

Rookie Legislator In National Eye With Bill To Lessen 'Sexting' Penalty For Consenting Minors



Freshman legislator Rosa Rebimbas sits on the minority side of the House of Representatives has proposed a new law making sexting not a felony. Acting from suggestions from her Naugatuck district guided how the law was written. (MICHAEL MCANDREWS / HARTFORD COURANT / March 31, 2010)

By AMANDA FALCONE

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HARTFORD — - One year into her first term as a state representative and national media outlets are already calling.

Rep. Rosa Rebimbas, R- **Naugatuck**, appeared on "**Fox & Friends**" and **CNN** last week to talk about a bill that would lessen the penalty for "sexting" between two consenting minors.

She proposed the bill after attending a Naugatuck informational forum and talking with members of the Naugatuck Police Department, and although she knew she was tackling a relevant and important issue, she said she never thought it would get national attention.

Rebimbas is a freshman lawmaker and one of only 37 **Republicans** in the 151-member House of Representatives. She acknowledges that it is not easy for a new member, nevermind one in the minority, to push a bill through the legislature successfully, but she says the sexting bill stands a chance.

The judiciary committee voted 39-5 in favor of it. Rebimbas said even she did not expect the bill to pass by

such a wide margin.

Rebimbas' bill would make it a Class A misdemeanor for children under 18 to send or receive text messages that include nude or sexual images, a practice known as sexting. It is currently a felony for children to send such messages, and violators could end up on the state's sex offender registry.

The sexting issue is not political, said Rep. **Stephen Dargan**, D- **West Haven**, chairman of the legislature's public safety and security committee. Some public safety issues just need to be addressed, and there is little argument, he said.

Rebimbas said she is working hard to get support for her bill — and along the way is learning to educate her colleagues on why a bill is important and why a law needs to be changed. This is especially important, she said, when it comes to emerging issues like sexting.

'A Tenaciousness'

Rebimbas, 34, replaced former Rep. Kevin DelGobbo, a Republican who vacated his seat to become a commissioner of the state Department of Public Utility Control.

When Rebimbas won a special election in March 2009, she did not get to go through an orientation process, and she did not start the legislative session with her colleagues. Committee meetings were winding down when she beat Democrat Kevin McSherry to capture the 70th District House seat.

"It was jumping in with two feet," Rebimbas said, noting that she had to learn quickly.

Rebimbas worked hard to get elected, said Republican Party Chairman Chris Healy. He described how Rebimbas spoke Portuguese on the phone to local voters, trying to get them to the polls on a snowy day.

"She had just such a tenaciousness to her," he said, describing Rebimbas as a passionate and conservative lawmaker who has a good work ethic and solid values.

Rep. David Labriola, R-Oxford, helped Rebimbas campaign last year. The two have been friends since before they entered politics. Labriola said he helped Rebimbas get started as a lawyer and predicted a few years ago that she would end up running for state representative.

"She knows how to reach across the aisle and put together coalitions," Labriola said, adding that Rebimbas is not afraid to speak up and share her thoughts. "We use the microphone," Labriola said, explaining how Republicans represent their communities in a Democrat-dominated legislature.

Rebimbas serves on the legislature's appropriations, energy and technology, and public safety committees.

Do-It-Yourselfer

Rebimbas got her political start by serving on Naugatuck's finance and water pollution boards. She is also a member of the Naugatuck Republican Town Committee.

She has a bachelor's degree from **Fairfield University** and a law degree from the University of **Utah**, where she worked on the school's Innocence Project. Rebimbas currently works for Hardman, McPadden and Rebimbas LLC, a general law firm with offices in Naugatuck and **Middletown**.

Rebimbas volunteers for several organizations. She is president of Habitat for Humanity of Greater **Waterbury** Inc. and enjoys doing home repairs. She learned how to use tools and do construction work from her father, a carpenter, and is now fixing up her own Naugatuck home.