



Our choices for Westchester legislature

Notwithstanding all the gnashing of teeth over Westchester taxes, the next county Board of Legislators is going to look pretty much like the Board of Legislators that voters have now. Ten incumbents are unopposed on Tuesday's ballot, while a few others face only token opposition. Barring some massive, Florida- or Afghanistan-style chicanery at the polls, the Democrats will continue to rule the 17-member panel. An apt slogan might read: "Change is for others."

There are a couple of ways of looking at this: Most voters are mindful that school taxes are the big cost-driver in these parts; therefore, they aren't storming the county building, demanding a new legislator or seeking indiscriminate retribution. Or maybe it's simply too hard to dislodge an incumbent in Westchester, even the ones who might have it coming. So only a handful of challengers even try.

In any case, voters decide seven races on Tuesday. Here's our take:

District 1: Cortland Manor's Dominic Volpe, Democratic and Working Families lines, squares off against Republican John Testa, the former mayor of Peekskill, to claim the seat being vacated by Republican George Oros, the longtime voice of the loyal opposition. During the Editorial Board's interview with the candidates, Volpe, who has run before,

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sounded all the right notes about "crushing property taxes" and being a "fiscal conservative," but we see neither interest being furthered by flipping a reliably Republican seat and adding it to the Democrats' considerable majority. Testa was an able mayor and spokesman for GOP concerns. His minority voice and government experience give him the edge. Testa also has the Independence and Conservative lines.

District 4: Somers incumbent Democrat Michael Kaplowitz, who works in financial planning, is very often the smartest person in the room on Westchester money matters. Unfortunately, two years ago, he wasn't quite smart enough to see the absurdity of the outsized stipend boosts that were earmarked for legislators — at least not until public outrage scuttled the pay grab. Better late than never. He now faces a challenge from Somers' Gregory Kane, on the Republican and Conservative lines. Kaplowitz, who also has the Independence line, lost political clout on the board after breaking with board Chairman William Ryan and speaking out against his and the board's excesses. We don't think he should lose his seat, too. Taxpayers are still better off with him on the board rather than on the sidelines.

District 5: Chairman Ryan,

the Democrat from White Plains, misread the mood of the voter two years ago when he proposed outsized stipend boosts that would have increased his from \$40,000 to \$75,000, an 87 percent increase. That would have been on top of the \$49,200 base salary that legislators get. The ensuing public outrage touched off a political firestorm that continues to overshadow real fiscal gains by county government — including important accomplishments advanced by Ryan himself.

The chairman should have known better: Two years prior to the 2007 pay debacle, Ryan was taken to task by this Editorial Board for yet another post-election pay grab. That one boosted Ryan's compensation to \$89,200, including a 60 percent stipend boost. Why do the disingenuous in Westchester still gain political mileage by advancing the impractical and the impossible — the notion of eliminating Westchester County government? Look no further than the compensation messes that Ryan helped set into motion.

In District 5, however, the Republicans have hardly served up a suitable alternative. Businessman and former pro-football player Robert Hyland, also of White Plains, has the GOP, Independence and Conservative lines. His take on the False Claims Act/fair housing settlement recently ratified by the board is

alarmist and flat-out wrong. "What this means for every resident in Westchester County is that our right to own and enjoy property is under attack," Hyland said. Because moderate-income people will have roofs over their heads? It would have been disastrous for all county taxpayers had such fear-mongering prevailed, forcing more litigation and likely a significantly more costly judgment. We won't endorse a sitting legislator who was so deaf to the taxpayers' sensibilities — in 2005 and again in 2007; we won't recommend so wrongheaded a challenger either.

District 8: Greenburgh's Alfreda Williams, on the Democratic and Working Families lines, squares off against Thomas Bock, on the Republican, Independence and Conservative lines. The seat is being vacated by incumbent Democrat Lois Bronz, who is stepping down after 16 years. Williams spent 14 years as Greenburgh town clerk and many more years as a community and civic leader. Bock's commendable service as a fire-responder — including with the Elmsford Fire Department and the county hazmat team — spans nearly four decades. He lives in Greenburgh and formerly worked for The Journal News. Our recommendation goes to Williams, who during our interview demonstrated a broader understanding of the appropriate role that govern-

ment can play in addressing problems in this diverse district, which includes Sleepy Hollow, Tarrytown, Elmsford and Greenburgh. She pledged to work on community concerns including controlling taxes, building affordable housing and job/business development.

