

Update: Democrats' Electoral Prospects on Long Island

By Wendy Diller

In the few months since April, when NYS Sen. Anna Kaplan (D-NYS Sen District 7) spoke to Three Parks Dems on Nassau County politics, the state's electoral situation has changed significantly. On a national level, a series of US Supreme Court decisions, highlighted by the fall of *Roe v. Wade*, is galvanizing voters on Long Island who previously were expected to be apathetic. Closer to home, the controversial electoral map drawn by a court-appointed special master was finalized in May, reconfiguring the borders of Kaplan's home district to make it less favorable to her.

While Three Parks Dems does not endorse candidates running in primary contests, we

want to understand how the new maps and national developments are changing some electoral dynamics on Long Island. The following is an update to Kaplan's April comments to Three Parks. While specific to her circumstances, they reflect broad currents underlying the LI races. Note that it is not an appeal for a primary endorsement, and neither of Kaplan's upcoming opponents, Jeremy Josephs (primary) and Jack Martins (general), was contacted for this article.

NYS Sen District 7. Following redistricting, NYS District 7, where Sen. Kaplan is running for re-election, now covers the entire north shore of Nassau County and cuts to Mineola – New Hyde Park on the southern border and Suffolk County along the eastern border. Now, as before the redistricting, Kaplan faces a primary challenge from Jeremy

Josephs, a community activist and computer scientist, who is attacking her from the left (Josephs announced his candidacy in March, prior to finalization of the redistricting map). The winner of the primary on August 23 will face a Republican, Jack Martins, who represented the district from 2011 to 2017 and who is uncontested in the primary.

The electoral maps finalized in May eliminated 40% of Sen. Kaplan's original base and are, she believes, less favorable to her. Now serving her second term in the state Senate, she is less familiar to people in the new District 7, which is purple, with the balance between Democrats and Republicans continually shifting (Kaplan came to office by beating a Republican incumbent, Elaine Phillips, in 2018). Currently, about 30%-40% of voters in the new District 7 are independent and are critical to Democratic

prospects. The new District 7 is 2% African American, 20% Asian, and 12% Latino. There is also a big Jewish population, consisting of both moderates and conservatives, who tend to support former President Trump because of his pro-Israel positions.

Turnout for the June primary (for Governor and state Assembly) was less than 10% of registered voters, and August could be worse, given summer vacations, Kaplan said. However, two US Supreme Court decisions announced in June striking down New York City's gun control laws and obliterating *Roe v. Wade* on abortion rights are igniting voters in the district.

The national culture wars that are taking place across the country at the local level are also playing out in District 7, where school board and other

local politics have become contentious. While most have so far not succeeded, the battles are ongoing. “The extremist groups and anti-Semitism are growing in numbers and visibility in the district and on Long Island,” says Kaplan, an Iranian Jewish refugee. The Long Island Loud Majority, which is recognized by the Southern Poverty Law Center as an extremist group, has been advocating against various transgender rights, a factor that led the Smithtown Library Board of Trustees to ban all Pride displays in libraries and remove all Pride books from display in children’s sections of public libraries – an edict that it swiftly reversed under pressure from protesters. The Proud Boys are also active on Long Island.

While Democrats are widely expected to maintain control of the NYS legislature following the midterms, it is less certain

whether they can hold onto their current super majority in the State Senate. Kaplan points out that since Laura Curran was unseated by a Republican as Nassau County Executive in 2020, Democrats hold very few positions of power in Nassau County.

“The State legislature needs to be a firewall against an extremist Supreme Court, so it is important for Democrats to maintain their levers of power in Albany,” Kaplan said.

“People need to understand every vote counts.”

US Congressional District

NY-3. NYS Sen District 7

overlaps with US

Congressional District 3, where a highly competitive primary is underway among Democrats and Republicans in what is an open seat, since the current Representative, Thomas Suozzi, stepped down to run in the Democratic primary for

governor. That seat also is very much at risk for Democrats right now, said Sen. Kaplan, who is not endorsing any contenders in that primary. She believes, however, that a moderate-left Democrat best reflects voters in that district.

“This is not a district that goes for insurgents or far left candidates,” but with a heavily divided field as in CD 3, a left-leaning candidate could win the primary. “Whether they could make it through the general election would become the problem,” she said.

What does it take to get Long Island Democrats and moderate-to-left leaning Independents out to vote? Everyone’s tired, but people need to “understand what is at stake here.”