

THE *Contenders*

The changing face of politics—and politicians—is no more evident than in the diverse viewpoints and backgrounds of these newcomers vying for office in 1996. By Sarah Henry



Michela Alioto
THE FLEDGLING

If she wins in November, Michela Alioto, 28, will be the youngest woman ever to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. Does that faze her? “Not at all,” says Alioto, from St. Helena, California, who is eager to bring a fresh perspective to Capitol Hill. “You can rattle off a string of men who have served at a young age, and it’s been an acceptable career path for them,” she says. “Politics has such a negative meaning to so many people and it shouldn’t. It should be viewed as something positive and good. I want to give people

something to vote for, so they’re not just voting *against* someone.”

Although an electoral neophyte, Alioto is no stranger to politics. She’s former San Francisco Mayor Joseph Alioto’s granddaughter, and her aunt, Angela Alioto, sits on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. Her own involvement in public life includes a two-and-a-half-year stint as a staff member for Vice President Al Gore. “He’s a true public servant who puts the interests of people first,” says the self-described moderate Democrat. “I learned a lot about the system working for him. Now I want to fight for what *I* believe in.”

Paralyzed from the waist down since a ski-lift accident 15 years ago, Alioto shrugs off questions about whether campaigning from a wheelchair has helped or hindered her bid for Congress. “It’s not an issue,” maintains Alioto, who served on the President’s National Council on Disability Advisory Board. “But my disability has taught me to be tenacious—and that’s a gift.”

Her goals are firmly rooted in the here and now. “When I’m out on the campaign trail I hear people say we need to make sure our children and grandchildren have a future,” she says. “But I’m looking at the present. Four years ago, many of my friends couldn’t get jobs. We need to change that.”



Nona Brazier
THE PRAGMATIST

Nona Brazier dates her partisan political awakening to 1982, when she and her third husband started a small waste-hauling business. “You go through all the challenges that exist in life, try to build something, and the government takes it all away through taxes and regulation,” says the Republican from Maple Valley, Washington. “That’s wrong. Entrepreneurship, ownership of private property, and education are all on-ramps to the American Dream.”

Brazier has now set her sights higher: She hopes to be the first African-American woman governor. “I’m not a professional politician, a political pundit, or an attorney,” declares the “citizen legislator.” But she doesn’t claim to be an outsider either. “Citizens are not outsiders.”

