
THE BROADWAY DEMOCRATS

◆ District Leaders: Curtis Arluck, Paula Diamond Román ◆ President: Mary Peppito ◆

Annual Town Hall: “Around 125th Street”

Invited:

Representative Adriano Espaillat

State Senator Cordell Cleare (30th District)

State Assemblymember Danny O’Donnell (69th District)

Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine

Councilmember Shaun Abreu (7th District)

NYPD (26th Precinct)

Sanitation Department

Community Board 9

Thursday, June 15, 2023

7:15pm - Sign-in/Refreshments

7:30pm - Town Hall

Speakers will make brief presentations,
followed by an in-depth question and answer session.

Manhattan Pentecostal Church

541 West 125th Street

(Between Amsterdam and Old Broadway)

for more information: DistrictLeaders@BroadwayDemocrats.org

THE BROADWAY DEMOCRATS

◆ District Leaders: Curtis Arluck, Paula Diamond Román ◆ President: Mary Peppito ◆

Volume 48, Issue 6

June 2023

President's Corner

Scaffles, Millennials and Issues for Democrats in the 2024 Election

Mary Peppito

Two recent articles in the New York Times declare that 1.) Millennials Aren't an Exception. They Have Moved to the Right (<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/01/upshot/millennials-polling-politics-republicans.html>); and that 2.) To Understand the '24 Race, Remember the 'Scaffle Vote' ("DeSantis and the 'Scaffle' Vote in online edition <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/25/briefing/ron-desantis.html?searchResultPosition=1>).

Meanwhile, the New York Post has declared that the problem with the Scaffle voter for Democrats is that the "more affluent and educated voters, who tend to be "very socially liberal" and who "contribute an enormous amount to the Democratic Party" have too much influence over their platform, while these economically liberal, socially conservative voters are being swayed by 'Scaffle' Republicans like DeSantis and Trump. (<https://nypost.com/2023/06/02/don-rickles-trump-bidens-primary-elex-woes-and-other-commentary/>).

What is a Scaffle? Apparently it's the new term for "socially conservative, fiscally liberal" voters. For example, while these Scaffle voters are suspect of transgender care for minors, they want government healthcare and lower drug prices.

What is a Millennial? It is a voter who propelled Barack Obama to the presidency in 2008 and again in 2012, that is, those born between 1980-1994.

While Millennials have not become as conservative as previous generations, but they have shifted to the right, and it's the margins that are concerning. Certainly, given that traditional Democratic voting groups, i.e, the Latino and Black communities have also lost ground to Republican candidates/ideology, such shift in younger voters is concerning. Elections are sometimes won in the margins.

We are just gearing up for the fight in 2024, but we must keep in mind what we are up against this year to persuade our traditional voting base. To be sure, Republicans are giving us a lot of talking points

on reproductive rights and the right to privacy and other issues that threaten the very fabric of our constitutional freedoms. But, to persuade voters, we must keep in mind the fiscally liberal voters and remind them that we are the party of healthcare and lower drug prices—as well as freedom and individual liberties.



District Leaders' Reports

Curtis Arluck

Remembering Bill Perkins

I first got to know Bill when we were each seeking our first election as Democratic District Leader in 1979. I was unopposed, Bill had a tough race against an incumbent. But he won, we became friends and running partners—he was much faster and he also trained much harder—and eventually we political kids became Elder Leaders, outranked in seniority as Manhattan DL's only by Jim McManus and Denny Farrell. Now all are gone.

Bill served Harlem, the Upper West Side and Washington Heights as City Council Member and State Senator for 24 years, from 1997 to 2021. He fought for affordable housing, public education—including opposing private Charter Schools' invasion of public school buildings—the environment, social and economic justice for minorities, women, LGBTQ communities, unions, prisoners. His signature legislative achievement was the Childhood Lead Paint Poisoning Prevention Act of 2004; his signature moral and legal achievement was never letting go until the Central Park Five became the Exonerated Five. It is a fitting tribute to Bill's leadership, mentorship and character that the Mom who turned him on to the dangers of lead paint and became his Chief of Staff, Cordell Cleare, now represents his old State Senate District. It will be an even greater tribute to his legacy if his Schomburg Plaza neighbor Yusef Salaam, the kid whose innocence and goodness he never doubted, wins his old City Council seat in the June 27th primary.

