

## Politics

### **Iraq Trumps Corruption for New Jersey Voters**

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**(CNSNews.com)** - New Jersey voters apparently were more concerned about Iraq than they were about corruption on Tuesday, when they sent Democrat incumbent Sen. Robert Menendez back to Washington.

The contest was characterized by Menendez's pledge to "stand up to George Bush" and by Republican Tom Kean, Jr.'s attempts to remind voters that his opponent was "under federal criminal investigation."

"The real issues of the state were overshadowed this year by the national concerns," said former New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman, a liberal Republican.

"Corruption and the situation surrounding Menendez is an issue," she told **Cybercast News Service**. "These are real issues and real concerns, but apparently they did not hit home with the voters."

Menendez, who won by an eight-point margin, reportedly is the target of a federal investigation into his financial dealings with a nonprofit agency.

Last June, after the Senate primaries, the key issues in New Jersey included illegal immigration, taxes and homeland security - especially at the Port of Newark, one of the nation's largest seaports.

New Jersey has a large population of illegal immigrants, and its citizens have the highest property taxes in the nation. Studies have shown that New Jersey receives 55 cents in return for every dollar it sends to Washington, the worst ratio in the nation.

"When I went door-to-door, people talked to me about taxes and illegal immigration," said Joe Sinagra, the Republican candidate who lost to Rep. Rush Holt in New Jersey's 12th Congressional District.

"They were the issues that seemed to matter most. I believe the media attention given to Iraq, and the way the media portrayed Iraq and President Bush, pushed these issues off the radar screen here in New Jersey."

Menendez, who is on record as one of the few Democrats to call for a complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq, painted Kean as a pro-war Bush clone.

Kean, however -- one of the first Republicans to call for Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's resignation -- questioned the Bush administration's Iraq policies during his campaign.

The corruption issue did not disappear entirely during the campaign. Some newspapers, even as they endorsed Menendez, noted the allegations.

The Record of Bergen County backed the Democrat despite saying that he "came with baggage," while the Star Ledger, New Jersey's largest newspaper, endorsed Menendez while saying it was "fully aware" of ethical questions dogging him.

"It certainly does not help the image of New Jersey," said Whitman of the outcome.

New Jersey's State Legislature is up for election next year.

"I think we've learned we have a lot of work to do to combat the anti-Republican and anti-incumbent feelings here in New Jersey," said Bill Spadea, a conservative and former N.J. Congressional candidate.

"However, the effective job that Republicans did nationwide in 1994 could be the blueprint here in 2007 on the statewide level," he said. "We have to drive home the issues better despite how the media portrays these issues."

Iraq and anti-Bush sentiment also helped Democrats sweep major contests in New York.

Former New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer won the race for governor by a landslide, and former HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo easily became the new state attorney general.

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton garnered 67 percent of the vote on Tuesday - setting her up for a possible presidential run in 2008.

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