
THE BROADWAY DEMOCRATS

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

March General Meeting: **Who Does What** **in State and City Government?** *A Civics Lesson on How to Solve a Problem*

Which level of government handles which kinds of issues – and who is the correct authority to ask? This forum will provide the tools and know-how to navigate the maze of bureaucracy.

invited speakers (additional speakers to be announced):

Jeff Coltin

City Hall Bureau Chief at *City & State New York*

Ester Fuchs

School of International & Public Affairs, Columbia University

Hon. Mark Levine

Manhattan Borough President

Please join us on Zoom

Thursday, March 9

Club business 7:30pm

Forum 8:00pm

Register: bit.ly/2023marchforum

for more information: DistrictLeaders@BroadwayDemocrats.org

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President's Corner

Why the Chief Judge of the State's highest court is so consequential

It's not just abortion and labor laws – Democracy itself is on the table.

Mary Peppito

The battle to replace conservative Chief Judge Janet DiFiore, who retired under the shadow of scandal in July 2022, is not only important to protect civil rights and liberties in New York State. Her replacement might well preserve democracy in New York.

Recently, we witnessed a high profile fight over the Governor's nomination of conservative Democratic Justice Hector LaSalle to be the Chief Judge of the highest court in New York. Ultimately, following an unprecedented vote in the full Senate after the Senate Judiciary Committee refused to approve his nomination, LaSalle was defeated.

Looming large over LaSalle's defeat was the recent decision of the U.S. Supreme Court overturning *Roe v. Wade*, that had New Yorkers laser-focused on the importance of preserving all privacy rights at the state level. However, we would also do well to remember that, if (when) cases arise on voting rights, civil rights, campaign finance and other issues with a direct effect on democracy, the Chief Judge often has the last word as well.

For example, the perfect storm that led to 2022 Congressional Republican gains in New York State was created in part by conservative judges in New York State's highest court who sided with the Republicans who had strategically sued in tiny Steuben County to throw out the congressional redistricting maps created by the elected legislature. In a decision authored by then-Chief Judge DiFiore – a former Republican prosecutor from Westchester – the conservative majority of the Court of Appeals sided with the Republicans to give the authority to redraw NY's congressional maps to a town judge in remote western New York, instead of returning that task to the legislature.

This usurpation of legislative authority is truly shocking. Indeed, even the Steuben County judge himself had proposed to send the maps back to the legislature, and the intermediate appellate court agreed with that solution, the conservative Court of Appeals majority decided to leave redrawing the maps to the sole discretion of this town judge. Judge DiFiore and the three other conservatives single-handedly changed the balance of legislative power in the country, wiping out four Democratic congressional seats and giving three of them to Republicans (a Democratic seat was also lost in 2020 reapportionment). Currently, the Republicans hold a narrow five-seat majority in the U.S. Congress.

The abrupt departure of DiFiore left an ideological 3-3 split, with Acting Chief Judge Cannataro, Judge Garcia and Judge Singas on the conservative side and three moderate to progressive judges – Judge Wilson, Judge Rivera and Judge Troutman – on the other. Given that, from the U.S. Supreme Court on down, our judges are now openly political actors, the next Chief Judge of the New York Court of Appeals will have the power to either preserve democratic values or empower a conservative minority to have the last word about the most important issues in our state. We stopped LaSalle; we must continue to be on our guard.



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District Leaders' Reports

Paula Diamond Román

I watched the 2023 State of the Union with a pleasure I don't experience most years and with a renewed admiration for President Biden. After the introductions and the joking, the very first point he made was about job creation. He followed that by reminding us of the success of the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

President Biden spoke with pride about the creation of 800,000 "good-paying manufacturing jobs" for the middle-class, although I think his definition of the middle-class is oddly broad. He also spoke with sorrow about the how the original loss of those sorts of jobs had turned "thriving cities and towns into ... shadows of what they used to be." He talked about new jobs that pay a decent salary for people who worked in and around factories, without dramatically changing their training and education.

President Biden also addressed the inflation in the prices of food and other goods, as well as gas prices. Some of this is as a direct result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, "the breadbasket of Europe;" some of it is still a result of the pandemic; and some of it has been caused by price gougers taking advantage of the situation. Some saw a silver lining in the gas prices, hoping that it would encourage the purchase of hybrids and electric cars, but people who can't afford gas to get to work also can't afford to buy a new car. Cash incentives for buying more fuel efficient vehicles are a nice bonus for middle-class people already planning to buy a car but they don't make a car purchase possible for most people.