District 9: Anyone paying attention to taxpayers these days knows that they want representatives who aggressively advance their interests, which means rooting out wasteful spending. They may have what they are looking for in Susan Konig, author and former Croton village trustee, who believes the board has been too weak on spending controls. Konig, on the Republican, Independence and Conservative lines, pans all manner of board-administration fiscal decisions, from Playland expenses to the False Claims Act/fair housing settlement. Her conclusions aren't all on the mark, but she has considerable experience asking tough questions, from her Croton experience.

Incumbent William Burton of Ossining, on the Democratic and Working Families lines, has contributed much to the board's public policy discussions, but Konig may be the most earnest minority voice on Tuesday's ballot — including those few Republicans running unopposed. We recommend adding Konig, for the good of the group.

District 13: Incumbent

Lyndon Williams, D-Mount Vernon, faces a challenge from Dorothy Fiorillo, on the Republican, Independence and Conservative lines. Williams, seeking a second term, is a former member of the Mount Vernon City Council. He has been a smart and forceful advocate for the city's youth, the disadvantaged, and for anti-crime initiatives. Fiorillo said her chief concern was lowering taxes; the district's problems are far more complex than that. Williams certainly understands that. We recommend his return.

District 17: Incumbent Jose Alvarado, on the Democratic and Working Families lines, faces a challenge from Sandy Annabi, on the Independence and Conservative lines. Alvarado, who lives in Yonkers, has gained influence on the board, especially on fiscal matters (after Kaplowitz was knocked down a peg or two). In the last budget cycle, he helped move a recession-shocked spending plan that trimmed tens of millions of dollars from discretionary spending — cuts that helped offset significant rises in mandated expenses, such as for pensions. At the same time, Alvarado has not been shy about securing amenities for his district. Annabi is a member of Yonkers City Council, but not for much longer. Term limits compel her to move on. She doesn't make a compelling case for making her next stop the county board.

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DiFiore for Westchester district attorney

Incumbent has shown she can be trusted with the difficult calls

The last time we endorsed Janet DiFiore for Westchester County district attorney, she was a Republican. Her party affiliation has changed to Democratic, but that's the only change; four years later, we still believe she is the candidate with the strongest credentials for the job.

Once elected, the former prosecutor, Family Court and supervising judge of the criminal courts reached out to the executive branch of county government and helped establish a long overdue Child Fatality Review Team, an independent group that now reviews the death of any youngster in the child-welfare system.



Matthew Brown/The Journal News
Janet DiFiore, Westchester County district attorney.

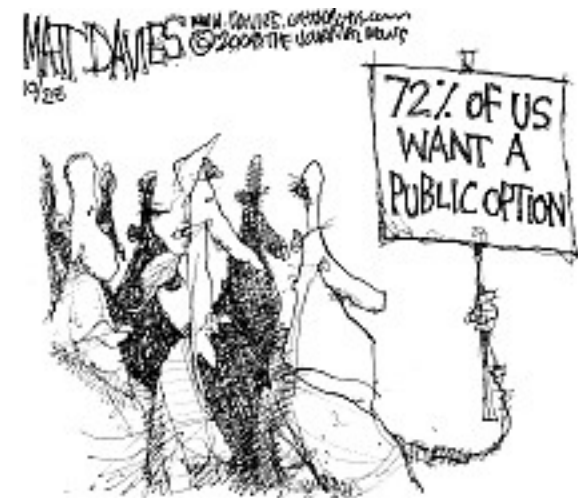
DiFiore also called for the retesting of DNA evidence in the case of Jeffrey Deskovic, who was wrongly convicted of murder and served nearly 16 years in prison. It was a step her predecessor had declined to take. DiFiore also ordered an investigation into the circumstances that led to Deskovic's conviction — analysis that is virtually unheard-of in these cases of belated justice. DiFiore now co-chairs the state Justice Task Force,

which examines wrongful convictions. We appreciate that DiFiore admits when her office is wrong — as it was when Irma Marquez, a woman who had been body-slammed by a Yonkers police officer, was prosecuted on obstruction charges rather than treated like a victim. DiFiore is running on the Democratic and Conservative lines.

Tony Castro, a former Bronx prosecutor who now works as a lawyer in Rye, is running on the Working Families and Independence lines. He has tried for the office twice before and was only narrowly defeated by DiFiore in 2005, when he was running as a Democrat and she as a Republican. In the intervening years, however, more has changed than DiFiore's party affiliation. DiFiore has gained solid experience running an office that prosecutes an estimated 40,000 cases a year. The experience edge that DiFiore enjoyed four years ago is now a yawning gap.

