

ARLINGTON, MEDFORD

## **Six start sprint to follow Marzilli Open House seat primary is Feb. 5**

By Eric Moskowitz, Globe Staff | January 3, 2008

With Representative J. James Marzilli Jr. newly elected to the state Senate, six candidates have jumped into the race to succeed him - including two members of the Arlington School Committee.

The school board members, both Democrats, are joined by two other Democrats, one Republican, and an unenrolled candidate in the race for the 23d Middlesex District seat, which Marzilli held for 17 years before winning a vacant Senate seat Dec. 11.

The House district covers most of Arlington as well as West Medford. All the candidates are from Arlington.

Those considering a run did not have much time to decide. To save election expenses for Arlington and Medford, the House called for the primary to be held the same day as the state presidential primary on Feb. 5.

That meant the candidates had just two weeks, in the middle of the holidays, to gather the necessary 150 signatures to appear on the ballot. Those signatures were due for verification with local officials last week, and the candidates had until yesterday to forward them to the secretary of the Commonwealth.

The six who submitted signatures are Democrats Sean Garballey, Suzanne Gordon, Andrew E. O'Brien, and Jeffrey D. Thielman; Republican John L. Worden III; and Robert V. Valeri, unenrolled.

Garballey and Thielman serve on Arlington's seven-member school board, a panel that has been sharply divided over the performance of the town's superintendent of schools and has weathered an e-mail scandal that led to the firing of a middle school principal and teacher last summer.

Another member, Susan Lovelace, the committee chairwoman, also submitted signatures but did not have enough to qualify for the ballot.

Lovelace and Thielman said their decisions to run are not related to school politics and rather reflect the interest in public service and local affairs that led them to seek School Committee seats. Garballey, who was traveling with family, could not be reached for this story.

Garballey, 22, has been a member of the school board since 2005, two years after he graduated from Arlington High School. Active in local and Democratic politics from an early age, he served in Town Meeting while still an Arlington student. He graduated from the University of Massachusetts at Lowell last year with a degree in political science.

Gordon, 62, is a freelance writer and healthcare activist who has written for the Globe, The New York Times, and other publications, and who has authored or edited 12 books. As a writer, she has focused on healthcare and nursing issues. Gordon has been active in the antiwar and environmental movements. As a candidate, she said she is especially interested in economic justice and public education.

An Arlington resident since about 1980, Gordon is seeking both the Democratic and the Working Families Party nominations and submitted signatures for each. She said she hopes to raise awareness of the Working Families Party and ballot-access issues. "I'm just very concerned about the state of democracy in America and in Massachusetts, and the issues of citizen participation and voter choice," she said.

O'Brien, 47, is an Arlington substitute teacher, a professional piano mover and rigger, and a part-time stay-at-home father to daughters who are 7 and 10. He earned a master's degree in education from the University of Massachusetts at Boston in 2005 and is a certified middle school social studies teacher. As a candidate, he said he is particularly interested in consumer affairs and healthcare, and wants to help lower-income residents navigate the state's health insurance laws and find affordable options.

O'Brien spent part of his childhood in Arlington and has lived there continuously since 1995. This is his first time as a candidate, though he said he has held signs and knocked on doors for others in the past.

"Since I finished going to school at nights, I've been thinking about getting into politics in one way or another," and the timing and circumstances seemed right with this race, he said.

Thielman, 44, was first elected to the School Committee in 2003, two years after he moved to Arlington. The former trial lawyer has worked for the past seven years as executive director of the Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation, a Newton organization that has established a network of Jesuit high schools in inner-city neighborhoods across the country. Thielman previously spent three years in Chicago establishing the first of those schools, and he also spent three years as a Jesuit volunteer in Peru. He is a graduate of Boston College and BC Law School.

Thielman said he wants to help the Legislature refine the new healthcare laws to make care more affordable and accessible, resolve the state budget deficit, and provide more money to cities and towns. In 2005 as School Committee chairman, Thielman advocated for passage of a successful \$6 million tax increase. If elected, he said he would serve the duration of his School Committee term, which expires in 2009.

Worden, the Republican, faces no primary competition, making him the presumed nominee. Democrats outnumber Republicans better than 5 to 1 in Arlington and Medford, so Worden is hoping voters will look past his registration and consider his record as a member of Town Meeting since 1970 and as Arlington's moderator from 1989 until this year, when he stepped down.

"I think the voters of Arlington and Medford are sophisticated enough to realize that there's more to a candidacy than particular party affiliation," said Worden, 69, a lawyer who has lived in Arlington for more than 40 years. He said his knowledge, background, and experience leading the town's legislative body make him well-suited for the House.

As an unenrolled candidate, Valeri will go straight to the March 4 general election ballot without a primary. The 55-year-old Arlington native owns a commercial printing business, RV Print Solutions. He has been a registered Democrat and Republican in the past but said he has never been completely satisfied with either party.

Valeri, a first-time candidate, said he is running to "give real representation to the average person."