

**By BRIAN ACKLEY**  
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One of the fun things about observing the local political scene is constantly reading between the lines.

Rarely is it ever about what is actually said. Sometimes, you need the Hubble telescope to figure out what the hidden message might be. Sometimes, it's actually as obvious as a billboard on the Skyway.

So it goes on the Republican carousel which is currently taking Joel Giambra, Nancy Naples and the rest of the GOP on a less than merry go-round. It's no wonder Democrats are lining up at the carnival's ticket booth to make sure the ride doesn't shut down until November.

Bob Davis, for example, the county's GOP head honcho, had to feign surprise and disappointment recently when Giambra said Naples wasn't his choice. Using the Hubble, you could read in his words --which were something along the line of "we'll have to have a talk" -- that Davis was hardly shaken to the core by the revelation. In reality, the county executive's position was as predictable as Michael Moore's reaction around a box of Twinkies.

And after using the same Hubble approach when asked about his indifference -- "No. 1, she hasn't asked me for my support," was his initial smoke-screen defense -- Giambra quickly became the billboard on the Skyway, when asked a month ago by the Western New York Independent newspaper group about his signing on to the Naples' effort.

"I'm not sure she's the best candidate to represent us in Congress," he offered. "It has nothing to do with audits, the office furniture, it has to do with work ethic and commitment." No missing that point -- nothing stirs the political pot like one party member publicly calling another lazy --and it's not likely the relationship has gotten any chummier.

Naples will ride Giambra like Red Pollard on Seabiscut, and won't be shy about flashing the leather whenever needed, but not so much that she'll simply make Giambra her personal whipping post. Democrats -- split themselves, but delighted at the now public Republican rift -- are already chirping about Naples being less than vigilant while supposedly glossing over the very transgressions she now uses to strengthen her watchdog mentality.

If it's not the furniture, it will be the county's tobacco settlement money, which has become the most recent rift between the two. It's the perfect example to highlight the treacherous and narrow balance beam on which Naples must tread. The potential problem for Naples, who now says more than 85 percent of the more than \$200 million has already been spent, is she herself is part of the process in approving how that tobacco settlement money is doled out. How many red flags did she raise when funds were approved, how high did she raise them, and most importantly, how long did she wait to hoist them before the public?

It's not likely the comptroller's math skills are that shoddy, and certainly Naples would dismiss it as some technical oversight. But at the very least she could take the time to change the sentence on her Erie County website biography, which as of late last week proudly proclaimed about the tobacco funds, "After disbursements of \$67.5 million and interest earnings of \$22.1 million to date, the remaining balance available is \$166.3 million (excluding future interest earnings)."

Dems have their own little problem, a wide open primary that will siphon precious dollars away from a November election., particularly troubling since this is an election that will be all about dollars -- not the kind Naples is elected to watch but how many she and her eventual opponent can collect.

Of course, there's always the hope that sometimes the Hubble lens goes a little fuzzy, and billboards get lost in a sea of buildings, traffic and crying children in the backseat. Too bad too often it's the best strategy either side can come up with.

*(Brian Ackley is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers (WIN) of Western New York. WIN is a consortium of 19 community weekly newspapers in Erie and Niagara counties with a combined paid circulation of 75,000 homes, providing collaborative advertising and editorial support for member publications. For more information on WIN, or to provide feedback on this column, visit our website at [www.wnynewspapers.com](http://www.wnynewspapers.com). Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)*