

Assembly Speaker Prieto Faces Leadership Challenge

By: Danielle Alexander, MBI/GluckShaw

Within days of each other, current Assembly Speaker Vincent Prieto and current Assemblyman Craig Coughlin, both announced they have the support of the Assembly Democrats to become Speaker in January, 2018, when the new legislative session begins.

Prieto, the Hudson County Democratic Chairman, sought support from members on Monday during an Assembly session. The current Speaker said there is no point in listing members who support him until after the election in November, when he will know which incumbents are returning and which new Democrats are entering office. Assemblyman Coughlin, however, yesterday did announce his list of supporters -- which includes incumbents, as well as candidates currently running for Assembly seats.

South Jersey Democrats are expected to go with Coughlin, who has also poached at least some support in North Jersey. Prieto feuded with South Jersey Democrats in proposing his own plan to delay the state takeover of Atlantic City, as an alternative to the plan that was backed by Sweeney and Democratic South Jersey power broker George Norcross. Prieto failed to get his plan through the lower house, demonstrating his fractured support. At one point, Norcross allegedly discussed replacing Prieto with the Bergen County Democratic Chairman, according to a report in the Record.

Coughlin's behind the scenes campaign for the speakership began as Democratic gubernatorial front-runner Phil Murphy sewed up party organization support for Governor, forcing Sweeney and Jersey City Mayor Steve Fulop to drop their own not-yet-formal campaigns for Governor. In the run up, Democrats in Coughlin's native Middlesex County had sought to exert greater influence on the delegation.

Internal contests for leadership roles are common in Trenton, and they're generally settled well before actual votes are cast for the posts. Prieto took power in 2014 after he and his allies cut a deal with Norcross and other power brokers, ousting then-Speaker Sheila Oliver, who four years earlier rose to the speakership as part of a different deal.

Assembly Republicans, who have 28 members, can have a say in who becomes Speaker too, opening up the remote possibility of Prieto cutting a power-sharing deal with the minority party. But so far there have been no indications that will happen.

Below is a full list of Coughlin's supporters. Those with an asterisk next to their name are candidates, not incumbents.

Bob Andrzejczak
Arthur Barclay
Daniel Benson
John Burzichelli
Herb Conaway, Jr.
Craig Coughlin
Joseph Danielsen
Wayne DeAngelo
Joann Downey
Joseph Egan
Jerry Green
Louis Greenwald
Eric Houghtaling
Gordon Johnson
Patricia Egan Jones
Robert Karabinchak
James Kennedy
Pamela Lampitt
R. Bruce Land
*Yvonne Lopez
Vincent Mazzeo
Paul Moriarty
Gabriela Mosquera
*Carol Murphy
Nancy Pinkin
Annette Quijano
Adam Taliaferro
Andrew Zwicker