
THE BROADWAY DEMOCRATS

♦ District Leaders: Curtis Arluck, Paula Diamond Román ♦ President: Joe Nunley ♦

September General Meeting: Stop the Parole-to- Prison Pipeline!



Join us for a presentation and Q&A about **#LessIsMoreNY**, a bill that only needs Governor Kathy Hochul's signature to become law. This legislation promises to end the senseless incarceration of people for violating technical parole rules (and offers incentives for parolees to abide by those rules).

Speakers will include:

Staff from the Katal Center for Equity, Health & Justice,
staff from the Center for Justice at Columbia University,
NYCLU Executive Director Donna Lieberman,
and persons adversely affected by the current parole system. Our elected officials are also invited:
Lt. Governor Brian Benjamin (bill sponsor), State Senator Robert Jackson (bill co-sponsor),
and Assemblymember Danny O'Donnell (bill co-sponsor).

online, via Zoom

Thursday, September 9

Meeting starts at 7:30 p.m. sharp!

RSVP at bit.ly/broadwaydems-sept9

THE BROADWAY DEMOCRATS

◆ District Leaders: Curtis Arluck, Paula Diamond Román ◆ President: Joe Nunley ◆

Volume 46, Issue 8

September 2021

District Leaders' Reports

Curtis Arluck

Kathy Hochul Beckons to Brian Benjamin; County Committee Meeting Beckons For Us

In one of several moves showing that she is off to a very promising start, Governor Kathy Hochul picked our own State Senator Brian Benjamin as New York's next Lieutenant Governor. No legislative approval being needed for this interim appointment, Senator Benjamin will be sworn in in a few days.

Every indication is that this is a serious appointment, done as much because of Brian Benjamin's qualifications for the job as for political considerations. In terms of age, gender, race and geography, Lt. Governor Benjamin complements Governor Hochul very well. But there is clearly chemistry between the two, and there is no doubt that Brian's role in the State Senate Leadership, his complete grasp of fiscal affairs, and his strong commitment to restoring justice to our court and prison systems were very important reasons he got the job. This is not yet an endorsement; Governor Hochul may face strong opposition next year. What is certain is that the Hochul-Benjamin ticket is one we could support with pride and purpose.

Our joy in Senator Benjamin's elevation is tempered a bit by our loss of him as our State Senator. But there will soon be a new State Senator, and we will be part of the process to select the best person for the job.

The date of the Special Election to succeed Senator Benjamin has not yet been set, but it is all but certain it will be held at the same time as the November 2nd General Election for Mayor and other local offices. This way, the turnout will be respectably high. We all remember voting in other Special Elections, often in terrible weather, where the poll sites resembled frontier outposts.

Since NY State as opposed to NY City has partisan Special Elections, the Democratic nominee to succeed Senator Benjamin will be selected by the Democratic County Committee Members from the 30th State Senate District, which comprises all of Central Harlem and Manhattan Valley, and parts of West Harlem, East Harlem, Morningside Heights

and the Upper West Side. Don't grouse too much about this nomination being made by the County Committee. It is written in the NY Election Law, and if it were done by primary, there would also have to be a Special Primary Election, it would take weeks to count the ballots, and the district would be without a State Senator for months. Also, we've learned from recent City Council Special Elections that "non-partisan" elections are nothing of the kind: partisan Democrats and in some areas partisan Republicans create "parties" with names out of Monty Python, and the same partisan types win these "non-partisan" elections.

Broadway Democrats will play a major role at the County Committee meeting, which is likely to be held in mid-September. We have 71 County Committee members in the 30th SD. Paula and I will see if we can arrange a Zoom forum to interview the candidates. Something like 14 people have announced that they are interested. We are starting to talk to the major candidates, and are trying to keep an open mind. What we're not inclined to do is support the incumbent Assembly Members from the 70th and 71st AD's, both of whom are running for the State Senate seat. We need new blood, not a revolving door.

DR

Paula Diamond Román

I'm spending a lot less time on Facebook lately. Originally, I used FB for political organizing, houseplant and cooking tips, and keeping in touch with high school and college friends; sometimes, they even overlap! Recently, though, I've started finding FB affecting my sense of well-being and making me a little twitchy.

