

## Menendez's Senate appointment will be a speedy one despite isotopes

*Some radioactive things are readily accepted.*

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WASHINGTON — Sometimes, politics takes a back seat to bureaucracy. Sometimes, they sit together in the front seat. Such may be the case next week.

Minutes after Sen. Jon S. Corzine is sworn in as governor of New Jersey on Tuesday, he will sign paperwork appointing Democratic Rep. Robert Menendez to serve the remainder of his Senate term — and then those documents will be sped back to Washington by car.

This process is designed, in part, so Menendez can cast his first Senate vote on whether fellow New Jerseyan Samuel Alito should be confirmed to the Supreme Court. Menendez remains undecided and says he hopes to meet with Alito before the vote, which Republicans want to take place next Friday.

Corzine could mail the letter, which informs the secretary of the Senate that he has resigned and named a replacement. But it would have to undergo irradiation tests, a rule in effect for all mail sent to the U.S. Capitol since the 2001 anthrax scare, said Senate Historian Richard Baker.

Since that could delay Menendez's swearing-in by about two weeks, Corzine decided to speed the process by having the letter hand-delivered.

And that's where Nicholas Chiaravalloti, Menendez's state director, comes in.

He will drive his 1997 Nissan Altima — full of gas and free of his two children's Cheerios and car seats — the 175 miles from the Statehouse in Trenton, N.J., to the Capitol, and deliver the letter before the close of business at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday.

"The last time I had this many people interested in whether I would arrive or not was my wedding," Chiaravalloti said. "That worked out fine."

Corzine is to be sworn in at noon Tuesday, so even if he doesn't hand the paperwork to Chiaravalloti until after his inaugural speech, Chiaravalloti should have enough time to complete the three-hour drive and make the delivery without too much angst.