

GOP incumbent, challengers push for change in 3rd District

Published: Sunday, October 30, 2011, 4:00 AM



By **Carly Q. Romalino**/[Gloucester County Times](#)

There's a twist to the 2011 Third Legislative District election, as three Assembly incumbents are contending for two open seats, following the recent redistricting of district boundaries.



From left, Domenick DiCicco, Dr. Robert Villare and Michael Mulligan

But Republican Domenick DiCicco, currently serving as a Fourth District assemblyman, believes that the message of government accountability and independence from party alliances could turn Third District voters toward GOP representation in the Legislature.

DiCicco, of Franklin Township, is running for one of the two open Assembly seats along with West Deptford's Dr. Robert Villare. The pair are up against Democrat incumbents John Burzichelli and Celeste Riley. Senate hopeful Michael Mulligan, of Pilesgrove, is vying for the Senate seat currently held by Democratic state Senate President Stephen Sweeney, who is running for re-election.

"The redistricting changed the dynamics, very much in favor of the majority party," said DiCicco, who met with the Times editorial staff Thursday along with Villare and Mulligan. "Our message does appeal to the individual voters as well as the Republicans and even soft Democrats ... they see some reforms at the state level, and they realize that the only reason those reforms happened is because of the Republican governor. They see what they like and definitely want to see more of it. The current majority party is just not going to get it done. Let's face it, they haven't gotten it done."

Although Republicans in the Legislature have been accused of marching in lock step with Gov. Chris Christie, DiCicco said it's not because the GOP legislators are caving to the governor's demands.

"We are aligned philosophically," DiCicco explained. "The most startling thing we offer is independence. My two opponents are machine politicians ... they

don't represent the constituents of this district. They represent a hierarchy, and we don't. That is our major philosophical difference."

The GOP ticket believes they bring new ideas to the table, including Villare's plans to reform medical care, instead of reforming the mere costs of providing that care.

Villare supports a Volunteer Physicians Act that would allow doctors to volunteer their services for those who cannot pay or do not have medical insurance – including those who could be in the state's Medicaid program. In return, the doctors ask that the state cover malpractice insurance.

"We have convinced the Medical Society of New Jersey to endorse this," said Villare, a surgeon, who touts the plan as saving \$2.2 billion that the state would pay for outpatient services. "When you see the government wasting millions of dollars to give this care, which is the poorest care around, this could work."

Patients could pay what they could afford.

The plan could take the pressure off hospitals, which are required to treat the poor who cannot pay for care.

Villare has also proposed another plan that would allow the New Jersey Hospital Association to provide a basic insurance plan. The association would be partly subsidized by the state, but Villare said the measure "would take a lot of the burden off the whole sector of health care."

"Instead of hitting the individuals with a bill for \$20,000, they would get a bill to pay toward insurance cost for the care," he said. "I have not heard of those ideas coming out of the Legislature in the last 12 years."

In addition to health-related initiatives, the Republican trio is set to take on issues in education if they can garner the votes to take seats in the Legislature.

The Republican challengers believe the limits should be lifted on the length of use for public equipment, including school buses and fire trucks.

"If they are unsafe or they don't work, retire them. But monitor your assets," said Mulligan, pointing to a case where New Jersey school buses were retired, then sent to Texas and continued to be used. "We can't afford this any more."

Mulligan believes the Opportunities Scholarship Act – a voucher program that lets low-income students attend private schools – should be moved through the Legislature.

The program would be funded by groups and businesses that donate into a fund in return for tax credits.

“It saves kids and it’s going to give some satisfaction to the donors because they are not writing a check to an amorphous association,” said Mulligan. “It’s going to fund the achievers.”

DiCicco said the Opportunities Scholarship Act has been watered down, and currently leaves out parts of South Jersey. Plus, it will act like a bandage to fix failing school systems including Camden City.

DiCicco and Villare think the state should stop pouring money into failing school systems that are not serving students.

“The simplest solution is to give the parents the money and let them decide where they want their child to be educated, as an alternative to holding the Camden school system accountable,” DiCicco said. “My premise is, if it costs \$26,000 per student in Camden to educate them, give the parents a \$26,000 voucher to go to any school, public or private.”

Villare said members of the Assembly must “have the guts to pull the purse strings,” and “have the diligence and fortitude” to hold government accountable for violating the constitution, which states that funding for education should be equal for all children.

Education costs continue to be the main driver of property taxes in the state. The Republican candidates also see regionalization of school administration as an approach to cut out duplicate jobs and lower school costs.

“Mandate the regionalization of administration. It just makes good sense to have one superintendent with responsibility to provide resources to all the schools in a jurisdiction, and then someone with their feet on the ground in each school,” Mulligan said. “That’s an area we ought to focus on.”

High property taxes are forcing residents out of their homes and out of the state, according to DiCicco, who said the primary real estate transaction in his current district is short sales or foreclosures.

“As long as we continue to fund education with property taxes, we’ll never get it under control,” DiCicco said. “The best model I’ve seen is Michigan, where they switched to sales tax. I would love to explore the Michigan

solution. If we ever want to get property tax under control, we have to stop funding education exclusively through property tax.”

The Proud Residents of Paulsboro and West Deptford cheer for local favorite, Dr. Bob Villare, to win the election for State Assembly.

“He’s one of us and on our side.” Dr. Bob was born and raised in Paulsboro and lives in West Deptford. Vote Tuesday November 8th

Dr. Bob Villare & Domenic DiCicco.