

DeFranco, challenging Tierney, faults health-care law, calls for immigration reform

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LOWELL -- A recent poll of likely Democratic primary voters in the 6th Congressional District asked voters about just two of the Democrats planning to run in the party's primary.

One candidate left out of the poll released by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, immigration lawyer Marisa DeFranco, said she believes party leaders are afraid to find out about the strength of her campaign.

"Perhaps they are afraid that my numbers might be better than they are hoping they are, and (people) might not support the incumbent and they might support my independent nature and willingness to buck the party," DeFranco told The Sun's editorial board.

DeFranco also said she found it odd she was left out of the poll, when as of Thursday, she was the only candidate who has secured the necessary signatures to be on the September primary ballot.

DeFranco is challenging the incumbent, U.S. Rep. John Tierney, and fellow challenger Seth Moulton, a Marine veteran, in the Democratic primary. The district includes Bedford, Billerica, Burlington, Tewksbury and Wilmington.

One major area where DeFranco breaks with her party and the incumbent is on the federal health-care reform law, known as the Affordable Care Act.

DeFranco, of Middleton, said she would have voted against the legislation, which was passed by congressional Democrats.

"The Affordable Care Act is a sellout to the insurance companies," said DeFranco. "It is not going to do anything close to providing affordable care for 90 percent of American people."

Instead, DeFranco said she supports a so-called "public option," in which Americans would have the choice to purchase government insurance or remain in the private market.

She said doctors and other health-care officials would not become government employees, but government insurance would be available to Americans of all ages.

Immigration reform is another area where DeFranco said her proposal on the topic would not necessarily satisfy party leaders, but she believes she has a plan that would help the more than 10 million undocumented immigrants in the country.

DeFranco, who unsuccessfully tried to get on the Democrat ballot in the state's 2012 Senate race, has proposed a "path to legalization" rather than a path to citizenship.

The plan would require the undocumented immigrants to pay back taxes and a fine, while waiting around 15 years to receive a green card. Those participating would get to the back of the line for those seeking green cards.

The incentive for participation in the program is it would allow people who came to the U.S. illegally to remain in the country while going through the process to receive a green card.

"We as the American people are a forgiving people and recognize what you have given to the country as citizens, but a green card is where it stops," DeFranco said.

If her plan is approved, DeFranco said she thinks 80 percent of undocumented immigrants in the country would participate. Those undocumented immigrants who don't want to wait for a green card could return to their home countries and seek to legally immigrate to the U.S. and later seek citizenship, she said.

If elected, DeFranco said closing corporate loopholes would be another one of her top priorities.

DeFranco also said she would push to end all government subsidies of corporations.

"It is anti-American and anti-capitalist to use the taxpayers' dollars to subsidize the big corporations to put all of the small businesses out of business on main street," said DeFranco, who describes herself as a small-business person.

DeFranco said more needs to be done to help small businesses and she was critical of Tierney's efforts on the economy and job front.

"I've said very clearly that if you have been there 17 years and employment is mediocre, we are losing jobs on main street, and the economy was destroyed by the so-called masters of the universe on your watch, you are not delivering for the district," DeFranco said.

Tierney's campaign manager said the congressman was not available for comment on Friday.

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee poll of 402 likely primary voters had Tierney receiving 64 percent of the vote compared to 17 percent for Moulton, with 20 percent undecided.

Marc Brumer, a spokesman for the committee, said "the poll speaks for itself," when asked why DeFranco was not included.

The committee is supporting Tierney, whom Brumer says has been "a tireless fighter for Massachusetts families."

An Emerson College poll found that among Democrats, 64 percent would vote for Tierney, with 10 percent voting for DeFranco, 10 percent for Moulton and less than 2 percent for John Devine. In terms of fundraising, DeFranco, who is not taking any political-action committee funds, lags behind. DeFranco did say she had her best quarter in the first quarter of 2014, bringing in \$22,000.

Moulton raised \$469,000 in the first quarter, while Tierney took in \$348,000.

Republican Richard Tisei, who is running again after losing a close race to Tierney last time, raised \$301,000 last quarter.

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