



THREE PARKS INDEPENDENT DEMOCRATS

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President

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Bob Botfeld
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State Committee

Lynn Thomas
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CLUB MEETING, MARCH 8, 2017

- Speakers:** **Zephyr Teachout**, Associate Professor, Fordham Law. and political activist
Fighting Government Corruption and Taking Back Congress
Katie Robbins, Executive Director, Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP)
Advocating for a Single Payer Program
- Date:** Wednesday, March 8, 2017
- Time:** 8:00 pm
- Place:** The Youth Hostel, 891 Amsterdam Avenue at 103 Street
- Room:** Ballroom

AGENDA

- 7:45 pm Sign-in
8:00 pm Call to Order
District Leader Reports
Speakers:
 Zephyr Teachout, Assoc. Professor, Fordham Law
 and political activist
 Katie Robbins, Executive Director, PNHP
Adjourn

CALENDAR

- Wednesday, March 8, 2017, 8:00 pm**
Three Parks Membership meeting,
The Youth Hostel, 891 Amsterdam Avenue
- Wednesday, March 22, 2017, 8:00 pm**
Three Parks Board Meeting,
The Youth Hostel, 891 Amsterdam Avenue
- Wednesday, April 12, 2017, 8:00 pm**
Three Parks Membership meeting,
The Youth Hostel, 891 Amsterdam Avenue
- Wednesday, April 26, 2017, 8:00 pm**
Three Parks Board Meeting,
The Youth Hostel, 891 Amsterdam Avenue
- Hold the Date: Sunday, April 30, 2017**
Three Parks Annual Benefit
Mexican Festival Restaurant
1:00 pm-4:00 pm
2672 Broadway at 102 Street

President's Report

By Merle McEldowney

I am immensely proud to have been chosen by the Three Parks nominating committee and club to be the President in 2017. Leading this club this year will be an awesome responsibility.

We have a lot to do. The election of Donald Trump and a Republican House and Senate requires all progressive organizations who care about democracy to ensure a forum for education and debate for their members. It requires that we continue our protests to keep the news focused on the horrors and ensuing consequences of the Trump administration.

For those who may question the effects of such demonstrations, consider this: If thousands of people had not appeared at airports all over the country, would Trump have rescinded the immigration orders? No. Outraged editorials in a few liberal newspapers would not have done it. It is the ongoing demonstrations in NYC and all over the country that let the President know that we are firm in our belief that it is un-American to discriminate against Muslims. "Hell no!" in the words on a sign of a recent marcher.

Three Parks is committed to informing its members of local and national activities designed to resist the Trump agenda. On January 21, the club led over 150 people to the Women's March in New York City. We were part of (according to Atlantic Monthly) close to four million people nationwide telling the president that we will not tolerate a federal effort to take away rights that women have worked so hard to gain over the past century. From voting rights to reproductive rights, to the right to equal pay for equal work, we will not allow women to be returned to second class citizenship.

Three Parks will continue to promote, support and participate in marches and rallies in New York City. Board member and webmaster Steve Max is charged with letting us know when. Check our web site and your emails for updates. Meet us at the Broadway/96th street subway stop; bring your family and friends. We will go on the rallies and marches together.

Also, board members Dan Cohen and Chuck Wall are working with Steve Max to organize phone banks to inform elected Republicans (like congressman John Faso, of 19th congressional district) that they better not diminish Medicare or Social Security. If they do, their re-election may be in jeopardy. Email blasts from Three Parks will keep you informed when the phone banks take place.

This year, our club meetings have been especially relevant

and well attended. In January, Comptroller Scott Stringer was our guest speaker. Last month, Public Advocate Letitia James spoke to the club about sanctuary cities and the immigration chaos at JFK. Our March meeting will feature Zephyr Teachout.

Teachout ran a campaign against Governor Cuomo in 2014 and won eight counties! Last fall, she ran against John Faso for the congressional seat in New York State's 19th district. I was one of many volunteers at Three Parks' campaign storefront who drove up to Ulster and Dutchess Counties to help advance her campaign.