I firmly believe that we have overlooked the urgency of job insecurity in non-urban areas across our country. Neither party has addressed it well, although the Democrats have tried to avoid lying and scapegoating. It's time for us to stop condescending towards people who miss the horrible, dangerous, unhealthy jobs in coal mines that allowed them to buy a house and feed and clothe their children. It's time for us to stop labelling as "other" those whose problems may look different on the surface.

There's been talk at various forums about the battles fought by NYSCOPBA, the union that represents correctional officers and some police officers. NYSCOPBA has often been the biggest obstacle to achieving reasonable criminal justice reform because many of those reforms would decrease the prison population, resulting in prison closures and loss of corrections jobs.

Most of us agree that there can't be social and racial justice until our country decreases the number of people incarcerated. However, there is less agreement about how to help local economies that are completely dependent on prison jobs and the money they bring to local businesses. Many years ago, Assemblyman Jeffrion Aubry, then Chairman of Corrections, spoke to our club about various criminal justice issues. In addition to his background teaching in a penitentiary and working at an agency for at-risk youth, he had also worked in economic and small business development. He spoke very passionately about the need to find other avenues of economic development in counties with prison-based economies as part and parcel of working to reduce the prison population. New York State was responsible for creating the situation; NYS must actively seek holistic solutions to the situation.

I know it's easier to blame racism and/or ignorance when people vote Republican. However, I hear too much ignorance on the part of many good Democrats about the dramatic differences between urban centers and the rest of the country: ignorance about how much less diverse and complex non-urban economies usually are; ignorance about how, in many places, public transportation just doesn't make sense; ignorance about the fear of people in those places who have watched job opportunities disappear and towns wither. I also see plenty of people who share my political orientation who don't vet their news sources and base their opinions on the titles of articles they see posted on social media.

Returning to the State of the Union Address, I came away from it with a new respect for our president. My father's side of the family was firmly blue-collar and I was raised to appreciate the importance of good union jobs, and of jobs that didn't require a college degree (and college loan debt). I know that there are lots of other crucial issues to be addressed in our country right now (and President Biden addressed most of them) but it's difficult to address them when so many people are worried about providing food, water, clothing, and shelter for their families. I also came away from the speech with a renewed appreciation for those whose problems may look different from mine on the surface.

Fighting for the sake of fighting, power for the sake of power, conflict for the sake of conflict gets us nowhere. That's always been my vision of our country, and I know it's many of yours: to restore the soul of this nation.



Curtis Arluck

Thank you for your support at our Endorsement Meeting! Weather permitting, Paula and I will be out there starting this Saturday (Morningside Farmers Market) and Sunday (Columbia Farmers Market), gathering petitions, talking about what we're up to, and finding out what issues our community thinks we and the Broadway Democrats should be emphasizing. Join us!

The decisive defeat of Judge **Hector La Salle** was a sad but necessary outcome to a nomination that Governor Hochul made without consulting leading Democrats or really any of the constituencies that elected her. Within a few months of each other President Biden and Governor Hochul faced crucial choices about who to appoint to top courts. Biden picked the outstanding and inspiring Ketanji Brown Jackson; Hochul the placid and well to the right of our state's judicial center Hector La Salle. This shortly after the State's Court of Appeals by a one vote margin threw out the State's Congressional lines which were far better than those enacted in at least ten Republican States, and also, in an atrociously legally bad decision, essentially said that the NY Legislature could not draw its own lines for State Senate and State Assembly, even though the lines it drew were not found to be gerrymandered. With La Salle on the bench, at least in any close vote, the likelihood is that every progressive initiative that the Legislature passed would have been endangered. It was also very unfair that the Governor played into the hands of those who said the vote against La Salle was anti-Latino. Actually, the fact that he is a Latino was the only positive reason to vote for La Salle; without this, he would have gotten no votes from Senate Democrats rather than the few he did get. Of course I feel a bit sad for Justice La Salle, who seems to be a person of integrity and competence. But he's just too conservative. We have to do better, Gov. Hochul!

