

# The Record

## **Rothman Glad-Hands Voters; Thanks Them for Their Help in Sending Him to Congress**

November 7, 1996; THURSDAY; ALL EDITIONS

**SECTION:** NEWS; Pg. A23

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Steve Rothman was back on the job Wednesday morning, shaking hands in Hackensack at the Anderson Street train station with Hoboken-bound commuters waiting for the 8:03.

He wore the same battered beige raincoat with an ink mark on the right leg, and the same uniform of blue suit, blue shirt, and red tie that carried him through the bruising campaign for the 9th District congressional seat.

Only this time, he was no longer looking for votes.

"Good morning," Rothman said to the first commuter he could find, a woman in a brown raincoat. "I just got elected to Congress last night."

In the wake of his convincing win over Republican Kathleen Donovan on Tuesday, Rothman, a Democrat and former mayor of Englewood, began preparing for Washington. On three hours of sleep, he went out to meet his public.

Rothman said he would spend the next few days resting with his family and then head to the capital for a 12-day freshman orientation course.

Unofficial final figures showed that Rothman pulled in 102,810 votes, about 54 percent, compared with 81,705 for Donovan, about 43 percent.

Rothman said the early morning train stop was just a way of expressing his gratitude to voters. It impressed one commuter, Michael Faulkner, 50, of Teaneck, who acknowledged he voted for Donovan.

"It's encouraging. Maybe he'll change my mind," Faulkner said.

Officials from both camps said the final outcome was not as close as they had expected and was decided largely by factors that had little do with the combative campaign waged by the two candidates.

Donovan's campaign manager, Kaylah Bergeron, said she was not surprised at the results once she saw the strength of support in New Jersey for President Clinton. "It was a mandate against Newt Gingrich," she said.

Rothman's campaign manager, Paul Swibinski, acknowledged that having Clinton and Rep. Robert G. Torricelli on the ticket "was a tremendous advantage."

Rothman and Donovan campaigned heavily, facing each other in eight debates and unleashing a stream of television and radio commercials.

Rothman appeared to have the edge because Democrats outnumber Republicans 2-1 among registered voters in the district. Half the voters are registered independents.

Donovan appeared to gain strength when she received key endorsements from the New Jersey Education Association and the Sierra Club. She also received the backing of virtually all the major newspapers that circulate in North Jersey.

Rothman said he believed the results showed that the public had bought his message, that as Englewood mayor from 1983-88, he helped revive the city.

"I believe the voters knew of our success in Englewood in turning that community around and felt confident that, if they gave me the opportunity ... I would follow a similarly fiscally conservative course for the district."

Swibinski said Donovan's last-minute pitch to white ethnics and her effort to raise the issue of forced school busing may have turned people against her. Donovan ran newspaper advertisements emphasizing her ethnic heritage, one said "Irish-Italian-German... She's one of us."

She also unleashed a barrage of TV and radio commercials and calls to voters around the county asserting that Rothman supported forced regionalization and she did not. Though the ads did not mention specifics, in interviews Donovan said they were meant to refer to Rothman's alleged support for regionalization as a solution to racial segregation at Englewood's Dwight Morrow High School.

"It certainly did not succeed, and it was a very lowbrow tactic," Swibinski said.

Bergeron said Dwight Morrow was a legitimate issue because Rothman touted his success as mayor but never mentioned the school and its problems.

"We thought it was about education and it was a fair issue," she said.

Donovan, reflecting on the campaign, said she would have changed nothing.

"I enjoyed the race. I enjoyed talking to all of the people. The only part is that I didn't win, that's the only part I didn't like."