Besides being a Fordham law professor, Teachout is currently involved in a lawsuit against the President in violation of the "emoluments clause" of the constitution. (See next page for an explanation of the clause).

With all the attention given to Obamacare, we in New York are fortunate that we may be getting a single payer program. Also at our March meeting, we will have Katie Robbins from PNHP (Physicians for a National Health Program) to explain the single payer program—New York State, as always, is in the forefront of progressive change. We all need to help get this program passed; hopefully, many of us will participate in PNHP's Lobby Day on April 4. More information on this to come. (In 1990, NYS passed the most progressive abortion law in the country—three years before Roe vs Wade.)

So, thank you all in advance for your support! We have so much work to do this year. I look forward to our doing it together. It is the only way I know to get anything done.

SCRIE for All, a Billion for Seniors

By Daniel Marks Cohen

The Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE, also known as the NYC Rent Freeze Program) freezes the rent for head-of-household seniors 62 and older who live in rent-regulated apartments. In order to satisfy the income eligibility requirement, the senior's household income must be \$50,000 or less. The most recent data from the NYC Housing and Vacancy Survey shows that the median income for rent-controlled apartment households stands at \$40,000 a year. There are only 44,000 rent controlled apartments in the city, housing mostly seniors. According to Met Council on Housing, rent control "...is not the sweet deal that it is often portrayed... (m)ost rent-controlled tenants pay a 7.5 per cent increase each year... and the majority pay well over one third of their income towards rent." This reference is the definition of rent-burdened—when housing becomes unaffordable, making it harder to pay for other basic needs like food, clothing and medical

care. New York's seniors deserve better.

If a tenant in a rent-controlled apartment makes slightly more than \$50,000, they do not qualify for SCRIE. On average, an increase of 7.5 per cent a year is much higher than the annual increase in social security or conservative investment returns. What we should do is expand SCRIE for all seniors, regardless of income. The number of seniors earning incomes above the SCRIE threshold—and don't qualify as rent-burdened—is very small out of all the 44,000 rent controlled apartments in the city. The risk of some wealthy seniors taking advantage of SCRIE is offset by the peace of mind for the seniors who are under the growing threat of being rent-burdened.

While on the topic of senior housing, we should also consider a significant investment in new housing construction. Recently, a number of senior advocacy organizations came together to support a NY State Senior Affordable Housing Program. It would establish \$10 million a year for five years, and create 500 units of housing (at \$100,000 apiece). But this amount feels woefully inadequate considering the rapid growth of the senior population in New York. We need an aggressive program that will establish some 10,000 units to make some measurable progress. But that would require an investment of \$1 billion. While that seems like a huge number, the NYS Comptroller has almost \$200 billion in assets. Investing in senior housing is a safe investment, and helps the very people who have invested in the pension fund—public employees like teachers, cops, firefighters and sanitation workers. Plus it has the added benefit of being the easiest kind of new housing for communities to accept in their neighborhoods. We need a billion for seniors. Now!

What, Exactly, is the Emoluments Clause?

By Cecilia Villabona

It is 49 words in Article I of the Constitution.

No title of nobility shall be granted by the United States: And no person holding any Office of Profit or Trust under Them, shall without the consent of the Congress, accept of any present, Emolument, Office or Title, of any Kind whatever, from any King, Prince or Foreign State. (Article I, section 9, clause 8)

In brief, the emoluments clause prohibits American officeholders from accepting money from foreign governments.

This prohibition sought to shield the republican government of the United States from corrupting foreign influences and to ensure it was a government deriving its powers from the

great body of the people.

The word “emolument,” which is Latin for “profit” or “gain,” has been used in the English language since the late 15th Century, and it is believed to refer to payment to a miller for grinding the corn, derived from “emolere” or “to grind up” as per the Oxford Dictionary.

The definition seems straightforward, but legal experts differ in the interpretation. To mention just two of the opposing views, according to the American Civil Liberties Union, “Trump took the oath, but he didn't take the steps necessary to ensure that he and his family's business interest comply with the Constitution and other federal statutes,” while Seth Barrett Tillman from Maynooth University Department of Law in Ireland is of the opinion that the clause does not apply to the presidency or elected official, but to federal government appointees.

