

**TOP STORIES**

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## Gillibrand: Lee's District Won't Suffer in His Absence

By: Casey J. Bortnick

Just days after now former Congressman Chris Lee resigned, some are already speculating on how his departure will impact the district he leaves behind.

Lee was a member of the majority in a position, some say, to do good things for Western New York. But others, including New York's junior Senator, are determined to make sure his absence will not hurt the people he used to represent.

"For a lot of people this is a tough time, but I'm very focused on making sure that the constituents of that district feel well looked after," Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D) said.

In his second term, Lee was appointed to serve on the U.S. House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee. It's an important panel that shapes tax policy and programs like Social Security and Medicare. Issues, Gillibrand said that she and Senator Charles Schumer are already very active in.

"He's (Schumer) on both the Banking and Finance Committee. It's the equivalent on the Senate side," said Gillibrand, "and tax policy is something that I take a leadership role in as well."

"It's definitely a setback for us," said Sandy Parker, President of the Rochester Business Alliance.

Parker said Lee was a friend to business in Upstate New York.

"His agenda for revitalizing manufacturing, which I think he came out with it at the end of 2010 I think, was right on. Again, the guy knows manufacturing," Parker said.

A businessman himself, Lee formed a small businesses advisory subcommittee. It's a group Parker's organization had a seat on.

"We spend a lot of time in terms of relationship building with our delegation, and now we're going to be starting from ground zero again," Parker said.

While Lee's former seat in Congress sits vacant, Parker believes funding for local projects could suffer. No matter when an election is held to replace Lee, Gillibrand is confident his district will be well represented.

"They have representation right now, through myself and Senator Schumer, every minute of every day. Senator Schumer and I are committed to making sure their voice in Washington is as strong as it's ever been."

Gillibrand also is continuing Lee's efforts towards helping the victims of Flight 3407. Lee pushed for tougher flight safety legislation after the crash and Gillibrand said she will continue to do so.

"We wanna make sure that as we negotiate this FAA reauthorization that all the protections that those families lobbied for stay in place," said Gillibrand. "We made sure in that bill that to have the accountability and the training and the oversight that could have prevented that crash will now be in place so no family has to suffer what our families went through."

State Senator Joe Robach says until that seat is filled, the people of the 26th District will be under served. Just like he did when Eric Massa resigned in the 29th District, he's calling on the governor to call a special election as soon as possible.

"I believe that Governor Cuomo will handle this much differently than Governor Paterson did, but yes, I think the people of that Congressional district deserve representation, and I hope they will have it very soon," Robach said.