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HEADLINE: Cunningham spoke on Democratic primary in interview hours before he died

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BODY:

Hours before a massive heart attack killed Jersey City Mayor Glenn Cunningham, he spoke to The Associated Press about the 13th Congressional District Democratic primary race in which he backed an unknown candidate to run against the powerful Rep. Robert Menendez.

In a telephone interview, Cunningham spoke optimistically of candidate Steve Fulop's chances in a district dominated by the powerful Hudson County Democratic organization. Cunningham stunned state Democrats when he was elected mayor in 2001 in the city's nonpartisan elections.

"This is all about putting the right person in a very, very important job," Cunningham said. "He's running against a man who doesn't spend enough time fighting for people here. I like to think his (Fulop's) chances are great."

Cunningham, 60, said he backed Fulop after being impressed that the 27-year-old took a leave of absence from his job at Goldman Sachs to join the Marines Corps Reserves, and was deployed to Iraq in 2003 for six months.

Cunningham added that the 13th District needed more political leaders like Fulop, and said some people nicknamed Fulop "Corzine Junior," referring to New Jersey Democratic Sen. Jon Corzine, the former chairman of Goldman Sachs who was elected in 2000.

"Steve is a man of the future and what I'm trying to do is encourage younger people like him to become involved," Cunningham said. "

Cunningham spoke proudly of Jersey City, Hoboken and the other towns in the 13th District, calling the area a revitalized spot where young people no longer just lived there for short periods of time and then moved once they had school-age children.

"We're seeing a lot more younger people proudly calling themselves Jersey City-ites," Cunningham said.