Ironically, I'm not reacting to people "on the other side of the aisle" or people posting flagrantly incorrect information about politics or COVID. My headaches, tense muscles, and twitching psyche are primarily in reaction to people I've known forever, people who by-and-large share my political beliefs. It isn't what they're saying, it's **how** they're saying it. One commentator refers to it as "anger porn," or the thrill ride of rage; I think of it more as a drug that temporarily makes us feel better as we come to need more and more of it.

After the four years of the previous administration, ending with the COVID pandemic and the deaths of 400,000 Americans, and the January 6th insurrection, it's very challenging not to be constantly furious. Now we have the new variants and the wave of deaths among the unvaccinated, largely in states with Republican governors; we have this continuous foot-dragging around the filibuster and down-right lying about the John Lewis voting rights bills and voter fraud. It's even more challenging not to feel like things haven't changed. One of the many people we talked to while tabling this weekend expressed her feelings of frustration and disgust that things hadn't changed. It's even more challenging not to feel like the people "on the other side of the aisle" are evil. My vaccinated, mask-wearing g*ddaughter moved to Miami to become a teacher and, five minutes later, had COVID; she's much better now but I'm **furious**.

The problem is that this isn't helpful. It doesn't move us forward and we badly need to move forward. Being angry and characterizing "others" as evil, backward, stupid doesn't move us forward. On a recent episode of The Late Show, Stephen Colbert interviewed Dr. Jonathan LaPook, Chief Medical Correspondent for CBS News and a gastroenterologist at NYU Langone. Dr. LaPook addressed the issue of how we speak with people who have chosen not to be vaccinated if our is for them to get vaccinated, rather than to vent at them. He echoed the need for trusted leaders within each community "but in addition, we have to have more empathy as we're trying to change people's minds." He acknowledges that there is a group whose minds can't be changed but he also identifies a group who have concerns that we would label "science-deniers," stupid, "Trumpers," ignorant, superstitious, whatever, but we **can** change their minds ...

... if you talk to them the right way. We come into these conversations coiled. They're coiled and we're coiled. And, we strike. So, we need to get the fangs back, and we need to uncoil. And, to start off, not by talking but by listening.

By asking people what their concerns are, he suggests we can find common ground and earn their trust about our differences (for more information about promoting empathy in medicine, go to <https://www.empathyproject.com/>).

I have a high school friend who grew up in Washington Heights, still lives there and is involved with politics up there, works with kids, and is arranging or and publicizing pop-up vaccination

sites in his community. "Coach" David Crenshaw is also personally volunteering at many of these sites. Unlike other places, many the unvaccinated in NYC are Black and Latinx people who have not had the same access to vaccinations but who are also aware that the medical community has not only treated them with respect. Crenshaw verbally grabs people walking by, one by one, and chats with them about whether they're vaccinated and why not. He has an incredible success rate.

This change in philosophy and approach has ramifications far beyond COVID. I recently read Katherine Grace Bond's article in Medium, "Should We Love Our Right-Leaning Fellow Humans?" Her answer, right off the bat? "Well, How's All That Hate Working for Us?" Bond is a teacher who used to be a creationist; there is a wide spectrum of political beliefs among her friends and family; she credits the empathy and loving patience of her brother-in-law for seeing the fallacies in creationism. She also describes the worries of a friend to the right of her and most of you reading this article; her friend watched the transfer of power in January and worried that the government was now run by people who hated her.

In the last several years, the frenzied pace of unfriending is surpassed only by the taunts and name-calling between Left and Right. The stakes are high. Great is the temptation to go into scathing righteousness mode. But between social injustice and the pandemic, the stakes are people's lives. So, I am working to (read: struggling to) speak my truth in love.

Bond describes the people who we strongly disagree with as "contra-orbital," people who we are tempted to unfriend on social media and in real life, people we want to throw away. The problem is that, if we throw these people away, they will find people who want them, who treat them with respect, who will at least lie about listening to and meeting their needs, who will organize them into a voting bloc. Does treating people badly who we disagree with in the pit of our stomach accomplish what we need to? (To read the entire article, go to <https://katherinegracebond.medium.com/should-we-love-our-right-leaning-fellow-humans-243dce24505>).

