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## Post in Tallahassee: Legislature 2013

CAPITOL CONVERSATIONS WITH DARA KAM

# Desire to be legislator started early

A Q&A with Sen. Joseph Abruzzo, District 25, D-Wellington.

By Dara Kam  
Palm Beach Post Capital Bureau

**Sen. Joseph Abruzzo, District 25, D-Wellington.**

**Age:** 32.

**Education:** Bachelor's degree, international communications, Lynn University.

**Family:** Single.

**Work:** Government policy consultant, Weiss, Handler, Angelos & Cornell law firm.

**When and where did you first arrive in Florida?** Arrived in 1999 from Chicago to attend Lynn University. My original intent was to play baseball at Lynn, but I got in student government. I was the first junior student body president in Lynn's history, which really got me involved in the community.

**First job and what you learned from it:** My first job was a lifeguard at Heritage Park, right outside of Chicago. I got my certificate when I was 15 years old. What I learned about water safety when I was 15 absolutely played a role when I wanted to go into the service, of picking the branch of the Coast Guard over a decade later.

**First political job and what you learned from it:** When I was 8 years old, I was glued to the television, watching the political conventions. I knew right then that I wanted to be a legislator.



Joseph Abruzzo started watching conventions when he was 8.

We weren't allowed to vote in the presidential election, so I helped organize our class and we got to vote. The teacher agreed. We did it by private ballot and she announced the winner. I had a passion and a heart for politics since I was very young.

I was elected student body treasurer as a sophomore at Lynn and the first junior to be elected president. I was really driven to make our campus safer and get better amenities for our students. Our big initiative was we changed speed "bumps" to speed "humps." The speed bumps were truly damaging some of the cars. Our other big initiative was the girls were complaining heavily about the lighting in their restrooms in their dorms for their makeup. I learned that women need bright lights when they put their makeup on.

I was also chairman of the judicial board at Lynn. And I'm chairman of the Joint Auditing Committee now. I learned a lot at Lynn about how things work in life, the organizational structure of government.

**Best political advice you ever received?** My grandfather, Bud Cataldo, told me to make sure you have passion for what you do and always

be honest and truthful. If you bring passion to the job, and you always are straight with people and you bring in the respect in relationships, you can get a lot done in this process. He raised me. I was raised by my grandparents and my mother.

**You were just discharged from the Coast Guard last week.** My whole life has been about public service. My career in college, joining the military right out and then getting elected to office. I just love service. I worked briefly for an international marketing company as the youngest executive on staff. I was doing fairly well financially, and I had to make a choice if I wanted to go public or continue on a career that would pay a lot more than the things I'm doing. But my grandfather said you have to have passion for what you do. I chose the public service route.

**Best book on politics you read:** "Buck Up, Suck Up, and Come Back When You Foul Up: 12 Winning Secrets," by James Carville and Paul Begala. It was campaign-based, but you could also take a lot of the lessons into life with you.

**What do you tell young people about government?** Dedicating your time to public service and community-based events is one of the most important things you can do. Anything you do in life, there's some political aspect to it. It doesn't matter if you're going to be a doctor, a teacher, an athlete. There's politics in

### UNMATCHED COVERAGE

Veteran reporter Dara Kam has covered state government in Tallahassee since 1997 and for The Palm Beach Post since 2004.



everybody's job. So to figure out how to work within the system is essential. And the overall benefit of course is you're making your community a better place.

**What do you see ahead for Florida?** We have a vast global, economic expansion throughout the world. For us to make sure we compete, we have to make sure we have the policies in place. For instance, retooling our ports for the expansion of the Panama Canal. We're always going to be competing even with other states in the region to attract business here and keep businesses that are here.

We need to be innovators in terms of retooling ourselves for the global economy. But to get there, we definitely need a stronger emphasis on education. We have to stabilize our teachers in public schools. We have to stop raising universi-

ty tuition and making it harder for students to go to college. Our largest trading partners are China and Brazil, but we have a very small workforce that speaks Mandarin and Portuguese. So it's retraining around new technology that's coming out but also in the culture and languages of our trading partners.

**Do you text while you drive?** I have. I have cut down on it tremendously, to the point that I don't even keep the phone near me in the car anymore. I'm trying to practice what I preach and the bill that I'm sponsoring. My girlfriend has a 7-year-old daughter that I adore. I never really had to drive in the car with a kid before. I remember a year ago getting her into her safety seat and thinking, "There's no way I'm looking at this phone with a kid in the car." I felt a responsibility I hadn't felt before.

**Do you own a gun?** I do not. I had guns issued to me but not anymore.

**Favorite smartphone app:** Probably my banking app. I don't use apps much. I'm really not a technology-type guy. I don't have a Facebook or a Twitter. I'm the youngest member of the Senate, but I still keep my schedule in a written book. I don't use many apps. And I'm not big on social media.

**What kind of car do you drive?** GMC Terrain. It gets 32 miles per gallon.

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