

Squadron, James Face Off At Final Public Advocate Debate

by {ga=ggstaff}

Monday, September 23, 2013 04:08 PM

The two Democratic candidates for the office of public advocate — the job currently held by mayoral candidate Bill de Blasio — are scheduled to face-off tonight in a televised debate.

Brooklyn City Councilwoman Letitia James and Sen. Daniel Squadron will try to convince voters to cast their ballots for them during the run-off on Oct. 1. James edged out a win against Squadron during the primary on Sept. 10, with 13,539 votes separating the two.

The only race on the runoff ballot, turnout is expected to be tepid: around 100,000 Democratic voters, or a sixth of the turnout from the primary. Still, those voters will decide which one of the two candidates will be a heartbeat away from the mayor's desk.

A lot has changed since the last time the Democratic candidates for public advocate met on stage. For one, there are now half as many top candidates as there were before the primary on Sept. 20.

Despite being within less than three percentage points from each other, James and Squadron couldn't have run more disparate primary campaigns.

Squadron spent almost twice as much money as James did, but only after raising \$1.8 million dollars to James' \$800,000. He also enjoyed a large amount of establishment support — most recently state Sen. Bill Perkins and former primary rival Cathy Guerriero — and the New York Times.

Meanwhile, what James lacked in money she made up for in massive support from labor and more, including 32BJ SEIU, Working Family's Party, EMILY's List and a number of fellow Council members.

James also recently got the support from former primary candidate Reshma Saujani, even if the two had terse exchanges with each other over donors and lessons in ethics. And James' own establishment cred is growing: she got a nod from the Queens Democratic Party yesterday.

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The only candidate to get a sizable amount of support from independent expenditures in the race, James benefited from \$57,357 spent in support of her candidacy. Squadron received \$1,721 in IEs.

James' allies have also begun to frame the runoff as a turning point for the next four years of city government, being that the two other citywide races for comptroller and mayor will likely go to white men. (Long-shot Republican comptroller candidate John Burnett might disagree.)

Regardless of whose message wins out or who mobilizes the most voters come the day of the runoff, some observers have highlighted this particular race as a showcase for an ineffective public policy that will cost taxpayers between \$15 million and \$20 million.