It might help if we extended Bond's philosophy to the Democrats we disagreed with in the past and, perhaps, still disagree with. If past Democrats may have over-emphasized strengthening the financial sector, we currently have seen incredible shifts back towards workers' concerns. Quite frankly, I believe that emphasis lost us potential

Democrats who just want to have a decent life. President Biden holds some positions to the right of many Broadway Democrats, he also shares that concern for workers as manifested by the stimulus money and the new infrastructure bill. In addition, he has shown a willingness to listen to his Vice-President and many members of Congress, moving a little bit more away from the center each time and keeping the focus on a decent life for all Americans. We can do our bit to encourage that movement.

As I mentioned before, we spent some of the past weekend tabling. With the summer over, we wanted to let people know the Broadway Democrats is gearing up again and we wanted to let people know about our September 9th forum on #LessIsMore, the incredibly important parole reform bill waiting for our new governor's signature. On Sunday, I was tabling with Meika Mustrangi who put together the forum, as well as the informational materials we were distributing. At one point, we got very busy and were each explaining the bill to different people; Meika was doing better with her "customer" than I was so I pulled out an argument from the justice reinvestment movement about how this fair and reasonable reform would also save money. Does it make me angry that some people are more likely to support a reform if it saves money? Was that more important that this person might email the Governor when they got home?

In one of my husband's favorite movies, *The American President*, the president's speechwriter tries to warn his boss about what might happen if he doesn't begin to show strong and positive leadership **for** something.

[I]n the absence of genuine leadership, they'll listen to anyone who steps up to the microphone.... They're so thirsty for it they'll crawl through the desert toward a mirage, and when they discover there's no water, they'll drink the sand.

The president bitterly responds that people "drink the sand" because they're ignorant. Of course, he only becomes a successful president when he stops treating his constituents as people to throw away and, instead, emphasizes positive change.

At this moment in time, with all the care we take in what language we use to describe other people, with a seismic shift in what we consider acceptable in comedy, there are two groups of people we can still make fun of – the fat, and those with Southern accents – and we cackle and gloat when we encounter people who are both. We might feel better momentarily about the horribleness of the

last few years, but we are simply cementing their conviction that we are filled with hate for them, that we consider them trash people to throw away, and that they should stick to the people who tell them pretty lies and give them sand to drink. So, even though it isn't always my first reaction, I am working to speak my truth in love.

If you're interested in joining the Broadway Democrats' Racial Justice Committee or in discussing this article, email your comments to valleygirl109@rocketmail.com.



President's Corner

Joe Nunley

Reverberations of a Difficult Era

The twenty-year war between the United States and the Taliban is over. At its very beginning my brother and I were walking on the phone and we both said, "We'll be there twenty years." We thought that it might even go longer.

The horror of the terrorist attack upon America on September 11, 2001 will long live in all our minds. Osama bin Laden's goal was to radically change America and that was accomplished. The shock, the anger, the fear, which raised us to a level of paranoia whose excess we still perceive today, in Trump and his Stephen-Miller-like followers, who stoke this paranoia towards all refugees and immigrants. Trump even declared that Middle East terrorists were hidden among a caravan from Guatemala seeking asylum in the U.S. He enacted a Muslim ban.

Americans responded to the attack in some regards reasonably and in many respects irrationally or opportunistically. With the Transportation Service Administration Act the federal government took over responsibility for all airport security. That was a good thing. More disturbing has been the tremendous amount of power we gave Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Police departments, such as the NYPD, engaged in massive surveillance of our Muslim communities.

Questionable bills regarding the restriction of civil liberties and the granting to the government significant powers for surveillance were rushed through Congress without debate in October, 2001. The Patriot Act passed the Senate 98-1. (Only Russ Feingold, (D-WI) voted against it. It passed 357-66 in the House. I'm proud to recall that our own representative, Jerrold Nadler, voted against it.

The attack on us on 9/11 was a criminal act. It was carried out by a group of non-state actors. We responded as if it was Pearl Harbor, as if a nation had attacked us. No nation attacked us.

The attack on Afghanistan was not for the purpose of getting Osama bin Laden. The Taliban would have given him up in a heartbeat to avoid a U.S. attack. It was necessary emotionally and politically so that the American people could see that America was taking bold and decisive action.

When the vote on the authorization for the war was voted on in the House only a single member of Congress, Barbara Lee of California, voted against it. In her speech she pointed out “how emotional everyone is right now” and that “This has to be thought through.”

