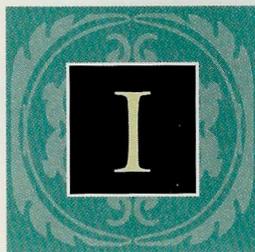


BORN TO RUN

He won his first public office at 13, then cut his political teeth on the tumultuous campus politics of the Vietnam era. Now alumnus Bob Torricelli—a seasoned statesman at 45—takes his biggest race to date, the U. S. Senate.

By Bill Glovli



In the reception area of U. S. Senator Robert G. Torricelli's temporary quarters at the Hart Office Building in Washington, D.C., two young staff members busily answer phones that ring several times a minute. Lobbyists, their clients, and job seekers move in and out like anxious patients in a crowded doctor's office. An aide monitoring the flow into the inner sanctum breaks the bad news: New Jersey's freshman Democratic senator is behind schedule and has only minutes to make a Senate floor vote. Under the baleful gaze of the supplicants, Torricelli makes a dash for the door.

Somehow, it seems fitting to watch Torricelli (RC'74, NLaw'77) on the move. Known for his boundless energy and restlessness, the 14-year veteran of the U. S. House of Representatives has always been comfortable running—whether for elective office, down to Washington from his Bergen County home, or on countless Congressional trips to foreign countries.

Torricelli was a youngster in Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, wallpapering his room with flags and painting his telephone red, white, and blue, when he first set his sights on serving his country. He had a special



Illustration

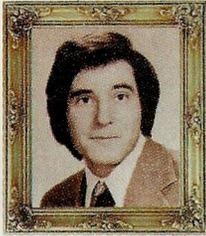
by

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Leister







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bond with his late mother, Betty Lotz Torricelli (SCILS'61), an ardent New Dealer who turned the dinner table into a political seminar and instilled in her son a belief in civic responsibility and high expectations of the government. His mother, he says, helped create the Department of Library Science on the New Brunswick campus and taught at Rutgers. He fondly remembers, as a boy, waiting for his mother to get off work: He'd comb the Alexander Library shelves, wander through campus, and think what a wonderful place Rutgers would be to go to college.

By the time Torricelli earned his undergraduate degree from Rutgers in 1974, his political aspirations were firmly in place, and he had already developed a knack for winning elections. When his father, Salvatore, lost the Franklin Lakes mayoral race in 1965, Torricelli ran for junior mayor and won by a single vote. At Rutgers College, where he was class president three of his four undergraduate years, he took on 13 other candidates his freshman year. "I went into every dormitory and probably met every single one of my 2,000 classmates," he says. "I even spent a fair amount of money and hired a band to march with me as I rode in a Jeep down College Avenue. That's what it took, and that's what I did."



People who have known Torricelli for years agree that, in the clubby atmosphere of the Senate, where the abilities to act on one's feet and debate convincingly are vital, Torricelli is clearly in his element. Within weeks of his election, in fact, he had nabbed two prestigious appointments: a seat on the Government Operations Committee, which is investigating campaign finance, and vice chair of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, which coordinates the party's campaigns. Coups like these have come to be expected of the man that friends and foes alike call "the Torch."

Thomas Hartmann, professor emeritus of journalism and mass media, says that Senator Torricelli has fulfilled his prediction: "I distinctly remember Bob coming up to me on the first day of class, introducing himself, and saying in a tone more matter-of-fact than brash, 'Someday I'm going to be the first Italian-American senator in New Jersey.' Bob isn't someone I'd call lovable, but at Rutgers I had only four or five students who were as bright, intuitive, and determined-qualities that came through in class and at an occasional dinner in my home."

Torricelli remembers his years in student government as highly politicized. The Vietnam War was winding down but not yet over; Martin Luther

King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy had been assassinated; and the University was expanding rapidly. Almost daily, protests erupted over tuition, academic freedom, and the war. At Rutgers, says Torricelli, he got his first taste of the perils of campaigning when, in his only election defeat, a victory for class president was overturned by the dean of students because, as Torricelli explains it, "one of my cronies had posed as a newspaper reporter."