Bill's tenacity, effectiveness and fights for all kinds of justice have been well-documented. Less spoken of is his intellectual curiosity: he loved talking about ideas, both as a teacher and even more

importantly as a learner. He loved talking about issues, running, food, sports, culture. He loved people, especially kids. He never backed away from his opinions, but he was always willing to listen to the other side

On behalf of the Broadway Democrats, I extend my deepest sympathy to Bill's wife, Pamela Green Perkins, his mother-in-law, Janny Green, his children, siblings, friends and neighbors in Harlem and all over the city. We are devastated by Bill's loss, but so honored to have walked, and in some cases run, the earth with him.



Reminder: Because there are no opposed races, Election Day and Early Voting Polls are closed in almost all of our area this month. The only exceptions are if you live in the 9th Council District and/or the 70th Assembly District. If you have any questions, contact Curtis and Paula districtleaders@broadwaydemocrats.org.



Paula Diamond Román

Yusef Salaam

I've been thinking a lot lately about the voices in our public sphere. I turn on the news and hear the voices of our leaders, city and nation, past and present. I turn on the local news and listen to Mayor Eric Adams, try to explain why he's allowing the Republicans to manipulate him into removing the guarantees of shelter so precious to our city. I put on MSNBC only to go back and forth between President Joe Biden explaining why he wants to empower the IRS to go after billionaire tax cheats who aren't paying their fair share, therefore contributing to our national debt, and our previous president talking about ... well, I don't usually know what he's talking about.

There are other voices catching my attention, one no longer in the public arena. Former State Senator and City Councilmember Bill Perkins, who died on May 16, had an incredibly powerful voice and a very different voice. Holding office in the Republican-controlled State Senate, Bill never hesitated to use his voice to bring attention to progressive issues that might have gone unnoticed otherwise. One of these issues was the City's refusal to acknowledge how badly they mistreated the five Black and Latino teenagers known as the Central Park Five; Bill was one of the first to stand up for them, at a time when it was extremely unpopular to

do so and a man we would later know as president would buy an entire page in the New York Times demanding their execution. Bill was the very epitome of speaking truth to power and, when he accumulated some power as an elected official, he used that to magnify his voice and the truth.

Another voice, powerful and different, that I've been listening to a lot lately is that of Yusef Salaam, one of the exonerated Central Park Five. We ask our elected officials to make so many decisions about criminal justice, incarceration, and policing; yet most of them have a monolithic background on those issues. Few people who run for office have ever been arrested for anything but protesting, ever been convicted of a felony, or ever spent time in prison. (Assemblymember Eddie Gibbs was elected in 2022 as the first formerly incarcerated person elected to the state legislature.) Yusef has experienced the full might of the NYPD concentrating on getting a false confession out of a 15-year-old; he has experienced prison conditions; he has experienced many people, including that former president, doubting his innocence. His is an unusual voice in a candidate.

The first time I heard Yusef's (adult) voice, I was a graduate student at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. One of my professors had completed a sentence and much of his education in an Illinois State prison for his involvement in a Chicago gang, so I had already begun an education in the voices of "others." Yusef, who had only been exonerated for a few years and recently started his public speaking career, had been invited to speak about his experiences. I was thrown back in time to 1989 when I had just moved to Manhattan Valley; I had both identified with rape survivor Trisha Meili, and filled with disbelief at the teenagers' treatment by the police. However, when Yusef finished speaking, I was less filled with anger than with a fervor to do justice and more knowledge of where to focus. I'm still taken aback by his ability to find peace and passion at the same time.

Last year, State Senator Cordell Cleare hosted a community tribute to Bill and to Congressman Charles B. Rangel, where I finally got the opportunity to introduce myself to Yusef and describe how pivotal a role he had played in my growth as a student of criminal justice. I had several additional opportunities to speak with him and watch him speak with others and, at the Broadway Democrats' fundraiser in May, I endorsed Yusef Salaam for City Council in the 9th district.

There are so many reasons to support Yusef in addition to the uniqueness of his voice. He shares many of our views on truly affordable housing, higher wages and benefits, high quality education, quality

of life and safe streets. He also shares some of those views with other candidates for various offices but, when you put his commitment to equity, justice, and systemic change together with the uniqueness of his voice, it is difficult not to listen.

