

Some candidates could do no wrong; others could do nothing right. The campaigns we picked did one or the other . . . exceptionally.

# The Best and Worst Campaigns of 1988



★ ★ The Best Campaigns ★ ★

## The New Jersey House Race Frank Pallone, Democrat



Pallone was an underdog . . .



. . . until his campaign hit the beach and started attracting environmental support

By S.A. Paolantonio  
*Philadelphia Inquirer*

This is the story of how a guy who drives a beat-up Pontiac was packaged as the savior of the Atlantic coastline, ran for Congress against a supermarket tycoon—and won.

The rags-to-riches tale begins last March, when James J. Howard—who had represented the central New Jersey coastline for almost 25 years—died of a heart attack. Despite the tremendous power he wielded as chairman of the House Public Works Committee, Howard had to fight to be re-elected in recent years. The district's Democratic core, Asbury Park, was withering, while suburban sprawl had given the Republicans an increasingly broad base.

Even before Howard's death, the Republicans were confident that their candidate, former state legislator Joseph Azzolina—owner of Foodtown Supermarkets—would raise enough money to beat the venerable Democrat. With Howard out of the picture, the GOP figured the Third District was theirs in a walk.

Local Democrats begged Howard's widow, Marlene, to run to save the seat. But Marlene favored the former boyfriend of one of her daughters.

Enter Frank Pallone, who lives with his parents, Marion and Frank, Sr., a one-time police officer on disability retirement. "When we tried to figure out Frank's net worth, he had nothing," recalled Tom Lindenfeld, who went on to manage Pallone's campaign. "He is a lawyer, but he doesn't have an office or clients. He drove around in an old Grand Prix, and that was it."

But Pallone had been a state senator for four years and a passionate protector of the New Jersey shore, which for two summers was ravaged by news of hypodermic needles and sludge balls washing up on the beach. Being "right" on the issues, however, meant little without money.

So Lindenfeld went to Washington to "knock on all doors", and met with the AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education. In the same room were candidates from around the country accompanied by consultants and ready with glossy fliers and a prepackaged pitch. Two weeks after Howard's death, all Pallone had was a resume and biographical sketch hastily crafted on Lindenfeld's typewriter.

What Lindenfeld did have was a theme and a plan: 36-year-old Frank Pallone was the legitimate family heir to the Howard seat, he represented the future and he would protect the ocean. Azzolina, 62, was an old pol looking for a place to hide in Washington.

With the backing of labor and a fundraising network plugged into Sen. Frank Lautenberg's re-election bid, Lindenfeld retained several leading consultants.

Because purchasing television in central New Jersey means buying in the ultraexpensive New York and Philadelphia markets, Lindenfeld decided to flood the district with mail. The campaign did 12 mailings, all showing Frank Pallone strolling along the ocean coastline. There was also negative mail; one showed how Azzolina's Foodtown markets incinerated waste while other grocery chains recycled.

In response, Azzolina sought to tie himself to the national GOP ticket in the hope Bush's coattails would pull him through. "We were getting murdered on the ocean pollution stuff," said one local Republican.

Bush already had appeared in the district twice. In the closing days, Azzolina—with former President Gerald Ford in tow—appealed to the district's large retired population by blasting Pallone as a left-wing menace to Social Security. It was too late; Pallone, chairman of the state Senate Committee on Aging, had been endorsed by the National Council on Senior Citizens.

In the end, George Bush carried the Third District by 55,000 votes. Pallone was elected with 52 percent, an 11,000 vote margin.

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