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Paterson Announces Choice of Gillibrand for Senate Seat

By [JAVIER C. HERNANDEZ](#), [DANNY HAKIM](#) and [NICHOLAS CONFESSORE](#)

ALBANY — Representative [Kirsten E. Gillibrand](#), a little-known 42-year-old upstate congresswoman selected to succeed [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) in the [United States Senate](#), said Friday afternoon that she would focus on passing legislation that would provide financial relief and create jobs for New Yorkers.

At a news conference at which Gov. [David A. Paterson](#) announced her appointment, Ms. Gillibrand, who is considered a centrist and is known for her bold political moves, also expressed support for investing in high-tech industries, health care, transportation infrastructure and small businesses, and said she would call for tax cuts for middle-class families and lower property taxes.

Ms. Gillibrand said she aspired to follow in the footsteps of Mrs. Clinton. While she acknowledged that many state residents did not know her name, she pledged to “bring upstate and downstate together, to work on behalf of all New Yorkers.”

“I can look someone in the eye and hear their concern, and hear their priority, and then do something about it,” said Ms. Gillibrand, who is to take office on Sunday.

Speaking from a platform crowded with New York political figures, Mr. Paterson described Ms. Gillibrand as “the best candidate” for the job. In his opening remarks, he made no mention of other contenders for the position, including [Caroline Kennedy](#), who made a surprising 11th-hour decision to withdraw her name from consideration. Mr. Paterson said that he was “95 percent” sure on Monday that he wanted to select Ms. Gillibrand, and that by Tuesday he had grown more confident of his decision.

He said he saw in Ms. Gillibrand a “new kind of leadership.” While downstaters have been known for being condescending to upstaters in the past, he said, “they will never condescend

to Kirsten Gillibrand.” Mr. Paterson said he was particularly impressed with Ms. Gillibrand’s command of financial issues, saying, “She can talk you A to Z about agriculture, and A to ZZ about Wall Street.”

The governor, however, did acknowledge the sometimes confusing nature of the selection process, which lasted weeks, and apologized, saying he was merely trying to be transparent.

“In retrospect, I wish I had not shown all of you the wrestling match” of the decision-making process, he said.

[Charles E. Schumer](#), the senior senator from New York, said it was important to have a senator from upstate New York, calling Ms. Gillibrand “one of the most aggressive and effective young members of the House.” He said Mrs. Clinton had also expressed support for Ms. Gillibrand.

Ms. Gillibrand (pronounced JILL-uh-brand) devoted much of her speech to thanking relatives and mentors, name by name, for their support — so much so that she missed a congratulatory call from President [Barack Obama](#). (The two spoke after her speech, and in a statement the president called her “a strong voice for transparency and reform in government.”)

Ms. Gillibrand is largely unknown to New Yorkers statewide, but is considered an up-and-coming and forceful lawmaker in her district and has gained considerable attention from Democratic leaders in Washington.

Mr. Paterson made his final decision shortly before 2 a.m. Friday after a marathon series of phone calls and deliberations with his top aides, according to a person who spoke to him. He began making phone calls to other contenders about 9 p.m., and had notified most of the other contenders by midnight. By then, the only two candidates who had not heard from Mr. Paterson were Ms. Gillibrand and [Randi Weingarten](#), the president of the [United Federation of Teachers](#).

The governor continued to deliberate and discuss the matter with his advisers into Friday morning — despite earlier reports that he had settled on Ms. Gillibrand — until he made his decision, according to the person who talked to him. He then called Ms. Gillibrand, who had earlier in the evening been told to come to Albany to await an announcement, to let her know she was his pick.

There had been speculation that Mr. Paterson might choose a woman to replace Mrs.

Clinton, though he said at the news conference Friday afternoon that her sex had not factored into his decision.

If Mr. Paterson was hoping to quiet the tumult over the selection process by picking Ms. Gillibrand, there were indications that he may not get his wish. Ms. Gillibrand, who has been endorsed by the [National Rifle Association](#), is controversial among some of the party's more liberal leaders downstate.

Representative [Carolyn McCarthy](#), a Long Island Democrat and ardent advocate of gun control laws, said on Thursday that if Ms. Gillibrand got the job, she was prepared to run against her in a primary in 2010. Ms. McCarthy was elected to Congress after her husband was killed in a gunman's rampage on the [Long Island Rail Road](#) in 1993.

Ms. Gillibrand's selection was a careful political calculation by the governor, who will run for his second term as governor in 2010, when Ms. Gillibrand will also be on the ballot. The choice reflects Mr. Paterson's thinking that his selection should be someone who can help him attract voters in key demographics — in Ms. Gillibrand's case upstate New Yorkers and women.

Ms. Gillibrand lives near Hudson, N.Y., just outside of Albany, with her husband, Jonathan Gillibrand, a financial consultant, and their sons, Theodore, who is 5, and Henry, who is 6 months old. Ms. Gillibrand, who had never held public office, won her seat in 2006 against great odds, defeating a four-term Republican incumbent in a race that turned intense and nasty in its final days.

She proved to be a formidable candidate, raising millions of dollars and assembling a campaign organization that aggressively exploited the personal and political baggage of her opponent, Representative John E. Sweeney, who frequently found himself on the defensive.

Just before the election, for example, the Sweeney camp accused Ms. Gillibrand of being behind a published report that the police had been called to the congressman's home during a domestic disturbance. Mr. Sweeney ran a television spot in which his wife, Gayle Sweeney, spoke of how his political rival was trying to "slander my marriage, husband and family."

Mr. Sweeney eventually acknowledged that the police had been called to his home. In the end, Ms. Gillibrand won with 53 percent of the vote.

Carla Baranauckas contributed reporting from New York.

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