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Is Bill Clinton Afraid of Charles Millard?

Local Races often have national implications, as President Clinton's visit to New York today demonstrates. The president will be campaigning for Democratic candidates and attending two separate fundraisers for Governor Cuomo and Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney - who is running for re-election in one of the state's few congressional races with national significance.

With a three-to-one Democratic majority, this district should be a sensitive barometer of public attitudes toward the Clinton administration. It is home to the city's civic and business elite and to world-class biomedical centers that were less than enthusiastic about the original Clinton health care plan. In addition to Manhattan's affluent East Side and a portion of the West Side, the district includes the blue-collar communities of Astoria and Greenpoint, which were added in the redistricting that followed the 1990 Census.

The 14th district is also breeding ground for political talent. Two recent mayors, John Lindsay and Ed Koch, launched their mayoral careers while serving as the district's Congressmen. Public Advocate Mark Green resides in the district, as does Rudy Giuliani, who lived on 86th Street before moving into Gracie Mansion.

In 1992, "The Year of the Woman," the district elected its first female when Maloney, riding Bill Clinton's coattails, narrowly beat incumbent Congressman Bill Green. Just as Maloney's victory in '92 was tied to Clinton, so is her '94 contest. Although Maloney initially opposed Clinton's budget plan, she ultimately cast a crucial vote in favor of his "deficit-reduction" bill.

Her campaign this year is built around the Clinton record: generating an economic recovery, passing an anti-crime bill and federal support for urban communities. As a member of the important House Banking Committee, Maloney has been a strong advocate for international banking, one of New York's growth industries.

Millard, a social liberal but fiscal conservative, has established an "independent" political persona during his tenure on the City Council. And he is the "golden boy" of Manhattan Republicans, actively supported by Mayor Giuliani and state Sen. Roy Goodman. He has campaigned aggressively in the Queens and Brooklyn neighborhoods that Green virtually ignored. And since Clinton's "deficit-reduction" plan raised taxes on the district's upper-income households, Millard has emphasized Maloney's culpability in requiring the elderly to divert money intended for their grandchildren to the Internal Revenue Service.

Should Millard win, he would join a cluster of Republican moderates such as Bill Weld, Olympia Snowe, Arlen Specter and Christine Whitman who are at odds with fundamentalist

groups seeking to influence the 1996 Republican Party Convention. Since the Democrats will undoubtedly have a slimmer majority in the House next year, Millard could be a strategic "swing" vote Democrats would need to build bipartisan coalitions. (Naturally, Maloney argues that a vote for Millard is equivalent to a vote for Newt Gingrich in his campaign to be speaker of the House.)

The polls say that the race is tight. And money has poured in from all sides. The 14th District is the state's most expensive Congressional race: Maloney has raised \$690,000, and although Millard has refused to accept PAC money, he has raised \$470,000.

A Millard victory based on a mixture of upper- and working-class voters would be a signal of Democratic vulnerability in the Empire State. To win the Northeast in 1996, Republicans must move to the center with Millard look-alikes, not further to the right - à la Ollie North. If an incumbent Democratic congresswoman loses to a Republican-Liberal in New York City this year. President Clinton may not be able to take New York - or anything - for granted in 1996.

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