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A Decision by Schumer Trickles Down to Local Races

By JONATHAN P. HICKS

When Senator Charles E. Schumer announced last week that he was ruling out running for governor of New York in 2006, he reshaped the state's political terrain and offered a significant boost to the gubernatorial aspirations of Attorney General Eliot Spitzer.

But the political ramifications did not end there. In fact, the decision trickled down to neighborhoods in Queens and Westchester County, where the local assemblymen are hoping to replace Mr. Spitzer as attorney general. Community leaders saw the political scene clarified, and in Astoria, both the owner of a flower shop and the operator of a funeral home were suddenly talking more urgently about dipping into politics, and running for a rare open Assembly seat.

"To paraphrase Robert Kennedy, every time an elected official runs for higher office, he or she sends out a tiny ripple of ambition throughout the political establishment," said Evan Stavisky, a political consultant and lobbyist who works with many local candidates.

"And that gives hope and opportunity for other candidates to move up or to get into office," Mr. Stavisky said. "That's what we're seeing now. The choices made by Chuck Schumer and Eliot Spitzer have an impact on other candidates, which provides opportunities and an endless stream of discussion as candidates jockey for those seats."

The attorney general's job is attracting not only state assemblymen. Given how Mr. Spitzer turned the position into a powerful platform in national politics, more than a half-dozen candidates have emerged to succeed him, including such high-profile politicians as Andrew M. Cuomo, the former gubernatorial candidate and secretary of housing and urban development under President Bill Clinton, and Mark Green, the former New York City public advocate, who narrowly lost to Michael R. Bloomberg in the 2001 mayoral race. Charlie King, an unsuccessful candidate for lieutenant governor two years ago, also wants the job.

But it is the potential candidacies of two members of the Assembly, Michael N. Gianaris of Queens and Richard L. Brodsky of Westchester, that have some would-be politicians coming forward in those areas, intrigued by the rare opportunity to capture open legislative seats.

Jason Gooljar, 25, a Web site designer, has already announced his intention to run for Mr. Brodsky's seat in 2006, spurred in part by the dominoes that fell with Senator Schumer's announcement. "I had been thinking about running for nearly a month, ever since the election," said Mr. Gooljar, who worked on Assemblyman Jeffrey Klein's successful State Senate campaign.

"I think Mr. Schumer's decision clears the way for Eliot Spitzer. And Spitzer clears the way for Richard Brodsky. And that helped me to make my decision," Mr. Gooljar said. "I'm a young man just starting out in politics, so I have to get out there early."

Mr. Gooljar is one of several candidates already in one stage or another of planning their campaigns to succeed Mr. Brodsky, a Democrat who was first elected to the Assembly in 1982.

"If Richard runs for attorney general, I am very definitely going to be running for that Assembly seat," said Thomas J. Abinanti, a member of the Westchester County Board of Legislators.

"Richard has done an excellent job and would make an excellent attorney general," Mr. Abinanti said. "And I am certainly interested in succeeding him if he moves on. We have similar views on most issues, and we have worked very well together over the years. I would love to do it and think it would be a great challenge for me."

In Astoria, Queens, a number of politically minded residents are now openly talking of running for the Assembly seat held by Mr. Gianaris, a Democrat who has represented that area since 2001 and is planning to run for attorney general in 2006.

For some time, Mr. Gianaris made it clear that he would not run if Mr. Spitzer decided to run for re-election.

But now, the near certainty of a Gianaris campaign for attorney general has started to produce stirrings on the street in Astoria. "I think it has the makings of a very competitive race," said City Councilman Peter F. Vallone Jr., who represents Astoria and said he has no plans to run for anything beyond re-election to the Council next year.

"I can't point to one person who would have a lock on that Assembly seat," Mr. Vallone said. "There are so many possibilities that I couldn't begin to handicap the field."

One potential candidate for that seat is Gus Prentzas, who owns a flower shop in Astoria, and is also a Democratic state committeeman. "I'm keeping my options open," he said. "Running for that seat is certainly a possibility, and I'm trying to raise money slowly."

Another potential candidate is Gus Antonopoulos, the operator of a funeral home in Astoria who has been involved with several civic associations in the area. "I am a big supporter of Michael Gianaris and I am always behind him," Mr. Antonopoulos said. "But if his Assembly seat becomes open, it is certainly something I would certainly look at favorably. It's something that I have been thinking about a lot."

The reality of New York politics is that legislative seats rarely come up for grabs. So with the attorney general's post drawing the interest of at least two incumbent lawmakers, local politicians see a rare opportunity.

"The fact of the matter is that we simply haven't had a vacancy in such a long time here," said Paul J. Feiner, the town supervisor of Greenburgh, in Mr. Brodsky's district. (Mr. Feiner said he would not run for the Assembly seat.)

"We have had the same people representing us in Albany for many, many years," Mr. Feiner said. "And, if any one of them becomes available, I'm sure there will be a lot of names that will undoubtedly come up."