

**By BRIAN ACKLEY
WIN COLUMNIST**

Ominous signs, opinionated lines, personal whines...

* * *

It's interesting the longest political shadow being cast during the local election season is coming from someone who isn't even seeking office.

In fact, it would be hard to tell he's not actually running for anything, or that it's his son who's actually seeking office. Suffice it to say, Jack Quinn is far from a bench-sitter this fall, even if it is Son of Jack who is hoping for a spot in the New York Assembly. Congressman Quinn's photo has been as prominent in an unusually early flurry of glossy campaign mailers as mugs of Genny at the local VFW.

In addition to supporting his son, with time and money, the biggest benefit for the affable lawmaker is keeping the Quinn name from getting politically dusty, especially if Junior wins his election. Of that, there is an improving chance, campaign literature aside. The 26 year-old expected to be facing just the seat's one-time holder, Fran Pordum, who won a difficult Democratic primary against Hamburg Town Supervisor Pat Hoak. Instead of abandoning his conservative and independence party endorsements, Hoak has announced he will stay on the November ballot on those lines. Let's just say, metaphorically speaking of course, that was more than enough reason to raise a glass of Genny at Quinn headquarters.

* * *

Maybe John Kerry can somehow transform himself from robotic to robust during this current series of presidential debates – unlikely since he's spent decades in the U.S. Senate which acts, nurtures and cherishes its erudite, autocratic, highbrow standing – but among the most stunning of the national polls recently was one that showed George Bush within eight percentage points of the Bay State bore here in the Empire state.

Of course, it was a survey sponsored by *The New York Times* and CBS – ex-employers of Jayson Blair and egregiously stained Dan Rather respectively – so maybe we should dismiss it as polling pabulum.

The only ones other than Bush campers who had to be mildly titillated by that number were we media types. Not because it was a big news story – it was worth a Rather raised eyebrow, maybe – but because ever so briefly television stations, radio station and newspaper owners drooled at the thought of all the easy campaign commercial money which would flow their way if in fact New York was unexpectedly “in play.” At least that's one good thing about the our lockstep with the left: we're subjected to the inanity of only local political commercials instead of the national ones too.

* * *

What's most disturbing about the whole ‘show me the money’ debate over local traffic tickets is the total absence of any argument about actual public and road safety, especially since more than 25 percent of all the traffic tickets written in New York are for speeding. Basically, town and village officials don't even bother to defend the fact that traffic tickets are revenue streams, or that all too often police officers are nothing more than money collectors.

After taking enough deserved grief over Albany's performance this past year, Assembly majority leader Paul Tokasz said the whole pleading “down” system is a mockery and perversion of state vehicular laws. He's right. Just recently, a downstate teenage bicyclist was killed by a motorist who had three speeding tickets in 22 months, all of which were pleaded down. The driver faces 15 years in prison after being charged by a grand jury with criminally negligent homicide. But he can still drive.

* * *

He's not my representative – yet. So I'm trying to get up to speed on congressional challenger Brian Higgins. The recent flap over his television commercials, which surprisingly all three Buffalo television stations dropped from their airwaves, hasn't helped. On the other hand, I haven't been impressed with his TV spots in the first place – even more over-the-top-full of every voter-friendly cliché and images than most – that maybe the three networks actually did him a favor.

In some quarters, he gets credit as being some miraculous “prime waterfront mover.” Huh? If it's the waterfront on which he wants to hang his hat, those who want a Washington job come January should send their resumes to the attention of Naples, Nancy.

(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. Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)