

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.”

Brazier, 47, points to Ronald Reagan as her source of inspiration. "People related to what he was saying," she says simply. Real-life experiences have shaped her own conservative political views.

Overseeing a household of six children, she has developed a game plan that should certainly stand her in good stead in politics. "My key operating model is: One size does not fit all," says the former community college teacher. "I have an ability to hear what everybody is saying, cut through divisiveness, and work to bring people together."

Michael Coles THE MAVERICK

It takes more than a little chutzpah for a cookie magnate from Kennesaw, Georgia, to go up against the leader of the Republican revolution. But Michael Coles, 52, cofounder and CEO of the Atlanta-based Great American Cookie Company, Inc., is anything but conventional: He's vowed that if he defeats House Speaker Newt Gingrich, he will decline a congressional salary or pension. "I'm very independent. I plan to serve only six years."

Coles remembers exactly when he decided to run. "The government shutdown was the turning point," he says. "I was frustrated about Congress's inability to effect any real change. I figured the only way to get things done was to do them myself."



Doug Nelson THE IDEOLOGUE

As a Socialist Workers Party candidate, Doug Nelson has no illusions about winning his bid for a Minnesota Assembly seat. "I'm only running to popularize our ideas," concedes Nelson, 21, an assembly-line factory worker from

Minneapolis. His ideas follow general communist principles; i.e., to overturn capitalism by revolution. "I don't expect to get elected, and even if I was, it wouldn't solve a lot of problems. My campaign is about reaching people."

Nelson is an active member of the Young Socialists, an international youth group, and says his nascent political views stem from the works of Karl Marx and Malcolm X. "I'm inspired by the struggles of the oppressed."

Politically active only for the last year or so, Nelson, who still lives at home with his mother, views his youth as a campaign plus. "My generation has a great potential to change things, and we're open to new ideas," he says. "People have this stereotype of Generation X as a bunch of losers taking drugs, having sex, or watching TV. It's important to see someone my age who is serious."

He knows campaigning will be tough. "Being a communist, you get used to people disagreeing with you," Nelson says. "But I'm going to use this election to talk to as many people as possible. We're trying to build a movement."

Geoffrey Foster THE ICONOCLAST

Two years ago, Geoffrey Foster (on right) from Ypsilanti, Michigan, decided to join the Libertarian Party. "I felt ignored by the major political parties," explains Foster, who had usually voted Republican in the past. "There are no underlying principles that guide them. They just serve special interests."

But it was the passage of the 1994 Crime Bill that pushed the long-time corrections officer into politics. "Congress, by that action, presumed it had the power to prohibit citizens of this country from possessing firearms," says Foster, 35. "I'm a hunter and use guns for target practice; I own them for protection as well as pleasure. That legislation shook me up."

Foster decided to run for a seat on the Ypsilanti Township Board of Trustees. He gets his political fixes from *Reason Magazine*, a libertarian publication, and C-SPAN. "On C-SPAN you get exposed to different political figures, like black conservatives, whom I never see on the nightly news."

He also listens to radio talk shows hosted by G. Gordon Liddy and Rush Limbaugh "to get a sense of why people are thinking a certain way."



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