

State Committee Report

By Daniel Marks Cohen

We have had a busy month since one of our State Senators, Brian Benjamin, was elevated to become Lt. Governor when Kathy Hochul became Governor upon Cuomo's resignation. Initial reports had three different sitting Assembly members interested in the seat, including Al Taylor, Inez Dickens and Robert Rodriguez, as well as a host of former staffers and former District 9 City Council candidates. The County Committee met on the last Saturday in September to decide who would be chosen as the Democratic nominee, much as we did four years ago when then State Senator Bill Perkins was elected to the City Council and we chose Benjamin for the seat. Of the many candidates who expressed interest in the 30th State Senate District seat, in the end only four remained: Assembly Member Al Taylor, Athena Moore (former staffer for Manhattan Beep Gale Brewer and third place in the 9th District Council race), Shana Harmongoff (former staffer to Brian Benjamin), and Cordell Cleare (District Leader, former staffer to Bill Perkins, and fourth place in the 9th District Council race).

Harmongoff was eliminated on the first ballot with Moore in first place, Taylor second and Cleare third. But all three

remaining candidates had roughly the same amounts of votes. Then Al Taylor played chess and decided that since he was not likely to win, he would be kingmaker (queenmaker?), and he encouraged his supporters to vote for Cleare. But he didn't announce it publicly, and an attempt to alert people to his decision was heard only after the second balloting had begun. No one got a majority, but Taylor came in third and was then eliminated, with Cleare getting 60% of the votes and the Democratic nomination on the third ballot. Many of us have known Cordell for years, and while she may not have been the first choice of much of the West Side initially, she will serve the district well and will be an excellent State Senator. The choice is Cleare.

Next, we have to address the redistricting. On September 16 an excellent piece appeared on www.electoral-vote.com on how New York State could pick up as many as seven Democratic seats in Congress. In brief, the Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC) has been unable to issue new maps that all members of the commission can agree on, so it issued TWO sets of maps. Since there is no agreement, the legislature (which is now fully controlled by Democrats) has the right to redraw the maps to completely screw the Republicans and potentially allow the Dems to gain seven seats, which might be enough to enable us to retain control of the House. The IRC is going through the dance of asking for

testimony, but in the end, it is likely farce, with Albany dictating the maps later this year.

There is still no date for the State Committee, but it is likely to be raucous with the elimination of Cuomo and a lot of progressives eager to test boundaries without the hammer in power to push them back. Also, between Jumaane Williams' exploratory campaign and Tish James' increasingly likely one, the Governor's race is sure to be a doozy. With the LG running separately, it is possible we could see a change in the executive mansion again next year but still have Brian Benjamin as LG. He is young (44) and could be in office for 10 years, well positioned to run for statewide office, either US Senator or Governor should there be an opening.