Dan Schorr, running on the Republican line, is a former prosecutor in Queens and Westchester and an adjunct law professor. He says he's running because prosecutors are abandoning the District Attorney's office like rats fleeing a sinking ship. He describes an office that is so at odds with its police partners that it needs an ombudsman to help straighten relations out. The problem is, neither depiction is even close to accurate. A report by the county Fair Campaign Practices Committee disputes the former, and the latter claim is undermined by DiFiore's endorsement by many police unions, though clearly not all of them.

We continue to trust DiFiore to make the difficult calls — involving police officers and ordinary citizens, in high-profile cases and everyday ones — based on the facts and the evidence, rather than politics or community passions. Indeed, being district attorney is not about making friends or keeping them, or making headlines either. It is a job that requires the utmost integrity and some very hard choices, about which, as DiFiore herself has said, "fair minded people can disagree."



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Peekskill needs to change paths

In asking for your vote on Election Day, please think about the following:

When elected officials implement fiscally dubious policies such as budgeting an unrealistic 10 percent increase in sales tax revenues, borrowing \$3.8 million to buy contaminated property and raiding fund balances to cover up excessive spending, is that what Peekskill citizens expect from our City Council?

Don't we instead want responsible leaders who will eliminate wasteful spending, reduce our debt and restore our financial strength and stability?

When elected officials orchestrate actions such as specifying a city manager contract term that violates the City Charter and hiring a tenant of a family-owned property to be city marshal, how is that our community's best interests? Aren't we entitled to honest leadership?

Instead of a city government that pays lip service to code enforcement and uses police officers to combat litter and direct traffic, don't we want a city government that will stabilize neighborhoods, remove illegal conditions, reduce crime and help citizens feel safe and proud of Peek-

skill once again?

Don't we need tangible economic development plans that we can move forward on now, like Target and waterfront redevelopment?

Two years ago, many wrongly placed their trust in Mary Foster and her running mates. This time, we ask you for the opportunity to make sure that your trust is again not taken for granted by voting for Joe Torres, Sue Sheridan, Tony Washington and me on Nov. 3.

Chris Hanzlik

Peekskill

The writer is mayoral candidate, Republican, Independence and Conservative parties.

Time for Harrison to move forward

As approximately 6,000 of us march into the polling booths on Tuesday, Harrison residents have many distractions being thrown before them to wrestle with. However, chief among our priorities is the financial stability of this community and the fair-minded distribution of important services that our residents have come to expect from town government.

No amount of mudslinging will succeed in convincing me otherwise — and we have seen plenty of that. Our com-

munity is set to turn the page on nepotism and waste. We are set to form policy that will permit the adoption of a more responsible approach to budget and personnel matters, which concerns each of us greatly. We cannot afford to be distracted on Election Day.

When you enter the polling booth on Tuesday, consider the booth as if it were a personal time machine that brings you forward. Look forward, get back to the future — and vote that way. Vote for change on Tuesday and you will make a difference. Best of luck to everyone.

Brendan Murphy

Harrison

The writer is a candidate for Harrison Town Board.

Big change needed in Ossining town

Re "Ossining village candidates square off," Oct. 9 article:

Peter Tripoli spoke out at The Journal News Editorial Board interview with town and village candidates about possible layoffs in the Town of Ossining. Peter's opponents said that he was misinformed and that no one would be laid off. That very day after the interview, the town laid off a parks employee and a highway employee. Two lifelong Ossining residents with families who have seniority over other members in their re-

Let us hear from you

Submissions, with a maximum of 250 words, must include your name, address and daytime phone number to permit verification. All submissions may be edited for length, accuracy and clarity. E-mail: letters@lohud.com; fax: 914-696-8396; mail: Letters to the editor, The Journal News, 1 Gannett Drive, White Plains NY 10604. Letters to the editor, opinion and editorial columns and articles submitted to The Journal News may be published or distributed in print, electronic or other forms. Reach the Letters Desk: 914-694-5030.

spective departments are now out of a job.

While the clueless incumbent Northern Witcher admitted the current town board would raise taxes, they are now cutting our services as well. In addition, all current board members up for reelection this year lied to the camera and to residents by stating that they would not lay anyone off. Have they no shame or respect for us?

As an Ossining resident, I am outraged by this two-faced system of government, whereby our elected officials say one thing and do another. Throw the bums in Ossining out!

Francine Leonardo
Ossining