

How Candidates Get on the Ballot for a Special Election

by Gotham Gazette Staff

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When a state representative leaves office in the middle of a term, the governor must decide whether or not to hold a Special Election to fill the vacant seat.

If the governor decides not to hold a Special Election, then the seat is open and the residents of the district have no representation until the next election.

If the governor does call for a Special Election, then each political party selects its nominee by its own party rules.

In the Democratic Party, the nominee is selected by the Democratic committee members, a slate of party loyalists who have few other duties than voting to fill a seat in the case of a vacancy.

Candidates who want to run present themselves to the local party “ usually through the local Democratic clubs. The local leaders schedule a day to vote when delegates must show up in person.

Each delegate’s vote is weighted based on how many Democrats voted in that election district in the last gubernatorial election. This means that one delegate’s vote can be worth two or three times as much as another.

The delegate’s votes are not secret. Each person puts their vote in an envelope and signs it.

Many delegates vote the way the party leader tells them. Sometimes rival political clubs will back different candidates, but usually the party bosses make their decisions ahead of time about who the nominee will be.

Candidates who do not get the party’s nomination can also file their petitions independently with

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the Board of Elections. For a State Assembly race, each candidate must get 1,500 signatures to get on the ballot and then the candidate makes up their own party name.

In New York City, where Democrats outnumber Republicans 5 to 1, the Democratic nominee has a distinct advantage.

The candidate who wins the Special Election also has a good chance of getting reelected again in the fall. Last year, of the 212 representatives of the State Legislature, more than half had no opponent or an opponent who raised less than \$1,000 for their campaign.

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