

# Senators, archdiocese lobby over hospital job

By Mike Gallagher  
Staff Writer

The search for a Westchester County hospital commissioner has expanded to involve an unusually high-powered group, including the New York Catholic Archdiocese, one U.S. and two state senators.

Bernard Weinstein's resignation on Jan. 4 led to the involvement of U.S. Sen. Alfonse D'Amato, state Sens. Guy Velella and Nicholas Spano, and the New York Archdiocese in the search for his replacement. Westchester County Executive Andrew P. O'Rourke would nominate

someone for the \$127,000-a-year position pending ratification by the County Legislature.

The county hired the New York firm Korn-Ferry International to conduct the search and provide a list of finalists. But the search has also included intense lobbying for at least two candidates, acting commissioner Edward Stolzenberg and Leonard R. Piccoli, a former director of New York's St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Center's Office of Real Estate and Transportation.

Stolzenberg has the major-

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File photo

**Dr. George Reed, Westchester County Medical Center Medical Board president:**  
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ity support of the county hospitals' administrative and medical staffs and the county's hospital board, according to several members of the board and letters from hospital leaders to O'Rourke.

Piccoli, chief of staff for Velella, R-Bronx, has — with Velella's help — engineered political lobbying on his behalf.

Piccoli says he is aware of the talk that the Catholic Church is in his corner.

"I've heard the same thing...but I haven't actively sought their endorsement," Piccoli said. "If I am chosen, I can tell you that I realize my boss is the county executive and that is who I have to answer to."

O'Rourke, through spokeswoman Claire Palermo Flower, said Thursday he would not release the names of the finalists or the applicants for the job.

Flower said O'Rourke was contacted by a clergyman and discussed the job, but she quickly added that O'Rourke did not believe the man was speaking for the Archdiocese.

Joseph Zwilling, director of communications for the archdiocese, said yesterday the Catholic Church had not publicly backed any candidate.

"Someone may have called Andy O'Rourke," Zwilling said. "I can't tell you unequivocally that someone from the Archdiocese hasn't called him, but I can say they didn't call to lobby or express favor for any one candidate."

Reports of the church's interest in the selection process disturbed at least one county hospital board member.

"They've been trying for years, both overtly and covertly, to have a say in the selection of our hospital commissioner," said Ellen Popper. "I find that inappropriate."

Efforts by Piccoli to use his political connections have also piqued Dr. George Reed, president of the Westchester County Medical Center Medical Board.

"I don't think politics should enter into this at all," Reed said. "The county executive should select the best person based on his or her merits. Not their political clout."

Both Reed and Popper said they supported Stolzenberg, citing his "effectiveness and commitment" during his administrative work with county hospitals.

Spano, R-Yonkers, said he was approached by Piccoli, but had so far declined to endorse either candidate.

Velella said last week he had interceded on Piccoli's behalf because he thought Piccoli was qualified and "would make a great commissioner." Velella said he asked U.S. Sen. Alfonse D'Amato to support Piccoli.

"Yeah, I called Senator D'Amato and asked him to recommend Len. I'm not sure what, if anything, he did about it," Velella said.

The request comes at a time when D'Amato is promoting O'Rourke for a federal judgeship.

Velella said he asked a U.S. senator to become involved because D'Amato had met Piccoli on an earlier project. Velella said he knew D'Amato had nominated O'Rourke for a judgeship, but did not ask D'Amato "to hold the judgeship over O'Rourke's head."

D'Amato's spokeswoman, Zenia Mucha, said Tuesday she did not know if D'Amato called O'Rourke to recommend Piccoli.

"Senator D'Amato did send Mr. O'Rourke a letter in September 1990 recommending Leonard Piccoli for the hospital commissioner's job," Mucha said. "If there was a telephone call between the senator and O'Rourke and the judgeship was mentioned, I don't have any way of knowing that."

O'Rourke says he is not being pressured by D'Amato, Flower said, and he didn't find it unusual to receive a letter from D'Amato recommending someone for a county job.

"I'm just delighted that the United States senator thinks enough of me to write a letter on my behalf," Piccoli said.

But he also said he would like to be considered "on my own merits."

Stolzenberg, through Westchester County Medical Center spokesman Barry Bowman, said Thursday, he felt he had "outstanding qualifications, having served in a variety of increasingly important administrative posts... He is sure his record will receive every consideration as the selection process goes forward."

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