As class president, he sometimes wielded surprising clout. The day before a scheduled campus forum with New Jersey's gubernatorial candidates in 1973, Brendan Byrne—who had yet to announce his candidacy—called and asked to be put on the panel. "I had never heard of Byrne and I turned him down," Torricelli says, laughing at his miscalculation. "The next thing I knew, the other candidates had dropped out of the race and Byrne was the clear favorite." A few years later, with the matter long forgotten, Torricelli became a key member of Byrne's campaign staff and a rising star in the new governor's administration.

By the time Torricelli entered Rutgers' School of Law-Newark in 1974, his game plan was set. "Going to law school at Rutgers was a very calculated decision and had some extraordinary advantages," he says, arms folded tightly under rounded shoulders. "I had already made important inroads into New Jersey politics. Rutgers offered a very high-quality legal education, was the center of gravity for the state's legal profession, and provided a way to gain meaningful employment."

Shortly after graduating from law school, Torricelli was named by Byrne to Rutgers' Board of Governors. "I was only 26 years old and had recently been a student. Byrne wanted someone who knew the University well because there was friction between the governor and [former Rutgers president Edward J.] Bloustein. I was caught in the middle and viewed as an antagonist against the University. It was an extraordinary experience."

In his five years of service, Torricelli recalls, he opposed moving a large number of campus buildings from New Brunswick to Piscataway. He was also against relocating Newark's law school building from Ackerson Hall to the Newhouse Center—a location several blocks away from the heart of the campus. He voted for the 1981 reorganization of the faculty in Rutgers' undergraduate colleges.

"Although Bob had strong ties to the governor, he wasn't arrogant and didn't try to push people around," recalls Linda Stamato (DC'62, GSNB'77). Now associate executive director of Rutgers' Center for Conflict Resolution in the Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Stamato was chair of the board from 1977 to 1983. "He had fairly strong, spirited views and liberal leanings, and he

was very articulate and convincing in support of those views. By the time he left the board, he had won the respect of his senior colleagues."



In a fast track as a 20-something wunderkind of state Democratic Party politics, Torricelli moved rapidly from class president at Rutgers to counsel in the New Jersey governor's office to a counsel on Vice President Walter Mondale's staff. By the age of 27, he had met most of the world's prominent leaders. In 1982, shortly after his 31st birthday, he resigned from the Board of Governors after capturing his northern New Jersey Congressional seat.

Says veteran journalist Ron Stepaneski (RC'70), former editorial page director of the *Jerald and News* in Passaic County, "We were classmates at Rutgers, so I have closely followed his career. His office was always known as a place that took care of its constituents. I've seen him charm a crowd walking in a parade and also handle some very tough questions in front of an editorial board. When we ran an editorial condemning a traffic light that had led to two fatal accidents on Route 208 in Fair Lawn, Torricelli got involved, and the traffic light disappeared. I was impressed."

His Congressional career has been marked by an unconventional voting record and an uncanny ability to speak his mind and still land on his feet. In 1989, he turned from his party to become the floor leader for the resolution authorizing the Persian Gulf War. In March 1995, the Republican leadership was outraged when, as a member of the House Intelligence Committee, he violated a secrecy oath and publicly criticized the CIA's role in the mysterious deaths of an American innkeeper and the husband of an American lawyer in Guatemala. He has long

championed the Cuban embargo and was the talk of the Beltway and the Northeast corridor when a 1995 *New York Times Magazine* article centered on his globe-trotting relationship with outspoken human-rights activist Bianca Jagger.

"Bob has never been shy about speaking his mind," says Carl Van Horn, professor of public policy at the Eagleton Institute of Politics. A policy director in the Florio administration, Van Horn, who has attended many meetings with Torricelli, continues, "That rubs certain people the wrong way, but I think his political instincts have mostly been right on target. In his district he was very popular, MOSI editorial boards of newspapers endorsed him, and he won his Senate seat in November more handily than most thought he would."

In that bitter campaign for former senator Bill Bradley's vacant seat, Torricelli amassed a war chest of \$8 million and defeated House colleague Richard A. Zimmer, a three-term Republican, by a surprisingly comfortable margin. The nasty charges, counter-charges and controversies that were played out in the media during the campaign did not help either candidate's image: "We held our noses and endorsed Torricelli," says a member of the editorial board of one major paper.