Also Fordham Law Professor Zephyr Teachout pointed out in a recent New York Times op-ed that past presidents have taken great pains to make sure they don't bump against the Emoluments Clause. Which is perhaps the reason why this has not been an issue in recent years. Til now.

The IDC: Off to a Bad Start

By Nathan Schumer

The Independent Democratic Conference (IDC), a group of rogue Democrats in the New York State Senate who caucus with Republicans, has had a bad start to 2017. First, Jose Peralta, who defected from the mainline Democratic caucus in January, held a town hall that was interrupted by protesters. Jesse Hamilton, who joined the IDC in November 2016, has been the target of a series of protests, including one two weeks ago in front of his office, another at a fundraiser, and a third at a town hall meeting that Jesse held about a week ago. On Friday the 24th, 60 activists showed up at Tony Avella's office to protest his participation in the IDC, and further protests are planned far into the spring, at each member of the IDC's office. These protests have included local community groups, members of local Indivisible groups, and the new anti-Trump groups—United Thru Action and Rise and Resist. The anti-Trump energy in New York City has found an important target in the IDC.

The IDC was founded in 2011 by Jeffrey Klein as a breakaway faction of Democrats who caucused with the Republicans. In 2013, when the Democrats had enough seats to claim a majority, the IDC instead chose to caucus with Republicans. The IDC grew in power in 2017, adding Marisol Alcantara, Jose Peralta, and Jesse Hamilton to its original caucus of Jeffrey Klein, Diane Savino, David Carlucci, Tony Avella, and David Valesky. The IDC's main argument is that the Democratic caucus is ineffective,

and that IDC has been able to achieve progressive goals in Albany, including paid family leave and raising the minimum wage. Senators such as Peralta, Alcantara and Hamilton, who represent extremely liberal districts, have made the argument to their constituents that caucusing with the IDC is a means for them to bring legislation to the floor and thus allows them to be effective legislators and advocates for their districts.

Critics of the IDC are quick to point out that unified Democratic control of the State Senate would produce far more progressive legislation. There are (if one includes Simcha Felder) enough Democrats in the Senate to swing control back (although admittedly one should note that since Bill Perkins became a Council Member, this will not be the case until after the special election). Further, critics point out that members of the IDC enjoy a variety of perks in their roles as part of the majority. Finally, in a time when our democratic institutions are being tested by the soft authoritarianism of a revanchist Republican party, critics argue that Democrats (who were elected in Democratic primaries) should not align with the GOP. If New York is to stand up for its values and oppose the Trump administration, we need unified Democratic control.

All this opposition has caught the IDC off guard. Klein and the IDC have long benefited from the simple fact that many New Yorkers are relatively ignorant about Albany, as well as the timidity of New York City's elected officials, who have generally endorsed, or at least not harshly critiqued, the members of the IDC. (There are some signs that this is changing: Council Members Costa Constantinides and Daniel Dromm showed up to protest Jesse Hamilton.) Members of the IDC have previewed several lines of defense, such as claiming that protesters are outside agitators (never a good look), racist (seriously!), or that it doesn't really matter, because Simcha Felder (he caucuses with the Republicans and is treated as if he will never agree to caucus with the Democrats, although that is not what he says to the press). But this agitation will not go away, and IDC members will increasingly find themselves in an untenable position, as public attention and the liberal anger riled up by a Trump victory focuses on them.

Three Parks has also joined this effort, passing a motion at its board meeting on Wednesday, February 22, to inform Marisol Alcantara, our new state senator, that we would be happy to meet with her when she rejoins the Democratic caucus. It is an unprecedented step for Three Parks to explicitly choose to boycott a local representative, but we feel that the situation necessitates a harsh response; to invite Senator Alcantara to come speak to our club would be to legitimize her and her choices. This decision is a weighty one, but was adopted unanimously by the members of the Three Parks board.

