

# **How to Solidify NY's True Blue Status: Advice from Successful Campaign Manager Chris Walsh and NYS State Committee Experts**

**By Wendy Diller**

Aside from learning lessons from the travesty of Republican George Santos on Long Island, many NYS Democrats are now focusing on getting an early start on plans for across-the-board victories in 2024, with an eye on what works in the state's purple districts and how grassroots groups, including political clubs, should engage, beginning now.

These topics were the agenda for Three Parks' December 14 monthly meeting, where the principal speaker was Chris Walsh, the former director for Democratic Congressman Pat Ryan's two successful campaigns in 2022 in CD-18 and CD-19. Walsh, who also previously led Brad Lander's upset victory in a 10-way ranked choice primary for NYC comptroller in 2021 and before that co-founded Flippable, a PAC dedicated to turning red state

legislatures blue, spoke about what works for purple districts as well as the crucial role of grassroots groups in fast-paced, nimble political campaigns.

His talk was followed by a panel discussion on reforming the state's Democratic Party. State Committee member Erica Vladimer and Hunter College Roosevelt Institute of Public Policy Director Basil Smikle Jr. discussed the need for reforms, with moderation provided by Three Parks Board member and State Committee member Daniel Marks Cohen

In his talk, Walsh stressed that winning campaigns have "authentic" candidates who deliver strong, principled messages. Most important is the absolute need for candidates to take the offensive in messaging and tone and "define the field on their own terms" – something that NYS Democrats did not do in 2022 when they completely ceded the conversation to Republican concerns about rising crime and inflation. To prep for 2024, Walsh continued, Democratic candidates will need to be bold about their messaging and hold elected officials accountable, particularly those NYS Republicans who ran as semi-moderates but now

are in junior positions in Congress, where they are under pressure to vote with more extreme Republicans. Democrats also need to shift the media narrative, particularly in NYC local media, which too frequently accept what candidates say at face value.

Walsh noted that Pat Ryan had organizational and strategic advantages over other Democrats running last November because he had already won a special election in August 2022 in CD-19 to replace now Lt. Gov. Antonio Delgado. In general elections, the outcome is much more influenced by the broader political landscape and candidates at the top of the ticket than in special elections, which depend on mobilizing their local base and capable execution. Despite the tight race at the top of the state ticket, however, Ryan's campaign was strong because it had a robust organization, which had not faced hurdles created by redistricting or a grueling primary in a shortened electoral cycle.

An understanding of the unique challenges presented by New York's media environment is also fundamental to success. While TV advertising is less effective than it was 10 years ago, it is

still crucial for reaching most voters and more influential than alternatives, Walsh said. Media placement in NY, however, is extremely expensive and saturated, so messaging must be efficient, creative, and focused on reaching many different types of voters. Unfortunately, unless the situation changes, advertising has become “an arms race of spending,” in which campaigns have to participate—this is true everywhere but is much more costly in NYS.

### **The Role of Grassroots Groups**

Grassroots groups can be most effective in a fast-paced political campaign if they have an organized, “solutions mindset” that thinks of the “larger ecosystem” in which they are working and that focuses on what the campaign needs and takes “problems off the organization’s plate,” Walsh suggested. Groups should communicate realistic expectations of what they can deliver to the campaign, and then organize their members to do it. Door canvassing is by far the most effective input, followed by phone banking, especially in rural districts, although hit rates for the latter are much lower, Walsh said. And despite voters’ push-back against so many

phone calls, data shows that it is effective at getting Democrats out to vote. In well-run campaigns, these contributions work in tandem and can make the difference in winning a race, he said.

## **Revamping the NYS Democratic Party**

Another key factor in ensuring Democratic victory in New York State will be revamping the state party's organizational structure, according to the panelists who spoke following Walsh. In the opinion of many Democrats, much of the blame for last November's defeats can be placed on State Democratic Committee Chair Jay Jacobs and the state party's weak organization, which they believe does not adequately support Democratic platforms and local candidates and which generally is not inclusive of grassroots groups and is too beholden to an old-boys' network. They are calling on Gov. Hochul to replace Jacobs and to implement other state party reforms, many of which are still in the formative stages. Groups seeking reforms are looking for Democratic voters to engage with them in a variety of ways, and members interested in

their progress can stay tuned for future  
Three Parks discussions.

To request updates on state party  
reform efforts, click [here](#).