

State Committee Report

By Daniel Marks Cohen

Without question, 2021 was an eventful political year: the end of the Trump administration, the attempted coup on January 6, the incoming Joe Biden administration, and history being made with the first woman Vice President in Kamala Harris, who is also the first VP of biracial Black and Asian descent. COVID waxed and waned and now waxes again. The resignation of Governor Andrew Cuomo led to the elevation of Kathy Hochul as the first woman Governor of New York and the selection of our former State Senator Brian Benjamin as Lt. Governor, and now we close out the year with the election of Eric Adams as the second Black Mayor in the City's history. Any one of these items would be a major event; all of them together is overwhelming.

Yet time and politics march on: five members of the NYS Assembly in Manhattan have announced their departure. Some are moving on due

to being elected to a new office, such as Carmen De La Rosa in the 72nd AD in Washington Heights who was elected to the City Council seat vacated by the term-limited Ydanis Rodriguez, or being appointed to another office, such as East Harlem's Robert Rodriguez in the 68th AD, who is becoming NYS Secretary of State. Others felt it was time to move on: after 50 years, Dick Gottfried called it quits in Chelsea/Midtown's 75th AD, and similarly, Dan Quart in the East Side's 73rd AD did the same (albeit with a shorter decade-long tenure in office), and lastly, with ambition calling, Yuh-Line Niou from Chinatown/Lower East Side in the 65th AD decided the time was right to challenge Brian Kavanagh in the 26th State Senate district.

Special elections for the 68th and 72nd AD will be likely in January and February, respectively. Niou in the 65th, Quart in the 73rd and Gottfried in the 75th are all leaving at the end of their terms, so the upcoming June primaries will likely decide their successors (although that East

Side seat is tricky with a larger share of Republicans than anywhere else in Manhattan). The impact of all this turnover on Danny O'Donnell in the 69th AD is relatively minor – with the exception that Gottfried's departure in the 75th means that the adjacent 67th AD represented by Linda Rosenthal, which is sandwiched between Gottfried in the south and O'Donnell to the north, now has some flexibility in terms of redistricting. The 67th can now be expected to expand south into the 75th due the lack of an incumbent to resist changes, and that potentially reduces the impact of redistricting on the 69th AD which itself is boxed in to the north by the 70th (Dickens) and 71st (Taylor) ADs, two incumbents who are unlikely to tolerate much change. Population changes in Manhattan mean that the 69th will still likely change a small amount but probably remain similar to its current district configuration. Should the 69th still need to adjust, it now might stretch into Rodriguez's 68th AD to the east,

which like Gottfried's 75th, no longer has a long-term incumbent.

With the Independent Redistricting Commission (IRC) members unable to reach agreement, as I wrote late last year, the Commission's plans will be tossed aside and the NYS legislature will redraw the district lines. Because the legislature is completely controlled by Democrats, the eventual new lines will protect Democrats and incumbents and impact the districts of Republicans and retiring legislators. Like many of you, I testified at the IRC about the state and federal district lines, which was not for naught even if the IRC is moot, as the response from voters and stakeholders still provides guidance to the legislature for its maps. The City maps will not be available until later this year when the city undertakes its own redrawing process.

I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge my own effort –with the support of many of you – in my bid for the 7th City Council seat in

the 2021 June Democratic primary last year. I placed fourth out of 12. That would be in the top third, which while it was insufficient to win, was a respectable showing. In the meantime, I am turning back to my passion for affordable housing – currently I am consulting for several nonprofits and a startup, and looking at where in the affordable housing world would be a good fit. I'll keep you posted.