Deconstructing the Administrative State

By Wendy Dannett

In listening to Amy Goodman's "Democracy Now" on 2/24/17, I was horrified by a report that Steve Bannon said, in a speech to a conservative group the day before, that the government was proceeding as planned, and all the cabinet picks had been chosen to undo the agency they were in charge of. "The deconstruction of the administrative state has just begun," he asserted.

Chilling.

One of Trump's cabinet choices is Scott Pruitt, a good example of someone who has and wants to undermine the group he is in charge of, the EPA. The Republicans rushed to push his nomination through before emails were released by the court from his time as Oklahoma's Attorney General. In reading through the emails, one can see why Republicans did not want them seen by the senate members before voting. They show a man closely tied to major oil and gas producers, electric utilities, and political groups with ties to the Koch brothers. The 6,000 pages of emails released on 2/22/17 show a man determined to roll back environmental regulations.

One email—from Matt Ball, an executive at Americans for Prosperity (funded by the Koch brothers), sent to the offices of Pruitt and an Oklahoma congressman in 8/13—said "Thank you to your respective bosses and all they are doing to push back against President Obama's EPA and its axis with liberal environmental groups to increase energy costs for Oklahomans and American families across the states....You both work for true champions of freedom and liberty."

Mr. Pruitt has been among the most contentious of President Trump's cabinet nominees. Environmental groups, congressional Democrats and even current EPA employees have protested his ties to energy companies, his efforts to block and weaken major environmental rules, and his skepticism of the EPA. But as soon as this week, Mr. Trump is expected to direct Mr. Pruitt to begin rolling back regulations that limit emissions that cause global warming and regulations limiting pollution in the nation's rivers and wetlands.

In his new job, Mr. Pruitt will regulate many of the companies with which he worked as attorney general of Oklahoma. In that job, he took part in 14 lawsuits against major EPA environmental rules, at times coordinating with energy companies such as Oklahoma Gas and Electric, whose executives held a fund-raising event for Mr. Pruitt. He joined that company to fight a rule that would require it to upgrade or replace certain coal-burning power plants.

The emails show his office corresponded with Devon Energy, an Oklahoma oil and gas producer, in efforts to weaken federal environmental regulations, the same rules he will now oversee. In the 2014 election cycle, Devon was one of the top contributors to the Republican Attorneys General Association, which Mr. Pruitt led for two years in that period. In 2013, a vice president of Devon wrote an argument against reining in methane emissions, whose language Pruitt directly used.

Of course there is more. You can't make this up. What is going to happen to the environment under Trump is upsetting for all of us, especially for Three Parks which has worked so hard to improve the environment, including its efforts to fight fracking and to close down the Indian Point Power Plant.

Next Three Parks membership meeting

Wednesday, March 8, 2017 at 8:00pm

The Youth Hostel,

891 Amsterdam Avenue

Save the Date!

**Three Parks 42nd
Annual Benefit**

Sunday, April 30, 1:00-4:00 pm

Mexican Festival Restaurant

2672 Broadway

southeast corner of 102 St.

Please join us as we honor

Congressman Jerry Nadler

with the

Ted Weiss Public Service Award



Club members at the Women's March, January 21.



Take back Congress activities started early in the year.



At the Immigration Rights Rally at Battery Park, January 29.

Three Parks Independent Democrats 2017 MEMBERSHIP FORM

New Member _____ Renewal _____

Membership Category—Check One

Individual (\$25) _____

Family—two adults in the same household (\$40) _____

Low Income (\$15) _____ Low Income Family (\$20) _____

Sponsor (\$50) _____ Patron (\$100) _____

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____ Apt. # _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (H) _____ (Cell) _____

Email _____

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Three Parks Independent Democrats—Dues 2017.

Mail to: Three Parks Independent Democrats

Cathedral Station, P.O. Box 1316, New York, NY 10025 Attn: Treasurer

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Cathedral Station P. O. Box 1316
New York, NY 10025

Next Meeting
Wednesday, March 8, 2017

Zephyr Teachout, Associate Professor, Fordham Law & political activist

Fighting Government Corruption & Taking Back Congress

Katie Robbins. Executive Director,

Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP)

Advocating for a One Payer Program