

Blueblood Weld dumped by Mass. GOP

by Dave Peterson

Republicans in Massachusetts overwhelmingly rejected former U.S. Attorney in Boston and former Assistant U.S. Attorney General William Weld's bid for their party's endorsement for governor, at a statewide convention held in Boston on March 10. The Republican Convention endorsed Weld's chief rival, state Rep. Steven Pierce, to spearhead the party's bid to make a comeback in the upcoming November statewide elections. Weld, a wealthy scion of a Boston Brahmin family who once described himself to a group of journalists as an "environmental terrorist," couldn't sell his newly acquired conservative credentials to the over 5,000 Republican delegates.

The vote 52.6% to 36.3%, a "super majority," will make Pierce the exclusive recipient of all funds from the Republican National Committee, GOP State Committee, and Republican Governors Council. Pierce, a carpenter's son, used his base of support among traditional GOP conservatives and a mobilization by a substantial group of pro-life activists to stage a stunning upset against the elite blueblood Republicans. The Boston media all but gave Weld the nomination months ago. But the lackluster Pierce benefited enormously from the blundering of the aloof and venomous Weld, who was greeted by a chorus of Bronx cheers during his address to the convention.

Weld, who used his position as U.S. Attorney to help railroad the conservative Democrat Lyndon LaRouche to prison, is known for conducting politically motivated prosecutions and using unscrupulous methods. In one case against a fundraiser for former Boston Mayor Kevin White, a federal appeals court judge admonished Weld's office for using Soviet-style legal methods.

Weld's humorously inept campaign took shape behind a "war chest" of \$350,000 of Weld's personal funds. Weld announced that he was the only Republican candidate who could raise the necessary money to defeat the Democrats—who outnumber registered Republicans in the state by 3 to 1—leading to charges that Weld was "buying the nomination with out-of-state money." A list of Weld contributors was a patricians Who's Who, including large sums from several Roosevelts, Rockefellers, Cabots, and Lowells. Weld put forward his new "conservative" program: longer prison sentences, the death penalty, and solving Massachusetts' \$1 billion budget disaster with thousands of layoffs of state workers and huge cuts in state services.

The arrogant, overconfident Weld predicted an early

"knockout" of his Republican rivals, and spent over \$1 million, including a quarter of a million dollars on television ads. Weld also made a hasty switch to a pro-abortion stance shortly after opinion polls claimed this was the view of most Bay State voters. He labeled Steven Pierce unelectable and an "extremist" because of his pro-life views. Such crass opportunism seems to have made its impression on conservative grassroots GOPers.

Many new activists have flocked to the GOP in the wake of the disastrous collapse of Gov. Michael Dukakis's administration and the so-called Massachusetts economic miracle. The estimated \$1 billion budget deficit may soon be revised upward in view of reports that state revenue collections are nearly 1% below those of last year. The state is currently implementing severe cuts in health care, family assistance, welfare, and aid to house the homeless, with Governor Dukakis demanding \$500 million in new taxes. Some Massachusetts politicians have labeled Weld the Dukakis Republican.

Weld begins to crack

Weld's invincible exterior began to crack when Pierce emerged with a solid delegate lead at the February local party nomination meetings. In a March televised debate, Weld was becoming desperate. He attacked Pierce based on a report that the state representative had filed late tax returns on several occasions. (In each case Pierce was owed a refund.) "When I was a U.S. Attorney, I sent people to prison for that," said Weld. In the final week before the state's convention Weld made his biggest gaffes. First he called for dispensing free birth control devices at all public high schools, a call which provoked outrage from family-oriented Republicans and drew denunciations from the Catholic Church and other Christian groups. Condoms with Bill Weld's signature were circulated by Weld opponents on the convention floor.

Finally, Weld called a news conference three days before the convention where he bitterly complained of a "hate and fear" campaign against him by Pierce supporters who referred to his blueblood patrician background. The *Boston Herald* headline March 8 screamed charges of "Class Warfare," and a *Boston Globe* cartoon portrayed Weld heading up a movement called the "Rich Yankee Anti-Defamation League." Several wealthy Bush supporters in the GOP also threw financial backing to Pierce in the week prior to the convention, exploding the myth that Weld's financial connections were indispensable.

Weld has announced that he will continue his campaign into the GOP primary, where he believes more liberal Republicans and independent voters are likely to cast ballots. State Republican Party chairman Ray Shamie who has called on Republicans to unite behind any candidate who obtained a "super majority." Shamie told reporters that he will not pressure Weld to drop out of the governor's race but said he has urged Weld to seek another post.