

Outside Money, Scandal Play Into Queens Council Race

by {ga=dssayles}

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NEW YORK — The future of the 19th City Council District seat in northeast Queens was thrown into flux in April when the officeholder was arrested in a bribery scheme to sell a spot on the Republican mayoral ballot.

Dan Halloran was preparing to run for a possible second term in the City Council, but announced in May that he would not seek re-election following his arrest.

Six candidates — five Democrats and one Republican — [are now vying to replace Halloran and represent the district.](#)

The Democrats running include Halloran's former chief of staff, a member of the Vallone political family, a former assemblyman, an urban planner and a former state senate press secretary. The winner will represent one of the larger geographic districts in Queens that was redefined during last year's district process and spans from the tip of the College Point neighborhood to Little Neck bordering Long Island.

In forums, the candidates have addressed issues such as overdevelopment, the new airline flight patterns to LaGuardia airport and general "quality of life concerns." However, no one issue has come to define the race. If anything, the question of public integrity following Halloran's departure has been the common thread.

Federal authorities arrested Halloran along with state Sen. Malcolm Smith and Republican party officials in [April and charged them in a bribery scheme allegedly orchestrated by Smith](#) to buy his way onto the Republican mayoral ballot. The defendants have denied the charges.

In recent weeks, Jobs For New York — a political action committee backed by real estate interests — has funded mailers attacking two Democrats in the 19th district race, Austin Shafran and Chrissy Voskerichian, by linking them to the scandal that led to Halloran's resignation.

"Halloran and Smith betrayed our community," [the mailer reads above photos of Shafran and Voskerichian.](#)

represent Queens families and the City Council?"

"And now their top aides want to

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Shafran, 33, was a spokesman for Smith during the senator's stint as majority leader in 2009; Voskerichian, 51, is Halloran's former chief of staff and resigned less than a week after the arrest of her boss.

On Tuesday, four of the Democratic candidates in the race — Shafran, Voskerichian, urban planner and advocate Paul Graziano and former assemblyman John Duane — attended a news conference to denounce the independent ad campaign by Jobs For New York. Graziano, 42, has also been targeted by a separate negative ad from Jobs For New York. Duane, 59, who has not, joined the others out of a concern for the issues raised by the mailers.

Calling the actions by the PAC an effort by “big money trying to take over the neighborhood,” Shafran [said at Tuesday's news conference](#) that “anyone who benefits” from the fliers “is just as bad as those behind them.”

Jobs For New York's preferred candidate in the race is Paul Vallone, 46, president of the Clinton Democratic Club and member of an influential Queens political family, for the race and has spent \$100,000 to independently support him. Vallone's father, Peter Sr., served in the Council and was the city's first Council speaker in 1986; his brother Peter Jr., is currently a councilman and is running for Queens borough president.

“Paul Vallone should be ashamed of the actions that Jobs for New York has taken on his behalf, but clearly he has no shame,” Voskerichian said at the news conference.

A spokesman for Vallone, Austin Finan, told the Queens Chronicle that his boss had no control over the actions of Jobs For New York.

“Those opponents of Paul Vallone who repeatedly lie about these facts continue to demonstrate they lack the honesty and integrity to represent Northeast Queens in the City Council,” Finan said to the newspaper.

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By law, PACs can't coordinate with candidates, making it difficult for them to distance themselves from groups that might seek to get them into office — a trend that has increased with this year's election, the first following the Supreme Court's landmark Citizens United decision.

Shafran has consistently led the money race with just under \$101,000 raised as of Aug. 25. Vallone and Duane are behind him, but still ahead of the rest of the pack. Vallone had raised nearly \$85,000 and Duane almost \$82,000. Graziano and Voskerichian had raised around \$23,000 and \$22,000, respectively. All of the candidates are participants in New York City Campaign Finance Board's six-to-one matching donation program.

The Democratic primary is set for September 10 and the winner of that primary will face the lone Republican in the general election — attorney Dennis Safran, 57, and the \$56,000's he's raised — on November 5.