The excellent article in the Sunday NY Times by Ross Barkan (former State Senate candidate as well as journalist) about the failures of the State Democratic Party, "**What the Hell Are We Even Doing?**", continues an important discussion we've been having in our club and all over the state. Barkan gives Democratic State Party Chair Jay Jacobs a platform, and correctly points out that Jacobs is a symptom rather than the cause of the problems of NY's Democratic Party, but he also makes it clear that, as Broadway Democrats and so many others have said, Jacobs must go. My biggest criticism of Jacobs is not that Democrats did so badly in Nassau County, Jacobs' home turf. I honestly believe that no Chair would have done much better

there last year. For me, the biggest problem is that he regards progressive Democrats as his enemies rather than his allies.

Consider Jamal Bowman, a progressive junior Congressman from a progressive Bronx/South Westchester district. Just about everybody who knows Jamal knows that he is both highly pragmatic and highly compassionate. A letter he wrote to an anguished Jewish constituent about the tragic Palestinian situation is one of the most moving and effective pieces of writing I have read on this or any subject. He's also the one who, at the end of Biden's masterful State of the Union address, grabbed him and said, "Great speech, Mr. President!" What did Jay Jacobs do? He gave the maximum allowable amount to Bowman's primary opponent!

RL

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RL

What makes this awful situation so frustrating is that six months ago it virtually did not exist. Governor Hochul was relatively popular with progressive Democrats. Her 2022 budget went through the Legislature with little complaint. In our area, which had voted overwhelmingly for Zephyr Teachout and narrowly for Cynthia Nixon over Andrew Cuomo, Hochul beat the progressive Jumaane Williams by better than two-to-one. Our State Legislators Danny O'Donnell and Cordell Cleare got along well with the Governor; she came to Barnard in the days before the election when she knew she needed progressive votes; she won here in November with 91%, barely from the Biden showing in 2020.

Then it all collapsed. The disastrous Congressional results and the lackluster showing by other NY Democrats understandably caused a lot of recriminations. But there were plenty of other bright spots, and plenty of successful Democratic gubernatorial candidates to emulate: Josh Shapiro, Gretchen Whitmer, Tony Evers, Katie Hobbs—none of them, by the way, far-left progressives. The successful Democratic model is the one followed by Joe Biden, Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi nationally and Tish James and Andrea Stewart-

Cousins locally: run to the center-left, try to get as many progressive victories as you possibly can, work both with the moderates in the swing districts and the progressives who are your party's soul and provide most of its activists. Governor Hochul did this for most of 2022. Since then, it's been the La Salle nomination and raising the charter school cap and too many budget cuts. By most accounts she's barely speaking with the Albany Democrats.

To bring our party back we need to get back to what we did so successfully for so long. This must start at the top. Of course I mean Jay Jacobs. But most of all I mean Kathy Hochul.



Club Endorsements

At our February 9 General Meeting the Broadway Democrats endorsed **Shaun Abreu** for City Council (7th District), **Dana Catanzaro** for Manhattan Civil Court Judge (Countywide), **Denise Dominguez** for Manhattan Civil Court Judge (District 7), and **Curtis Arluck (M)** and **Paula Diamond Roman (F)** for Democratic District Leaders, 69th AD Part C.

Petitioning begins Tuesday, February 28, and we need the petitions back by Sunday, April 2. All candidates need to gather signatures to get on the ballot. This is especially important for our District Leaders and County Committee because we're the only ones petitioning for ourselves. We'll be tabling all over the neighborhood, including our two farmers' markets. If you have any questions, please email Curtis and Paula at BwayDemsDLs@gmail.com.

Please fill out our form at tinyurl.com/petitioning-and-tabling-2023 to let us know when you can join us tabling in the neighborhood!



Letter-writing and post-carding for the Wisconsin Supreme Court election

Peter Flom, Steering Committee Member

On April 4 there will be an election for the Wisconsin Supreme Court that could determine the balance of the court. Liberal Janet Protasiewicz will face conservative Daniel Kelly.

You can write letters or postcards to remind Wisconsin voters how crucial this election is. For letter writing, go to <https://votefwd.org/>. Vote Forward gives you names and addresses and a

letter template. You add a personal message to the letter, address the letter, and send it off. You can write as many letters as you like. I'm doing this now and have done it in several past campaigns.

If you prefer, you can send post cards. One group doing this was formerly known as Reclaim Our Vote and is now known as Sincere. You have to be invited. For an invitation, email Meika Mustrangi at meika@centerforcommonground.org.



We Want To Hear What You Have To Say!



Email submissions to the editor (in MS Word, please) at palmonrode@gmail.com.

Please note that we will consider all submissions, but we reserve the exclusive and final right to determine what to publish.



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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

March 2023

FIRST
CLASS

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