In the Senate, where he has a larger staff and more money to run a bigger operation—including two district offices in New Jersey—Torricelli looks forward to a long and productive career. He talks enthusiastically about the advantages of the Senate over the

House. "The House is very compartmentalized, and it was often hard to be heard because of the stringent and restrictive rules," he muses. "I've always thought that I could make a contribution on science, national security, and foreign-policy concerns. Now I have that opportunity. The Senate provides a forum where you can be heard



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BEST



Book

The Grapes of Wrath

Food

Pasta

Political Model

Robert Kennedy

Film

Gone With the Wind

Vacation Spot

Rome

Sports Team

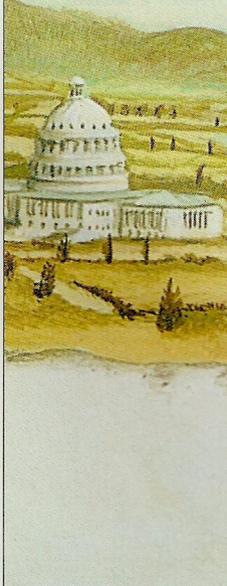
N.Y. Yankees

Comedian

Jerry Seinfeld

Musical Group

Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band

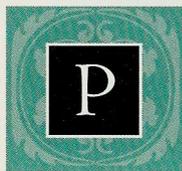


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On the shuttle that takes legislators and staff members from the Congressional office buildings to the Capitol, Torricelli shows a rare smile as a senior colleague compliments him on his comments in the Senate's morning session. His face brightens when he recognizes a familiar face, an older African-American gentleman who works in the House dining room. The pair exchange the friendly banter of insiders: When Torricelli quips that the Senate's eatery is much lighter than the House's, his acquaintance chuckles knowingly.

As Torricelli bounds into the Senate chamber to vote, it's impossible to ignore how youthful the 45-year-old looks next to the patrician, gray- and white-haired senators who shuffle rather than stride. "Bob's always gotten where he wants to be 10 years ahead of the norm," says Van Horn. "He has always been very focused and ambitious. He has a great deal of political savvy."

Adds Stamato, "I think some people resented Bob because he was so principled and so successful at such a young age."



Political consultant Steve DeMicco (RC'75), who ran a distant fifth against Torricelli in a Rutgers College election, worked closely on his classmate's Senate campaign. "Bob will undoubtedly be a strong advocate for Rutgers," he says. "His Board of Governors experience gives him an intimate understanding of what makes a large research institution like Rutgers tick. Students and their organizations will have the opportunity to establish a dialogue. He's also from a different generation than Bradley and [Senator Frank] Lautenberg, which means a fresh and different perspective."

Van Horn points out that, in the next few years, the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965, changes in the tax code that could have a far-reaching impact on student-loan programs, and federal grant-funding considerations to research institutions are among issues of vital importance to Rutgers. "There will be a lot at stake,

more so than in a long time. These issues go beyond pork barrel," says Van Horn. "Bob's in a position where he can help shape these things."

With the incidentals of the move from House to Senate still in transition—some staff members are new and his office space unsettled—Torricelli manages a sound-byte impression of the state of the University. "I've watched Rutgers steadily improve through the years to where it is today. I'm especially delighted with the decision to build a new law school building in Newark," says Torricelli. "I'm concerned that, as Rutgers continues to grow, it not lose the individual identities and missions of the colleges. Individual colleges make people feel like they have a home."

His thoughts now centered on the institution that was a major part of his life for 12 years, Torricelli initiates conversation for the first time: "Days after I won my Senate race," he says, "I came to Rutgers to thank the students for all their work on my behalf

and for getting out the vote." On that November day, Torricelli strolled down College Avenue with his goddaughter Wendy McLoof, a Rutgers College junior; shook hands in the student center; and had coffee at a campus shop. "It was a tremendous day."

Two months after visiting Rutgers, his first constituency, Torricelli was a guest of President Bill Clinton for Super Bowl XXXI. In February, he was again at Clinton's side during a fund-raising dinner in New York that netted \$1 million for the party's Senate candidates. Two weeks later, the national spotlight shone on the freshman senator as he went against a campaign promise and cast the vote that killed the proposed constitutional amendment requiring a balanced Federal budget.

Despite moving in the highest social echelons, positioning himself as a key player in Democratic Party politics, and legislating issues with implications for the world, Torricelli will return to campus in May to give the Rutgers College commencement address. But if the rest of his term is anything like the first few months, he may have less time than he'd like for leisurely strolls down College Avenue.

Bill Glovin is the senior editor of Rutgers Magazine.

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