

COVER STORY

IN depth profiles ON THE WHO'S WHO

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Photo courtesy of the office of Congressman Pallone

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Official Heir to the Lautenberg Legacy!

Frank Pallone © By Aliza Davidovit

Congressman Frank Pallone's official bio says he started in public service in 1982, serving in Congress since 1988, but the truth is he started in politics when he was in the fourth grade and ran for public council. Serving people, helping people and making this world a better place is what he has always been about. "I got into politics because I was raised on the belief that we must help each other," he told JLBC in an exclusive interview. "My parents taught me how important it is to make a difference when you can and I teach my children the same thing. As an elected official, I learned that you have the power to create a meaningful and practical way of improving people lives."

He also made a point of expressing appreciation for the Jewish community. "The Jewish community has greatly contributed to our state and to the country in so many ways; there are too many to list, but those achievements have benefited everyone."

In Congress, where Pallone tries reaching across the aisle to make things happen, not everything is so cut and dried. That's where there are those who say certain things help America, while others say those very same things will hurt her. Some of those others include Tea Party Republicans, a group Pallone attacked in the debate last week, for trying, 40 times over, to repeal his proudest achievement, The Affordable Care Act.

The Tea Party calls it Obamacare and predict it will end life in America as we know it—and they are threatening to shut down the government altogether to make it go away—which Pallone believes is morally reprehensible—because, as he said during the debate last week, it means among other things, that combat soldiers will not get paid.

Pallone says not to believe Tea Party types, because the Affordable Care Act is one of the best pieces of legislation Congress ever passed, and costs are already beginning to drop. “Healthcare is a major achievement,” he said, “and don’t let anyone tell you otherwise. There were 40 million who had no healthcare and now they can get it.”

As is often mentioned, the late Senator Frank Lautenberg’s family supports Pallone for the office, because they see him as the logical heir to the Lautenberg legacy. The campaign has taken him to every corner of the state, giving him a broad view of those he would represent if elected. He says the experience is invaluable. “I love going to the grass roots and directly meeting New Jerseyans from every walk of life. It’s very important for me to listen to what they have to say.”

Although Israel didn’t come up very much in the debate, I asked the Congressman about his views on Israel. He has been a visitor, and found the country enchanting. His favorite Israeli nosh is pita and hummus, and his favorite city is Jerusalem.

“That’s because it is so steeped in history,” he told JLBC. “I regard it as a holy city, an ancient city and seeing what it is like in our times is fascinating. The Jewish person I most admire is Golda Meir. I read about how she grew up and became prime minister and how she dealt with war and what was going at the time. What she managed to accomplish is deserving of the greatest respect, and I give her her due.”

The Congressman has a strong emotional connection to the Holy Land as well. “I have a romantic vision of Israel. It is the promised land of the Jewish people and the notion of Zionism—that Jews have the right to return and live in Israel, is very much part of what I believe.

“However, while the Jewish people have a legitimate claim to Israel based on the Bible, that doesn’t mean that there shouldn’t be a Palestinian State as well. I support Kerry’s efforts to have peace negotiations that could lead to a Palestinian State. But the outcome is something that needs to be negotiated by the two parties. The U.S. should help bring about the negotiations and help them along. But it is not the

U.S.’s place to set preconditions or force Israel into a position or push Israeli policy. Peace has to be negotiated between the two parties.”

He also does not believe that the Palestinian Authority can force the UN to recognize them as Palestine. “Unilateral recognition at the UN is wrong and this has to be negotiated between the two parties, as well.”

“I also believe the U.S. must continue to support a strong Israel and give Israel the best technology and aid so they can defend themselves.”

In mentioning Jerusalem, he added, “I also want to say that I support Jerusalem remaining the undivided capital of Israel and moving the embassy to Jerusalem.” He also wrote to President Obama asking him to “lay off Israel regarding building in Jerusalem.” However, Pallone is still not sure about whether or not Jonathan Pollard should be released.

On the issue of Iran, he says, “Preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons is a top priority. It would unleash a nuclear build up throughout the Middle East. I won’t rule out war with Iran, but I much prefer sanctions and diplomatic means—and we just voted to increase sanctions and once again attempt a diplomatic course.”

When asked about his religious beliefs and how they influence him, Pallone said, “I believe in God but am not afraid of Him. I believe He is a loving spirit who will give you strength to persevere. I don’t think of God as a vengeful spirit. I don’t believe in predestination or that God has a predetermined task for us. However, if you pray and ask for knowledge and ability He will help. I pray to be a good legislator and father.”

Is the Congressman afraid of anyone? “I’m not really afraid of any one person, but I am a big environmentalist and worry about the future of Earth, nuclear war and global warming. If we don’t deal with it, it can be catastrophic and will destroy life as we know it. I’m afraid of that!”

Although his kids don’t think he’s cool because he listens to Motown on his iPod, he wants his children to be proud of him, and he said, “If I’d ever write my autobiography the title would be: *He Made a Difference*. I don’t mean it in a show-offy way, but in a meaningful way.”

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