P.S.: Thursday morning June 8, Luis and I will be at the 110th Street and Frederick Douglas Boulevard B/C subway station with Yusef from 7:30-9:00am so you can hear about his platform directly from the candidate's mouth. If you can't make it but would like to volunteer for other subway opportunities or phone-banking, please email me at valleygirl109@rocketmail.com.

🔗

Disclaimer: unless otherwise indicated, items herein reflect the views of their authors only. They are published as a part of our club's commitment to the free and open exchange of ideas on topics of interest, but their publication should not be construed as an endorsement by the editor, the Steering Committee, or the Broadway Democrats club.

🔗

The Lawsuit You Probably Don't Know About – but Maybe You Should

Pat Almonrode,
Steering Committee Member

Wong et al. v. NYCERS et al.

On May 11, 2023, a lawsuit was filed in NY State Supreme Court in Manhattan, alleging that three of NYC's five municipal pension funds breached their fiduciary duty to their members when they shed their investments in the fossil fuel industry. As the complaint in *Wong et al. v. NYCERS et al.* says:

The New York City Employees' Retirement System ("NYCERS"), the Teachers' Retirement System of the City of New York ("TRS"), and the Board of Education Retirement System of the City of New York ("BERS") ... are obligated to administer their respective Qualified Pension Plans ... solely in the interests of the Plans' participants and beneficiaries, and for the exclusive purpose of providing retirement benefits. But instead of honoring that obligation, Defendants have breached their fiduciary duties and abused their control over plan assets by divesting the Plans of approximately four billion dollars of holdings in companies involved in the extraction of fossil fuels, in a misguided and ineffectual gesture to address climate change.

This unlawful decision to elevate unrelated policy goals over the financial health of the Plans is flatly inconsistent with the Defendants' fiduciary responsibilities, and jeopardizes the retirement security of Plan participants and beneficiaries. It must be enjoined.

As the complaint lays out in some detail, on January 25, 2021, the NYCERS and TRS Boards of Trustees "voted to divest their respective plans of all securities related to fossil fuel companies. The BERS Board of Trustees voted to divest from fossil fuels shortly thereafter."

This decision was in some ways the fruit of a long campaign by activists that started years before the 2018 announcement. It was critical to win over then-Comptroller Scott Stringer in particular, because the Comptroller is one of the trustees of each of the pension funds and wields a certain amount of influence over the other trustees. He was skeptical at first, arguing that the funds could best influence the fossil fuel industry's behavior by continuing to hold investments (and votes). But after long study and consultation, Stringer became convinced that divestment was a proper exercise of fiduciary duty.

And once the funds got started, they continued: in March 2021, "the NYCERS, TRS, and BERS Trustees voted to double their plans' investments in 'climate change solutions.'" Then-Mayor de Blasio "heralded '[t]his multi-billion investment in green tech and divestment from fossil fuels' as 'a winning combination for our planet, our city and our pensioners,' while NYCERS Trustee Henry Garrido added: 'New York City must be a global leader on climate change. We made a commitment to put our money where our mouth is and did just that.'"

So What About Divestment?

Divestment is an important strategy for the climate movement. Remember *It's a Wonderful Life*, when Jimmy Stewart's George Bailey stops a run on the bank by telling his neighbors their money's not "in" the bank, it's been loaned out to Fred's farm and Betty's beauty parlor? The same is true in the real world, with banks, investment houses (BlackRock, Vanguard), sovereign wealth funds, university endowments, and pensions loaning the many trillions of dollars they control out to businesses, including hundreds of billions each year to the fossil fuel industry. But the thing is, just like in Bedford Falls, that's not "the banks' money," it's *our* money. I don't know about you, but I don't want my money used to burn up the planet.

So that's the moral case for divestment; but there's a financial case as well. More and more, fossil fuels are becoming a risky investment. The

obscene profits the Oil Majors are currently making because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine can't disguise the fact that fossil fuels are doomed and dying. According to a 2022 paper from the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis:

Market forces now favor fossil fuel competitors; cost efficiencies, innovation and public opinion are converging to move trillions of dollars to sustainable alternatives. ... Weak economic performance and an unstable future for fossil fuels have made it clear that divestment can be achieved without financial harm to any individual investment fund. Divestment is a tool to protect investors from the loss of value—losses as certain as climate change's global reach.

