

**DeFranco takes on Tierney for Congress by Sarah Thomas
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Last November was a nail-biting Congressional race for sixth district Democrats - incumbent Congressman John Tierney was in trouble, embattled by scandal regarding his family's criminal offshore gambling ring.

National Republican political action committees, smelling blood in the water, poured unprecedented resources into the coffers of challenger Alan Tisei. The result was one of the nastiest campaigns in recent memory, with Tierney surprising even his supporters by eking out a win by a single point.

In the following months, Tierney's troubles have not lessened. Other Democrats, seeing his vulnerability, have decided to mount primary challenges, fearing that the lower voter turnout of an election year with no presidential race would spell an end to the Democrat hold on the seat. The latest candidate to throw her hat in the ring is a familiar face to Salem voters - local lawyer Marisa DeFranco, best known for her unsuccessful primary campaign for Senate against Elizabeth Warren.

"Last year, what were previously reliable Democrat towns didn't vote Democrat," said DeFranco in an exclusive interview with the Gazette. "The voters deserve a new choice."

Fiery beginnings

DeFranco, 42, burst onto the political stage last year in one of the nation's most high-profile Senate races. Always a dark horse behind the heavily favored Warren, DeFranco nonetheless made an impact with her plainspoken style and old-fashioned progressive values.

"If there's one thing I think I showed voters in that race, it's that I'm a person who says what they mean and means what they say," DeFranco said. "I'm an FDR-style Democrat who believes we need to make direct investments in creating jobs."

DeFranco cultivated her direct approach during years of taking the federal government on as an immigration attorney.

"I represented businesses with international workers, asylum seekers, people bringing their families to America. They were people who came here seeking the American dream, and although there are lots of challenges for many of them, their stories are inspiring and wonderful," DeFranco said. "But in my years of fighting the federal government, I came to realize that lawmakers in Washington pass legislation without any real idea of how it plays out in the real world."

The Senate campaign was her first foray into state politics, and she scored some notable successes - she was regularly an audience favorite at debates, and received the endorsement of Essex County register of deeds John O'Brien. She also exceeded the number of signatures required to make the ballot by over 4,000 votes.

"What I learned during that surreal campaign was that if I got out there, if I put in the effort to make the connections with voters and build that grassroots network, then the people would respond," said DeFranco. "People said I would never make the ballot, and I said, watch me."

Nonetheless, her dream came to an end on the floor of the state Democrat Convention, where she failed to receive the votes of 15 percent of the delegates needed for a primary race. The delegates were heavily campaigned by Gov. Deval Patrick to favor Warren, so she could focus her energy on taking the Senate seat away from Republican Scott Brown.

"I'd be lying if I said it wasn't disappointing; we had made thousands of phone calls, we had the support of many delegates, and at the end it all evaporated. But I'm a big girl, and I still had my law practice to focus on, so I moved forward," DeFranco said. "But I never for a moment thought it was the end of my career in politics."

An Outside Voice

Her next opportunity came as the sharks have begun to circle Tierney. Alongside admitting his branding issues, DeFranco also believes she is the superior candidate on merits. "He's been in Congress for seven terms, and I've been on the ground working with individual families and seeing how the laws really shake out when you get to the bottom level," DeFranco said. "I'm running for Congress because I can make people's lives better."

Along with a more active government role in job creation, one of DeFranco's signature issues is, unsurprisingly, immigration law. She is no fan of the legislation currently under consideration by the House of Representatives.

"I'm going to catch flak for this, but the current law is weighted far too much toward the interests and needs of big businesses, and away from the needs of small businesses and individuals," DeFranco said. "Some people would say that it's enough to do something, and not to let the best become the enemy of the good. Well, I say don't let the mediocre become the enemy of the possible."

So far, her campaign is still in its infancy; her website, marisadefranco.com, only went live this week.

"I've got a few speaking engagements lined up for September, which will be posted on the website, and we're actively raising money," DeFranco said. "I want people to know that I'm still committed to clean money and will not be accepting donations from SuperPACs. In my mind they're no way to win an election."

DeFranco said that she hopes voters can connect to her passion and honesty.

"I think there's a hunger for someone to put their name on the ballot who stays true to their values, and who can work with people who they might not always agree with," DeFranco said. "When you're fighting for people's rights, you don't trade your principles away."

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