

JAMIE ZAHLWAY BELSITO

CANDIDATE FOR CONGRESS IN THE SIXTH DISTRICT
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JORDAN STEWART
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Looking at Jamie Zahlway Belsito's platform, it quickly becomes clear how her history has shaped her policies. Belsito's family immigrated to the United States in the early 20th century. Her grandfather, who served in the Navy during World War II, worked well into his 70s; her father, a Vietnam war veteran, continues to work as a proud member of the Floor Layers Union.. Belsito grew up in Reading, attending Reading Public Schools the entirety of her childhood. She then continued her education at Salem State as a first-generation college graduate, where she is currently a school trustee.

Belsito had long held a passion for political activism. In 1996, shortly after graduating, she interned with Congressman Joe Moakley, saying he "taught me how to make government work for regular people." With Moakley, she worked to help a "backlog" of immigration files of those in need of help in the Congressman's district. She continued as an immigration specialist in the corporate world after her stint with Moakley.

In 2010, Belsito was laid off at eight months pregnant, leaving her with no income or health insurance. "The lifeline they handed me after this was a \$1300 a month COBRA plan," she said. "When you're unemployed, how are you supposed to come up with \$1300 a month?" This experience, coupled with her experiences with postpartum depression, inspired Belsito to begin her fight for improved maternal health care. Over the past five years she has helped establish a Maternal Mortality Review Board in MA, as well as frequently advocating for maternal mental health care as a member of a state commission on postpartum depression.

Her eyes remain fixed on continuing to fight for improved healthcare, particularly for marginalized groups but for the entire nation as well. "The first thing that needs to happen is everybody needs access to healthcare," she said, citing the Covid-19 pandemic as a particularly trying time for our healthcare system. "If the majority of people's healthcare is tied to their job, and people are losing their jobs left, right, and center, that means people don't have healthcare."

For Belsito, the Covid-19 pandemic has shined a light not only on disparities in equal access to healthcare, but on numerous other glaring social inequalities. "This time is going to prove to be the true test of how we support our education system," she said, speaking of challenges presented by the pandemic.. "There are families without access to wireless, to the technology they need to get their children an education. We need to realize this, and address it right now."

Belsito's other key issues include immigration reform, combatting climate change, and fighting for universal equal rights for all. While many of these are national issues, she believes "it all begins at a local level." Many of the same issues facing the country as a whole are prominent in the 6th district as well. Belsito pointed to disparities in local communities' education as just one example of this.

“When I’m looking at Lynn, it has 100,000 people in it, and 40 kids to a classroom- that doesn’t show the same picture that Reading does,” she pointed out, “Your zip code shouldn’t determine your education.”

To address these issues in Washington, Belsito noted the importance of giving a voice to these underrepresented communities. “The question I hear from people is ‘how are you going to make sure my voice is at the table,’” she said. “I want everybody to be part of the conversation. My door will always be open. We have to listen to the people who are continually being affected.”

Belsito says a large part of her decision to run is to give those underrepresented voices a seat at the table in Washington. “I see the heart, I see the soul here and it’s what made me who I am,” she said, speaking of her home in the 6th district. “I’m here to fight for communities like Bedford, like Reading, like Tewksbury, like the communities who have had no voice in this district and bring it to Washington.”