But in the face of this and many similar analyses, the *Wong* complaint makes the ridiculous argument that by trying to protect pensioners from the sure and certain long-term risk that climate chaos poses not only to their retirement funds but to their very existence, the funds are instead *jeopardizing* "the retirement security of Plan participants and beneficiaries" in "an utter abandonment of fiduciary responsibilities that no responsible private sector trustee would countenance."

Who is AFFT?

The plaintiffs named in *Wong* are four individual pensioners and one organization, Americans for Fair Treatment, Inc. (AFFT). And the individual plaintiffs are really just patsies being used by AFFT to get through the courthouse door. AFFT boasts a grand total of *fourteen* members among the many hundreds of thousands of fund participants and beneficiaries. But even though it "represents" only a miniscule percentage of plan participants, there's no doubt that AFFT is actually bringing this suit, and paying the exorbitant rates of the plaintiffs' lawyers.

And AFFT is, quite frankly, a nasty bunch of folks. Their stated purpose, about which they're quite unabashed, is to "educate[] public employees about their rights in a unionized workplace and connect[] these employees with all available resources to defend those rights." In other words, they're union-busters. AFFT is an associate member of the State Policy Network, a group of rightwing think tanks and other politically-active nonprofits. The Center for Media and Democracy describes SPN "and its member think tanks are major drivers of the right-wing, American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC)-backed corporate agenda in state houses nationwide, with deep ties to the [uber-reactionary] Koch brothers and a national right-wing network of funders."

Ironic, isn't it, that these folks claim to be *protecting* the pensions of NYC public employees?

Stay in touch!

visit us at

<http://www.broadwaydemocrats.org>

or

join us on Facebook at

<facebook.com/groups/BroadwayDemocrats/>

AFFT is gonna lose – but they'll still do damage

It's still early days, of course, but many observers think that AFFT's suit is unlikely to succeed. The trend in the law is to recognize that climate risk *is* financial risk – one that a fiduciary has a clear duty to mitigate and avoid. In other words, divestment *is* the right thing for a fiduciary to do.

However, the goal of AFFT here is not necessarily to win. This lawsuit is part of a sweeping political campaign that includes things like the pushback by Republican Attorneys General against the imposition of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) regulations on investments, and efforts in Texas and elsewhere to make it harder to install and operate solar and wind-power facilities. And even if AFFT ultimately loses this lawsuit, they and their allies will have won if the suit has the effect of making some *other* pension fund think twice before divesting. Many funds will find that it's easier to do nothing, especially if that means they'll avoid becoming the target of a similar suit.

We'll have to see how this all plays out, but for now – stay tuned!

MEMBERSHIP

Become a member of
the Broadway Democrats!

Dues are \$25/year (seniors and students \$10/year), and help defray the costs of presenting forums and our monthly newsletter.

send a check to:

BROADWAY DEMOCRATS

P.O. BOX 1099 CATHEDRAL STATION
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10025

or join online at

www.broadwaydemocrats.org/pay-your-annual-dues.html

Send to: The Broadway Democrats, P.O. Box 1099, Cathedral Station, New York, NY 10025

Special Interests:

E-mail:

Telephone:

Address:

Name: (title, honorifics, and pronouns optional)

Name:

To join the Broadway Democrats, please fill out the form below and mail with your check (made out to "Broadway Democrats") to the address at the bottom. Welcome!

In order to vote in club elections (endorsements, elections of officers, judicial convention, amendments), you must be an eligible, voting member of the Broadway Democrats. You must have attended at least one of the previous nine monthly public meetings and you must pay your dues. Dues partially defray the costs of presenting forums and putting out this newsletter. Dues are \$25; senior dues are \$10.

Membership

The Broadway Democrats Newsletter

June 2023

FIRST

CLASS

P.O. Box 1099
Cathedral Station
New York, NY 10025

Assemblymember: Daniel O'Donnell
District Leaders:
Curtis Arluck
Paula Diamond Román
President: Mary Peppito
Newsletter Editor: Pat Almonrode

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

