUS



KELLY FINCHAM

OCCUPATION: Executive director of the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform (ILIR).

What is your Irish background?

"I'm from Drogheda in Co. Louth. My mother's family is from Drogheda and Skerries in Co Dublin and my father's family are from Cappoquin in Co. Waterford and Cornwall in England.

"I'm a former senior editor with the *Irish Independent* and one of my first features was about the Irish Immigration Reform Movement in Boston back in 1988! More recently, I headed up the Irish charity GOAL here in the U.S., so I'm familiar with lobbying and advocacy."

How did you get involved with the immigration issue?

"Well, we're all immigrants really aren't we? I was thrilled to be asked to join the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform because I'm really passionate about this issue. I think immigration has always been America's greatest strength. Diversity is what sets this country apart and the Irish have played a huge part in that. It's tough to think that we could be on the brink of ending that historic link between Ireland and the U.S.

"You look at the names that have helped make this country great and you think, it might never have happened if someone hadn't been able to emigrate here from Ireland. And it's not just about the politics and the economy. Where would the Hamills, Breslins and Higgins Clarks be without emigration? The Michael Flatleys, the McCourts? Where would all those stories be told?

"And on a personal note, some of the stories are just heartbreaking. One family I know of have three children here and the children are all U.S. citizens. The father's mother is dying of cancer at home. If he returns home to visit his mother, he runs the risk of being banned for 10 years. So, his mother has never seen the grandchildren and now there's no way that she ever can. It's just not right."

What are the issues facing the Irish in this year's Congressional discussions?

"This year is really do-or-die for the Irish. The one thing that everyone is agreed on is that immigration reform will take place this year. We need to ensure that the Irish voices get heard when the negotiations start."

What is the ethos of the ILIR?

"We're backing the McCain/Kennedy bill because it will give the undocumented a path to a green card. But it is vital that the Irish join the fight. We're holding a series of meetings to tell people what's happening, but also to give people a chance to show their support. We need a big turnout to show that this issue is affecting people now.

"We're holding our first big meeting in Rory Dolan's on Friday, January 27 at 7 p.m., and then we're going city to city across the country to get this message out. Anyone who wants to help has got to get out to their city's meeting. This is the year to legalize the Irish."

(To contact ILIR go to www.irishlobbyusa.org)

Interview by Georgina Brennan

King Seat Under Pressure

IS Republican Congressman Peter King vulnerable in his Long Island congressional district in November 2006?

According to *Newsday*, Democratic Party officials believe he is and have sought a strong candidate to run against him.

Their pick is Nassau Legislator David Mejias, who was just re-elected handsomely in a very Republican area. Mejias traveled to Washington last week to meet



Congressman Peter King.

with Democratic Party strategists to discuss a possible race.

King is the only remaining Republican representative on Long Island, a testament to his strong local roots and his ability to out-work any challenger.

However, it is King's close ties to President Bush and his outspoken support for the war in Iraq that is seemingly causing him problems in his moderate home district — at least that's what Democrats think.

A survey of King's district showed him vulnerable to a campaign that would link his strong support of President Bush and the war in Iraq, which are both unpopular in his district.

In a poll taken by the Democratic Party King easily won when the two names were put to the electorate, but lost ground rapidly when his support for the war and Bush was included.

Mejias, 35, says he is considering the race "very seriously" and that he will make a decision in the next four to six weeks. He is looking to raise between \$1 million and \$2 million for a credible challenge.

Democrats have moved the King seat up to their top list of targets. "If he (Mejias) decides to run for Congress it's clear he has a lot of fans in New York and Washington who would heavily support him," Jennifer Psaki, a spokeswoman for the Democratic Congressional Campaign, told *Newsday*.

Among those urging Mejias to run are Congressmen Gary Ackerman of Queens and Steve Israel of Suffolk, and the Suffolk County Democratic Chairman Richard Schaffer.

However, Mejias knows that King is among the toughest Republican opponents anywhere in the country. Great on the stump,

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excellent on television, King has many inbuilt advantages.

However, given the political landscape this year, anything is possible.

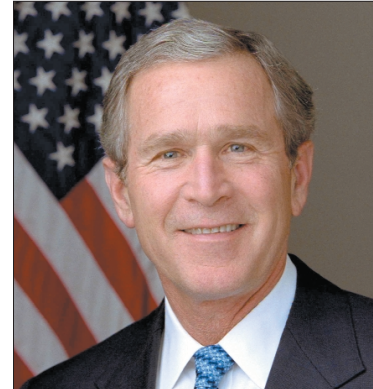
King Is Bush Buddy

IRONICALLY, of course, for many years King was the ultimate Republican maverick. He voted against the Clinton impeachment, supported Senator John McCain for president and was so outspoken on Northern Ireland that he was once deemed a security risk before a visit to his Long Island base by then President Ronald Reagan.

However, in recent times King has mended his fences with the Republican power elite and has been rewarded with the chairmanship of the Homeland Security Committee in the House, a very powerful job.

King has established very strong links with Bush himself and is often sent out to defend the president on national television, a forum which King excels at.

It may be that very, support,



President George W. Bush.

however, that lands him in difficulty in his race later this year. After years of easily fending off Democratic opponents, King may suddenly find himself in the toughest race of his seven terms.

The Perfect Storm Election?

KING has every right to be worried. Just 10 months before the 2006 elections the Republican Party may well be facing the perfect storm in New York State.

On the national stage the Jack Abramoff lobbying scandals may well lead to a "throw the bums out" election, which could endanger many incumbents.

Adding to King's problems are the fact that the Republicans are foundering at the top of the ticket in New York. If the election were held tomorrow Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, who is running for governor, and Senator Hillary Clinton would breeze home as the Republicans have no effective leader in the post-Pataki era.

If that were the case Democrats hope that many previously safe Republican seats could come into



Senator Hillary Clinton.

play in a Democratic landslide. Little wonder then that King and other Republican incumbents are nervously watching the polls as their races draw near.

Mention of Hillary Clinton brings up an interesting speculation. Would she campaign against King, given that he stood so loyally beside her husband on the impeachment business?

Politics is an unforgiving sport, but Clinton might find it very difficult to oppose a man who was one of a very few Republicans who stood by her husband.

Wal-Mart Big For Jail?

ONE of the more curious stories of the week involved Tom Coughlin, former number two executive at Wal-Mart, the retail giant, and a man well known in the Irish American community.

Coughlin now faces jail time after evidence was presented that, while he was second in command at Wal-Mart, he misused more than \$500,000 in company funds for his own benefit.

Coughlin will be sentenced next week and it has come as a major shock to those who knew the genial and affable businessman, who was a regular fixture at many Irish American business gatherings as well as a frequent keynote speaker.

What is most extraordinary is the tiny amount of money he allegedly stole, a fraction of the multi million-dollar paycheck he drew each year. Coughlin initially tried to prove that the money was used for anti-union projects, but that seems to have been comprehensively denied by the company itself.

According to *The New York Times*, Coughlin may serve up to two years in jail and pay restitution of more than \$350,000. A strange and sad tale.



Tom Coughlin.