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When it came time for the Women's Political Caucus to endorse a candidate in Monmouth County's 12th legislative district, the board found it impossible to choose between incumbent Democratic Sen. Ellen Karcher and the Republican challenger, Assemblywoman Jennifer Beck.

Though their own rules prohibit endorsing multiple candidates in the same race, the caucus did just that, but will contribute money to neither.

"We made an exception this time," said president Shari Weiner, a partner in the law firm Scarinci & Hollenbeck. She described the situation as an embarrassment of riches; a sign of how far women have come in New Jersey politics, where a record number of women will be sworn in as state lawmakers next January.

Weiner said the caucus has just \$20,000 this year for 35 endorsed candidates and decided it would be a waste of scarce resources to give money to both campaigns and essentially cancel the contributions out.

However, The Auditor is told the dual endorsement was actually the result of a knock-down, drag-out fight that ended in a draw.

Beck is a long-time caucus member and favorite Republican daughter. The caucus donated \$8,200 to Beck for her Assembly race in 2005. Karcher, who has never been a member of the caucus, had the support of key Democratic board members Jeanne Fox and former Attorney General Zulima Farber.

Fox is married to Steve De Micco, the political consultant whose firm is running Karcher's campaign. Karcher also voted with a slim majority in the Senate to confirm Farber as attorney general.

Weiner acknowledged there was "strong support" for both candidates, but said ultimately the dual endorsement "was a decision of the entire board."

Oh, baby Drumthwacket is experiencing something of a baby boom.

Gov. Jon Corzine, who became a grandfather for the first time a year ago, will be blessed again next year. His 36-year-old daughter, Jennifer Pisani, and her husband, David, are expecting their first child in late March.

"He's pretty excited about it," Pisani said.

Corzine's eldest son, Joshua, and his wife, Amanda, have a child, Emma, who turned one earlier this month. This summer, Corzine's companion, Sharon Elghanayan, became a grandmother for the first time when her daughter gave birth to a boy.

The arrival of grandchildren has drawn out a softer side of the governor, some say. He was recently seen with former Cabinet member Susan Bass Levin, now the deputy executive director of the Port Authority, huddling over a pile of baby photos and sharing cute grandkid stories.

Deal or no deal Former Commerce chief of staff Lesly Devereaux, found guilty in July of using a state employee to run her private legal practice, is scheduled to tell a judge Oct. 12 whether she will take a plea deal on a dozen counts left unresolved by her six-week trial.

Attorney General Anne Milgram's offer includes a seven-year prison sentence and the repayment of about \$99,000 to avoid a second trial. Devereaux, who already faces five years based on the guilty verdict, initially balked at the deal as too severe. But the judge asked Devereaux to continue negotiations.

Now, The Auditor has learned Superior Court Judge Maryann Bielamowicz has issued a gag order preventing both sides from publicly discussing the negotiations or whether Devereaux may agree to cooperate with prosecutors to sweeten the offer.

Bielamowicz declined to release the letter she sent to Milgram's office and defense attorney Jack Furlong ordering the case sealed, as did the attorneys.

"Clearly, her sealing was for not wanting information to be made public," said Milgram's spokesman, Peter Aseltine.

Story time The gift of gab and great storytelling is part of being a successful politician.

But embellishing or exaggerating stories can easily land them in trouble -- especially if they get caught. Newark Mayor Cory Booker knows what that feels like. During the summer, Booker was captured on video describing a beloved and deceased housing advocate, Judith Diggs, as a "portly, toothless" woman who cussed a lot.

When Newarkers watched the video on YouTube, they were incensed because they said none of that was true.

When Booker was asked to speak this week to the freshman class at Berkeley College in Newark, he launched into an anecdote about his freshman year at Stanford University.

But in a sign that he has learned his lesson, he started it off by saying, "Let me tell you a 96 percent true story about my first month at college."

The mayor never divulged what 4 percent of the story of his fight with a football player nicknamed "Dr. Death" was untrue.

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