

Democrats Hope for State Senate Win In Conservative Brooklyn

by David Howard King

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NEW YORK — Democrats should technically be able to win the 22nd State Senate District of Brooklyn that stretches from Bay Ridge to Marine Park, because of a voter registration advantage.

But people will tell you that the district is actually very conservative — likely explaining how former NYPD officer Martin Golden, a member of the Republican majority with an A+ rating from

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the National Rifle Association, has kept his seat since 2002.

This year, Golden is facing probably his strongest challenge in recent memory from Andrew Gounardes, an attorney for Citizens Committee for New York and a former staffer to City Councilman Vincent Gentile (whom Golden beat for his Senate seat).

Because of their voter registration advantage throughout the city, Democrats currently control all but three state Senate seats in the five boroughs. A win in the 22nd district could help them eke out a majority in the Senate or, at the very least, further establish their grip on New York City.

Golden, however, says Gounardes won't be able to deliver for voters. "I applaud his decision to run because he wants to make a change," said Golden, who was recently endorsed by Citizens Union, the good government group and sister organization of Gotham Gazette.

"But he won't be in the majority, he won't be in leadership, he won't be in management," Golden said of Gounardes. "What matters to New Yorkers are jobs and economic development and the Republican conference has been successful in working with the governor to achieve some major legislative accomplishments."

But Gounardes says he has all the qualification he needs because he plans on listening to the people of his district. He paints Golden as out-of-touch with the values of a new generation, and he says the district is changing as younger people move in.

"The changing demographics matter. We are attracting more minorities to Bay Ridge who have no prior attachments to Golden," says Gounardes.

A recent debate at St. Philip's Episcopal Church served to showcase the candidates' styles — Golden the older statesman, a bit crusty; Gounardes youthful and excitable. They traded barbs in a debate that featured booing, hooting and hissing from the crowd that seemed already firmly decided in their vote.

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Gounardes estimates that he and his campaign have knocked on tens of thousands of doors across the district as well as greeted untold numbers of commuters at subway stops most mornings.

Golden, meanwhile, said he wasn't taking any chances. "Don't make any mistake, this is an overwhelmingly Democratic city. No matter what happens Obama is going to do better than Romney, so you will see me at the train station every morning knocking on doors," Golden said. "We have thousands of signs up, our office is full of people working the phones."

Gounardes' says his challenge is to connect Golden to the votes he has taken in Albany. "We have a state Senator who votes with upstate and Long Island Republicans 99.8 percent of the time and against Brooklyn," Gounardes told the audience at the church.

"He's an aggressive young man, but he doesn't bring what he needs to to get things done," Golden told Gotham Gazette. "His message has fallen on deaf ears and he is not going to be in management."

Gounardes has also attacked Golden for missing a vote on microstamping — a technology that would stamp bullets fired by automatic handguns so that it would make it easier for police to trace bullets back to the guns that fired them. The technology is a favorite cause of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, among the premier patrons of Senate Republicans.

"Microstamping is a great idea," said Golden, "but it needs to be a national law to be effective. Illegal guns aren't made in New York. They come in from other states."

Golden initially claimed he had a phone call that made him miss the vote. He has refused to tell interviewers what was so pressing.

"I don't think the phone call had much to do with anything," Golden told Liz Benjamin in 2010. "Had I have been on the floor, I would have voted â€"no."

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Golden has pushed legislation that would increase penalties for those who use guns in crimes but has been steadfast in his opposition to gun control legislation. When asked at the debate earlier this month whether he would support an assault weapons ban during the debate, Golden informed the audience member, "We already have a ban on assault weapons here in New York state."

He went on to insist that Senate Republicans have put forward numerous proposals to crack down on illegal weapons but Assembly Democrats have refused to vote for them. All of the proposals had to do with increasing penalties for criminals who use guns in the commission of a crime.

"In 1991, we had 2,600 gun deaths," Golden said. "This year it is going to be 500. That is still too many and we gotta do something. The only thing you can do is prosecute the bad guys and put them where they belong."

This summer, under attack by Gounardes for his absence on the microstamping vote, Golden introduced a piece of legislation that would punish all gang members for community guns. "Gangs are a major problem in our courts and in our community and this is a way of going after those gang members," Golden said at the time the bill was announced.

Gounardes has also focused on Golden's voting record on women's issues. When asked by Gounardes during the debate if he supported giving rape victims emergency contraception Golden seemed to agree, but Gounardes retorted, "Marty, you voted against that bill three times in Albany."

Golden said at the debate that he voted against the equal pay bill because "it was flawed."

Women's issues have become a touchpoint in the race after the press learned of an event Golden sponsored on etiquette for women. An advertisement for the event said it would help women learn about "handshakes, posture and feminine deportment." Golden's website said women who attended would learn to "sit, stand and walk like a model" and "walk up and down a stair elegantly."

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Gounardes poured it on and Golden cancelled the event. “This just goes to show that Marty Golden just doesn’t get it — either that or he lives in a cave and thinks 'Leave It to Beaver' is a new reality show,” Gounardes staffer Chris McCreight said in a statement at the time.

Golden’s spokesman defended the event until it was cancelled.

Perhaps the most tangible issue for Golden in this race is the reaction labor groups have had to his decision to cross a Communication Workers of America picket line last year.

Metal Lathers & Reinforcing Ironworkers Local 46 president John Skinner said in a statement, “When I heard that, I hoped we would have an opponent we could all support. Fortunately, we found that candidate in Andrew Gounardes. I trust he would never cross our picket line.”

Golden said he crossed the picket line because he had to get work done for his constituents — and that it was the only way to do so. “I crossed a Verizon picket line because my phone had fallen in water. I crossed the line and exchanged the phone. I was out of communication,” he said.

Gounardes has also won major endorsements from the AFL CIO, the IBEW Local 3 and the 32 BJ SEIU, which could all turn out to be a lot of boots on the ground working to turnout votes.

But Golden still has the backing of many trades, including the police and fire unions. He says he is unconcerned about the groups that have backed Gounardes. “I’ve got about 99 percent of the unions,” Golden said. “I’ve got police, fire, 1199, most trade unions. You name it, I got it.”

Despite the number of fronts Gounardes is fighting on, the race may be out of his reach, since he has only about \$155,000 in campaign funds to Golden’s \$455,000. Senate Democrats are still in debt from their losses in 2010 and have been unable to bolster their candidate.

Meanwhile, Golden enjoys hefty support from Senate Republicans, individual donors as well as

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a number of business PACs. “We are gonna win this probably with 65 percent of the vote,” Golden said. “We are probably going to raise \$300,000 at a fundraiser tonight and we have \$400,000 in the bank.”

Gouardes said the race would come down to one issue: accountability. “This is about introducing Marty Golden to the voters,” he said. “Why vote against fair pay, emergency contraception, MTA budgets, school budgets? My job is to tell women he voted against the fair pay act, to tell union members he crossed the picket line. So many people think he is a Democrat but he votes as a conservative.”

As the debate at St. Philip's church wound down, supporters of Gouardes and Golden supporters converged on the front exit, forced to be next to each other after an hour or so of booing, haranguing and hissing at each other about their chosen candidate.

Image of Golden and Gouardes, at debate in Brooklyn, provided by the Gouardes campaign.