The U.S. attack on Afghanistan was initially highly successful as one might imagine it would be. Within months the U.S, and the Northern Alliance and NATO allies had control of every province but one. The Taliban agreed to surrender and demobilize their forces and provide Osama bin Laden to the U.S. The only stipend to this negotiated surrender between Afghanistan’s new interim government and besieged Taliban forces in Kandahar was that amnesty be granted to the Taliban leader, Mohammed Omar.

President Bush insisted that Omar needs “to be brought to justice” for harboring and supporting bin Laden and Al-Qaeda terrorists for the previous six years. Hamid Karzai and the Afghan government had different concerns. They wanted to provide a foundation for bring the country together. We’ll never know if this deal would have held but it might of.

So, our stated reasons for the invasion were to get the man who planned the attack and when this was presented to us we said “no”. So, did we have other reasons for the invasion as the British did in 1838, 1878, and 1919 when they invaded and were defeated or as the Russians did in 1979 when they invaded and were defeated ten years later? Apparently, we did.

The Taliban held on. George Bush pivoted to the invasion of Iraq. He claimed a link between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda (hated enemies in actuality). Bush declared that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and the entire American political class (Democrats and Republicans) got on board with this assessment, as well as the media, The New York Times and The Washington Post and all of the Pentagon’s attention was now on our even more doomed invasion of Iraq.

Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld talked of going “to the dark side” and the American government did things repugnant to our values as the CIA oversaw torture in Abu Ghraib, and other places. We detained people for decades without charging them or allowing them a trial.

Whistleblowers have revealed much. We learned of the massive secret surveillance of Americans from Edward Snowden. We learned of the deliberate killing of civilians in Iraq from Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange. Snowden is in asylum in Russia and Manning and Assange are currently behind bars.

President Biden should be commended for leaving Afghanistan and for the evacuation of citizens and Afghans who worked with us. This is still ongoing.

We must begin a bold reassessment of our foreign policy beginning with the military industrial complex and our bloated military budget. I commend both of our representatives, Espallat and Nadler, for voting to cut our military budget by 10%. The bill was defeated of course but it’s a beginning. Next time Barbara Lee votes I think she is going to have some backing.

DL

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.

DL

From the Membership Committee

Please share this newsletter with a friend or neighbor. Encourage them to join The Broadway Democrats. An active electorate informs and encourages thoughtful voting. Voter participation is crucial to the health of our democracy. Join us!

DL

Stop the Senseless Parole-to-Prison Pipeline!

Meika A. Mustrangi



At our September club forum we will have a panel presentation and Q&A session on #LessIsMoreNY, a bill that passed both the Senate and Assembly in June and is just waiting for Gov. Kathy Hochul's signature to become law.

#LessIsMoreNY will end the senseless re-incarceration of people accused of violating *technical* parole rules (e.g. getting home late for curfew) while offering incentives for people to be released from parole early if they abide by the rules. Many other states have passed similar laws with positive results.

Among our speakers: staff from the Katal Center for Equity, Health & Justice; Prof. Geraldine Downey, Director of Columbia University's Center for Justice; NYCLU Executive Director Donna Lieberman; and persons adversely affected by the current parole system.

Our local representatives have also been invited: State Senator Brian Benjamin (bill sponsor and our new Lt. Gov.), State Senator Robert Jackson (bill co-sponsor), and Assemblymember Danny O'Donnell (bill co-sponsor).

Please register at bit.ly/broadwaydems-sept9 to receive the Zoom meeting link as well as information on how to call in.

What's wrong with Parole in New York?

There are currently about 34,000 people on parole in New York State. They live under constant fear of being sent back to prison if they are just *accused* of a non-criminal parole rule infraction, like missing an appointment with their parole officer, or getting back home late for curfew. Under the current system people accused of these "technical" parole violations are *automatically* detained (for up to 105 days) and after the parole hearings are completed they are routinely reincarcerated for months or even years. ***New York imprisons more***

people for technical violations of parole rules than any state in the country.

Of those on parole whom New York sent back to prison in 2019, over 85% were reincarcerated for technical parole violations. Unsurprisingly, there are wide racial disparities: statewide, Black people are 5 times more likely and Latinx people are 30% more likely to be re-imprisoned for a technical parole violation than whites. In NYC, Black people are incarcerated for technical parole violations at 12 times the rate of whites. And we, NY taxpayers, pay more than \$680 million annually to reincarcerate people for these minor, technical parole violations.

There is no evidence that reincarcerating people for technical parole violations improves public safety. In fact it hurts public safety by destabilizing individuals on parole, their families, and their communities. Most people released from prison struggle to obtain stable housing, find and maintain employment, and further their education. Sending people back to jail for non-criminal parole rule infractions and automatically detaining them for the duration of their parole hearings erases their fragile progress, and once released they must start over again. This hurts individuals and families, especially those with children, and their broader communities, all with no benefit to public safety.

Conservative states like Alaska, Arkansas, Arizona, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, Montana, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Utah have all successfully implemented reforms similar to those included in Less is More. Recidivism rates for new crimes in these states have remained flat, and in some states declined, illustrating that the Less is More Act can be implemented in New York without diminishing public safety.

What does Less Is More do to improve Parole in New York?

- 1. Restricts the use of incarceration for technical violations of parole:** people should not be automatically sent back to prison for minor parole rule infractions
- 2. Bolsters due process, including speedier hearings:** through increased transparency and accountability, and more timely adjudication
- 3. Incentivizes good behavior, promotes rule compliance and participation in services:** for every 30 days without a rule infraction, parolees earn 30 days off their parole sentences.

If you can't make it to our Zoom club meeting on September 9, you can go to www.lessismoreny.org and take action now.

You'll find "Take Action" pages where you can easily send emails and faxes to Gov. Kathy Hochul asking her to sign #LessIsMoreNY ASAP. The more people who contact Gov. Hochul, the better our chance that she will sign it before the deadline on December 31 2021. You can send emails and faxes multiple times (preferably on separate days).

Questions? Please contact Meika A. Mustrangi at meika2008@gmail.com.

RL

From Go Blue

Laura Danford Mandel

Join GO BLUE to work with Reclaim Our Vote on a new postcard campaign targeting Virginia.

In contrast to states such as Arizona, Texas, Georgia, and Florida – which have passed racist voter suppression laws in recent years – Virginia has become, as the *New York Times* [put it](#), “a voting rights bastion.”

Please help us ensure this continues.

This past year, Virginia has

- instituted 45 days of early voting;
- implemented no-excuse absentee voting;
- repealed the state's photo ID law;
- enacted automatic voter registration for anyone who receives a Virginia driver's license;
- made Election Day a state holiday;
- required public feedback or state Attorney General approval for local election changes, such as moving voting precincts;
- passed a Voter's Bill of Rights that expressly prohibits racial discrimination or intimidation related to voting, allowing voters and the state Attorney General to sue over voter discrimination.
- passed a constitutional amendment creating a bipartisan redistricting commission to eliminate partisan gerrymandering;
- begun the process of amending the state constitution to restore voting rights to people with past felony convictions.

On November 2, Virginians will go to the polls to elect a new Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, and all 100 state delegates. **The newly elected policymakers will decide the future of the state's voting rights laws.** Reclaim Our Vote wants to help protect the advances Virginia has made by encouraging voter turnout in key communities.

We will be writing postcards to almost a million Virginia voters of color, alerting them that Early Voting starts in mid-September and that their voting rights are at stake. The deadline to send the postcards is September 18th.

If you would like a pack of 20 postcards (includes all of the necessary information and materials), please email shelbydale@me.com or lauradmandel@gmail.com. We will be able to deliver on the UWS and can make arrangements for pick up for others.

RL



We want to hear what you have to say! Please email your submissions to the editor at bdemsnewsletter@gmail.com (in MS Word format if possible, please).

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

Tired of seeing rats in the neighborhood?
Starve a rat by separating out *and composting* your food waste today!
For more information: ManhattanSWAB.org
Find a neighborhood drop-off site for food and plant waste
Sign up for Curbside Composting and get a brown bin for your building



The Broadway Democrats Newsletter – September 2021

FIRST
CLASS

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

Assemblymember: Daniel O'Donnell
District Leaders:
Curtis Arluck,
Paula Diamond Román
President: Joe Nunley
Newsletter Editor: Pat Almonrode

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED