

## Assembly District 74 Debate Transcript

by Gotham Gazette Staff  
Monday, August 21, 2006 12:00 AM

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The seat for the 74th Assembly district on Manhattan's Lower East Side has been held for 27 years by Steve Sanders, who won it in a special election after Andy Stein resigned. Sanders resigned January 1st of this year to become a lobbyist in Albany, and Sylvia Friedman was chosen to replace him in a special election in February. Now Friedman is up for re-election.

Friedman, has been a schoolteacher, community activist, and ombudswoman for former public advocate Mark Green. She has two challengers for the Democratic primary.

One is Brian Kavanagh, who worked in the administrations of four different mayors, served as the chief of staff to City Councilmember Gale Brewer from the Upper West Side, and ran in last year's City Council election against Rosie Mendez, and placed second in the Democratic primary.

Esther Yang, on my far left, is a single mother and activist, who has worked in mind and body health care, yoga and feng shui, as well as being a brown belt in karate.

These three candidates will square off in the primary on September 12th, and the winner will face Frank Scala, the Republican candidate who lost to Friedman in the special election in February.

On August 14, the three Democratic candidates met for a debate moderated by Edward Isaac Dove, the editor of the newspaper City Hall, and the city and political editor of publications Our Town and Our Downtown.

### OPENING STATEMENTS AND BIOGRAPHIES

**SYLVIA FRIEDMAN:** I have lived in the 74th Assembly District for over 40 years, and have spent much of that time as a community activist and political activist. I served on Community Board 6 for 10 years on the Housing Committee, Homeless Committee, and Parks, Recreation and Landmarks Committee. I have worked as a member of the Union Square Park Committee. I've been chair of the overnight shelter at the 16th St. meeting of the Society of Friends for 20 years. We shelter 12 homeless people, every night of the year. When we first started, it was only 4 nights, for 10 months of the year, but I've built it up, and it's now every night of the year.

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Politically, I was Vice President for Political Affairs, then President, of the Burman Society for Independent Democrats. Then I was won a special election for District Leader. After serving as District Leader for 7 years, I was elected again, in a contested seat for State Committee. As soon as I was elected, I joined the Reform Caucus, of which I became chair.

**BRIAN KAVANAGH:** I grew up in Staten Island. My father was a police officer, and raised a family of six children on a police officer's salary. I went to high school here in Manhattan. During high school, I got involved working with kids at the Mission on Forsyth, just off of Houston, and still do. I went straight to government out of college, when Ed Koch was still mayor. I worked in the mayor's office of operations; I did oversight of the city's housing programs for both Koch and Dinkins. Under Dinkins, we launched the Department of Homeless Services, in order to provide better services for homeless families and single adults in our communities, and to make sure the facilities themselves were good neighbors in their communities. I was also very involved in the city's response to the Happy Land Social Club fire. In 1990, 87 people were killed in a single evening in the Bronx social club. We went out and shut down 600 illegal firetraps around the city, in a program I had a lot to do with designing.

I left government to go to law school, then practiced law for a few years. After working a while for a couple of big NYC law firms, I did pro-bono work. I was involved in one of the nation's few successful death penalty clemency positions, in the State of Virginia. I represented a lot of community organizations that needed representations. I went back to government as Councilmember Gale Brewer's chief of staff, where I worked on lots of legislation. Most notable, a bill to protect domestic workers, among the most vulnerable workers in our workforce.

I want to go to Albany, because I believe that my experience, and my independence, make me the best person in this race to deal with the affordable housing crisis that we are all facing; to make sure that the schools have the resources they need to educate our kids; and, most importantly, to shake up Albany, so we can be responsive to the full range of needs that we have, which are often neglected by our state government.

**ESTHER YANG:** I was born in India, went to school in Singapore, and then I came here. I was adopted by an American family; my father was a police officer. He died from cancer, and my two best friends died from AIDS. I was in fashion at the time, and I said to myself, there's got to be more to life than wedding gifts. So, I changed everything, and went back to my Chinese grandparents. They were in oriental medicine, practiced Feng Shui, and were in herbals. And then something else took turn: I realized that we suffer because of Albany.

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I realized, after reading the Brennan Center report, that 98 percent of all elected officials get re-elected. I don't think that's kosher. I also I have a problem that there are close to 15,000 bills with no opposition. And you might think that those things don't affect us, but I think you're wrong. I'm standing here because I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired. And when I get elected, my office will be open 24/7. I'm going to expect all my friends who are training for medical degrees to give me free medical advice, and free legal advice. They don't know that yet, but they will. I want my office to be where my core constituents need me most. I expect my friends, if they want to be my friends, to come here. When I go to Albany, I will not have a ball - this is not a \$79,000 job. When I get elected, I expect all of you to help me, because I can't do this by myself. Because we're in this together, for better or for worse. And unless we take the power back from this elected official, it's not acceptable.

### PRIORITIES

**EDWARD ISAAC DOVERE:** The first question comes from Citizens Union. If elected to office, what would be your top three priorities during your tenure?

**BRIAN KAVANAGH:** My biggest priority is the continuing affordable housing crisis that we all face in this city. In order to address that, we first need to protect what we've got. We need to protect the rent stabilization system that has gotten weaker - and not stronger - each time it's come before the state legislature in the past decade. That means repealing vacancy and luxury decontrol. It means preventing the abuse of major capital improvements increase provisions. And ultimately, it means repealing the Ustadt law so we can bring control back to where it belongs, back to the city level. We also need to protect the affordability of units in the Mitchell-Lama program, and protect the families that are living in them, even if the sponsors of those buildings are successfully buying out of the program. We need stronger laws to protect tenants from harassment by their landlords, and we need to enforce the laws we've got.

More importantly, we need to get back to the city's long tradition of building new affordable housing for low, moderate, and middle-income people. Market rate housing is not accessible to anybody who is making a normal income in our city. We all know that, and yet our city and our state are not providing the kinds of subsidies that will expand our housing supply. All of those things are squarely within the authority of our state legislature.

The other major priority is to change the basic rules by which Albany functions. That means changing the campaign finance laws, so money doesn't wash over our elected officials, and prevent them from being people who pursue the public interest. That means changing the lobbying rules, so that lobbyists can't give gifts to legislators. Legislators shouldn't go directly from being legislators to being lobbyists - it's a conflict of interest. And also changing our

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redistricting rules, so that our legislators can't draw the lines of their own districts, like they do now. I believe voters ought to pick legislators, rather than the other way around. Eliot Spitzer has pledged not to sign onto a partisan redistricting plan, and I pledge the same thing to you tonight.

**ESTHER YANG:** When I get elected, because I like to think holistically, I think things need to get taken care of. We can't just think that life consists of this part or that part.

Even though the Court of Appeals said we have billions of dollars, I think counting money without accountability or full disclosure is insanity. That's number one for education.

Protecting the seniors [is number two], because these two are the most vulnerable. I think these two things are the most important.

Once that's stabilized, I think the middle part is job opportunity. I would create a database, one place [to look], because let's face it, we get jobs through relationships. What if I said, if you want to open a business in my district, you have to hire people from my district. And that's the way it is, because if we don't, how are we going to do it?

Whether term limits or not, I'm only going to serve for two terms, because that's the way it should be. The power should go back to the people, and never the elected officials.

**SYLVIA FRIEDMAN:** My assembly office did a survey, and invariably, people said housing was their priority. So, we all know that we have to repeal the Ustadt law; we have to end luxury and vacancy decontrol; we have to end major capital improvement increases, because they only benefit landlords, not tenants; we have to create a new Mitchell-Lama-like program that does not expire. We have the money to do it. There is a surplus in the mortgage agency, and the Housing Plus agency, and that should be spent on affordable housing.

Now, I am in the assembly, so I'm very proud to say that we funded that we funded the capital side of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. There is now \$11 billion for building new schools, for creating computer labs, for renovating libraries, for creating libraries in schools that don't have

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them.

My third issue is reform, and I thank the opportunity to do that. At my very first committee meeting, I discovered that there isn't any debate in committee, but I didn't discover it until after I started to debate on a bill that needed to be discussed. Suddenly, there was a debate in the committee, and the end result was, the bill passed the committee, but passed by only one vote. I was told afterward, that this had never happened before. The beginning of reform in the Assembly, I did it at my first meeting. 10 seconds flat.

### REFORMING ALBANY

**EDWARD ISAAC DOVERE:** The next question from Citizens Union is: Do you feel the operations of the state legislature are in need of reform? And to expand on that: Are there short term and or long term steps that are necessary to help create a more open, transparent, and accountable state legislature?

**ESTHER YANG:** First of all, I don't feel Albany needs reform, I think Albany needs a major clean up with Clorox. I think it's embarrassing what the New York Times, the New York Post, the Daily News, and everybody else in the paper have said about Albany. Our founding fathers said three separate branches with checks and balances. That's not asking a lot. I think that a major step is that we cannot have a state assembly member become a lobbyist. There has got to be some break, maybe 2 years off. Without that, we merely have a revolving door. Everybody says same old stuff, same old garbage, and all of us suffer for it.

I also have a problem with lobbyists giving money, and I have a problem elected officials becoming political puppets to self interest groups. When I get elected, I think the money should be zero. Lobbyists shouldn't be giving to elected officials.

**SYLVIA FRIEDMAN:** Of course there is need for reforms, for a great deal of reforms. When I was chair of Community Board 6, the work got done in committees. These committee people brought up issues, debated issues, made decisions about issues, and then it came to the floor. I want to see that happen in Albany, and I believe that I have started that.

We need to have a non-partisan redistricting commission, so that lines are not drawn by incumbents who represent those districts, but are drawn in a way that make sense, you know,

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when they're squared off, instead of looking like a jigsaw puzzle.

It's also extremely important that we have a finance program very similar to NYC. Clean money, clean elections: that is one of the bills that I have managed to get out of the Election Law Committee, with a very, very small group of reformers.

We also managed to get a much tighter period between the last day to register to vote, and Election Day. I think that we should have same day registration, but we did make it 10 days, which is certainly a big step forward for reform.

**BRIAN KAVANAGH:** Campaign Finance: At this stage, any individual in this state, or really anywhere in the country, can give tens of thousands of dollars to a statewide candidate, and very substantial amounts to local candidates like those you see before you. In addition, we have loopholes in that law allowing individuals who control different entities to give multiple contributions to the same person. The effect of the on our system of government is hard to overstate. Literally, when people have million dollar decisions before the state government - maybe \$10 million decisions, maybe \$100 million decisions - they can buy the influence of legislators, and the entire legislative body, for very modest amounts of money. We desperately need to change that in order to have a government that really represents the people.

Lobbying and ethics: We need to make sure that lobbyists can't give gift directly to legislators. We really need to make sure that all of the work that lobbyists do is part of the reporting system, so that we know what they are doing. And we need to drastically reform the way lobbyists participate in the campaign finance system. Redistricting: legislators currently draw their own lines, and that's really a recipe for legislators that are entirely to comfortable dealing with their own interests, instead public interest.

The biggest thing it takes to get reform is independence from the Albany system itself. Independence from the Speaker, who largely controls things. We've all heard of the "three men in a room" who control much of what's important in Albany. If we want to reform Albany, we need to take each opportunity to elect somebody new, who is going to be independent of that system, who is going to be genuinely committed to reforming it, rather than playing by the same old rules. And that's what I intend to do.

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**EDWARD ISAAC DOVERE:** The next question comes from the City Hall/Our Town Downtown Editorial Board: Among the more controversial questions in politics on the city level is term limits. Some people see them as an effective means of battling stagnation and power mongering among elected officials, some say that preventing the build up of institutional memory has led to a dangerous shift in power to unelected interests, like lobbyists. The man Ms. Friedman succeeded, Steve Sanders, took 27 years in the Assembly before resigning, certainly longer than anyone could, under a system with term limits. If you are representing the 74th Assembly District come January, will you support or oppose term limits for the legislature and or for statewide offices.

**SYLVIA FRIEDMAN:** I'm opposed to term limits because I believe it is up to the voters to determine who represents them. Now, when we have districts that are flawed like the current districts, and have a system of campaign finance like the current one, where people can pour money into a candidate, who then turns around and does exactly what a contributor asks for, then it seems that the only solution is term limits. But it's not. If we have fairly drawn districts created by a non-partisan commission, and if we have campaign finance legislation that provides money, so that people do not take money from the special interests - but take money from individuals only - then we have term limits called elections. That's the fair way

**BRIAN KAVANAGH:** I am opposed to term limits for similar reasons. I believe we have real opportunity in our system to fundamentally change the way our government works, being on the verge of electing a governor who is genuinely committed to reform, in Eliot Spitzer. We are also currently in a moment in our Assembly when we have a very large number of members who are relatively new to the system, and have not been benefiting for so long, by committee chairships and the lulus, and everything. (lulus are the extra funds you get for holding a particular seat in the Assembly.) Voters have an opportunity in each election to select somebody new, and if we can get the rules right, we will have genuinely fair elections. I think that giving up on the notion that voters can pick the right person each time is really giving up on democracy itself. So I do oppose that. I will also say that the process by which people actually get into the Assembly is often skewed against the voters in favor of the party itself. In particular: the provisions that fill seats when an incumbent leaves in the middle of their term. It is a system that is essentially driven by party insiders. The party selects somebody, not the voters, and they are run against each other. The conclusion of that election is already a foregone conclusion. At the city level, when a seat is vacant, many things are better than they are at the state. At the city level, there is a direct election, where the voters get to choose from the full range of candidates who'd like to run. That would also be a way to clean up our system and make sure the voters have a more of a direct say than they do now.

**ESTHER YANG:** In New York City, the people voted for term limits, not just once, but twice. And we have term limits for president. I think we should have term limits for Assembly, as well.

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Like I said, that the Brennan Center report said, 98 percent are re-elected. If everybody said that Albany is corrupt, then we can't have the same players playing games. To me, that's insanity - doing the same thing over and over and over again, and expecting different results. I'm totally for term limits; I'm totally for the civilians.

Public servants are meant to serve the public. But I think when we start having selected few people choose selected people, we only have selected answers. And that's not how I remember, in my history class, what democracy is all about. So we need civilian people, regular people, full disclosure, open book. The 14th Amendment said we have equal rights, equal justice, and everyone should pick, not the Speaker should pick the people. We should have the civilian complaints reporting bureau, like the New York Police Department, for the State Assembly. We should have the phone number where we can complain about all our elected officials. Something's GOT TO GIVE, people! And the only way to give is if we all stop playing their games. We will take our power back and say, "Know what? Enough of your foolishness. Enough of you political games. Enough of your sweet nothings."

### JUDICIAL SELECTION

**EDWARD ISAAC DOVERE:** A question by citizens Union. In a recent court decision that is now under appeal, Justice Gleeson ruled that the current Judicial Convention for selecting party nominees for the Supreme Court was unconstitutional. It is quite likely that the decision on how to reform the process will fall to the legislature. In such a case, what type of system would you support for the selection of Supreme Court Justices?

**BRIAN KAVANAGH:** First of all, I would like to say that Judge Gleeson got this right. For a long time we've had selection of judges that suffers from a lot of the same problems that we've talked about tonight with the rest of our political system. It is a system where partisan officials, members of the party - insiders, rather than rank and file voters - have way to much say in who gets these positions. Judges are the kind of positions that we expect to be the most independent of politics, and particularly partisan politics. I would favor a system where we have judges evaluated on merit by non-partisan screening panels, for all judges, whether they be elected judges or judges that are appointed. The first step is to be evaluated objectively, and the second step is to make sure we have mechanisms in place to allow - to the extent that voters choose them - direct election by the majority of voters, rather than pre-screening by the parties.

**ESTHER YANG:** I read Judge Gleeson's order. Judge Margarita Lopez-Torrez could not go to the Supreme Court. The Democratic club would not choose her because she would not hire staff that they offered. That's co-dependency if you ask me. They need to go to more therapy.

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Folks if we have to do for primary, I know I saw Andrea standing outside handing out flyers, if she has to go to the primary. So, what is so special about Supreme Court Justice? I mean, what ever happened to equal justice? What's good for you is good for me? So for me, if you're gonna have a primary for Civil Court judges, you should have a primary for Supreme Court judges. It shouldn't be like, "oh, you hired my people, I make you Supreme Court." The unified court system has a \$1.3 billion dollar budget. You know how much they give to minorities? \$139,000.

**SYLVIA FRIEDMAN:** The convention system started out as a reform measure. Because what was happening before that, was the people in the smoke filled back rooms chose Supreme Court Judges, and now and happening in Brooklyn again. Supreme Court Judges are chosen in the backrooms, by the political powers. So, Judge Lopez-Torrez brought a suit, and Judge Gleeson overturned that suit. In Manhattan, there certainly is some political play in how Supreme Court judges are selected. And frequently, people in power have a lot more say than they should. But there is an independent screening panel. And no one is permitted to run for Supreme Court judge unless they've been approved by this independent screening board. The panel is made up of representatives of law schools, good government groups, bar associations, and generally, all of the people who appear before the judicial convention, in Manhattan, are fine people - and fine judges, because they have been approved by this system. Now, once they've been approved by the system, then the politics come into play, and the end result is frequently not the person I would select, and maybe not who you would select. But it is someone who has been approved by a panel. Going to primaries: if there is a way to prevent that from going back to smoke filled rooms that existed before we started the convention system, I would certainly approve of that.

**EDWARD ISAAC DOVERE:** Our last question is a collaboration between Citizens Union and Our Town Downtown and City Hall. If you could determine the one criteria that voters would decide on who to vote for on September 12th, what would it be?

**ESTHER YANG:** I think voters should choose on how they can bring power back to the people. How can you make the 74th District the best district ever? When Albany is not doing what it is supposed to do, like full disclosure and checks and balances, then why are we still voting for the same people? Remember what I said, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results." When I was giving flyers out, nobody really liked me. Because, you know why? They have their own idea of politicians: crooked. And I think we have to change that.

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I only raised \$16,000, and it's not from lobbyists, or United Federation of Teachers, or anything else. And I have the financial disclosure where everybody wants to see it. Because that's what government should be. If we can't expect this, then there's a problem. Once my family was in a hotel, and my father was putting all the money in the safe, and I said, "Why are we putting all the money in the safe?" He said, "Esther, we lock things up to keep the thieves honest." So, we want civilian complaint reporting bureau to keep the elected officials honest. And when I get elected, I expect you to kick me out of office when I don't do right by you. Because I expect you to make me show results to you, and make me accountable.

**SYLVIA FRIEDMAN:** I chose service to the community as the one criteria. When I stand out on the street, giving out flyers, I'm amazed by how many people say to me, you've done good work, I'm voting for you. I know your work, I'm voting for you. I served on your homeless committee, I'm supporting you. And so on. I really do think that it's service to the community that's important: what you've been able to provide, so that people know who you are, know what kind of work you can do, and then choose to support you.

**BRIAN KAVANAGH:** My answer is also based on my experience. When I knock on doors and ask what they're concerned about, I hear two themes over and over again that are very related: one is a desperate need to deal with the housing crisis we all face, and the other is a desperate need to change the way Albany works for the people of our state. The thing I think you should look for, four weeks from now, the basis for which I ask for your vote, is that I believe you should choose the person who has the right experience and the independence to change the system. I am not beholden to the powers that be, as many of our legislators are. And I am running because I believe I am the right person to shake up the system, and I believe that that is what the voters want. As a method, as a means to getting answers to our housing crisis, to our education crisis, to our health care crisis. I think all of you know that until we change the way this government works, until we bring about genuine reform in the government, until we end the enormous roll of money and lobbyists and special interests in Albany, we are not going to get our interests addressed. That's the basis on which I am asking for your vote.

## CANDIDATES QUESTIONS TO ONE ANOTHER

**EDWARD ISAAC DOVERE:** Okay, now the part where the candidates get to ask each other questions.

**SYLVIA FRIEDMAN:** I think that we all agree that housing is at a crisis in our community, and that something needs to be done about it. What is their plan for repealing the Ustadt law, given

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the current climate?

**BRIAN KAVANAGH:** I believe that in this area, as in so many others, we really need to get our Democrats in the Assembly, in particular, to stand up for traditional Democratic values. We'll insist that we are going to represent the people - particularly the people of this city - with an overwhelming Democratic majority. Upstate Republicans, but not only them, are not responding to it because it is not their concern. Here in New York City our number one concern is the affordable housing crisis, and we understand that legislators based here in the city would do a better job regulating the relationships between landlords and tenants. And we need to insist that we are going to address that, and we need to start in the Assembly, and negotiate hard with our colleagues in the Senate, insist that we pass it and that the governor sign it.

**ESTHER YANG:** I always think that if you don't have a job, even zero increase of rent can feel a lot. It's middle income families, I always said, that helped build New York. Middle-income families should not be forced to get out of New York, because New York is 65 percent minorities. NYC is the greatest city in the world because of all the people in it. And I think that the state should not control us. The state should not be telling us; even the State Liquor Authority - which I call the Sleeping Liquor Authority - shouldn't be holding us for everything. I think that the city should be able to rule the city, and I think there should be a freeze in rent stabilization. If they take one apartment out, they should replace it with another one.

I'm not an attorney, I'm not an elected official, I'm just a regular person like you and I, and that's why I think I should be able to be elected, because I'm just a regular person.

**BRIAN KAVANAGH:** I've mentioned a few times tonight that my particular concern IS that we have people in Albany who are willing to stand up to the powers that be - in particular the Speaker.

For Assemblywoman Sylvia Friedman, who is already in the seat, I was only able to find three incidences in which you voted differently than the speaker. That was for A07711, which deals with hunting of coyotes with dogs and firearms, A11311, which deals with parkland in Broome County, and A12011, which regards peace officers in Lake George.

And Esther Yang, who has not been in the Assembly, what more generally would be your

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differences with the speaker?

**ESTHER YANG:** I think the difference between the speaker and I: I'm a woman, and he's a man. When I get elected, I represent the 74th District, and expect the 74th District to be taken care of. I expect that, in terms of schools, in terms of Medicare, in terms of job opportunities, in terms of gridlock. And I expect the speaker to always have an open door policy, and not just a closed-door policy between Bruno and Pataki or whoever else. And I have a problem when all chiefs of staff become lobbyists. And part of my being elected is that I expect to be held accountable and I expect to have results, because that's the way it should be.

**SYLVIA FRIEDMAN:** The main difference between the speaker and me is not in Albany, but right here in the Lower East Side. The speaker doesn't seem to think that we should have low and moderate-income housing in the Seward Park Extension. On the issues that Brian brought up: I am opposed to the alienation of parks, which means I am opposed to parks being used for anything other than park space. So I am opposed to building restaurants in parks, or taking parks away for other commercial purposes, which is why I voted against that bill. In the Assembly, the Democratic conference gets together and meets and debates these issues. The speaker was in favor of ending the statute of limitations on rape on the criminal side, but not on the civil side. In the Democratic conference, we talked him - and I spoke myself with great passion - into changing his conviction. So when it came to the floor, I voted with him. He was the one who changed his mind, and voted with us. So you can have a difference with the speaker, and he can change his mind.

**ESTHER YANG:** My question for both candidates is financial disclosure and financial filing. I know that Brian KAVANAGH makes \$120,000, and Sylvia Friedman makes about \$90,000 and that I know that Speaker Silver gave Sylvia Friedman \$2,000. The labors union gave money to you, Brian. I have \$16,000, no lobbyists, no unions, I personally didn't ask for them, and I don't want them to give me money, because I like to keep things simple. But I want to know how either of you could you be independent when Speaker Silver gave you \$2,000, and labor unions gave you money.

**SYLVIA FRIEDMAN:** I don't think I raised that much. But it would be nice if I did. We really don't know what Miss Yang raised, because she has not filed with the Board of Elections. Which by the way is illegal. She did not file for the first filing, she did not file for the second, so I didn't know how much money she raised until tonight when she told us.

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Yes, the speaker gave me \$2,000. I'm very grateful for it. He knows our differences. He knows that I am not supporting his candidate for judge; I'm supporting a different candidate. He understands that we are different, but he understands that I am a very hard worker and that I get along with my colleagues. We have differences, and yet, we can still work together. It's also true that I've been endorsed by a dozen unions, including the largest one. But I've been endorsed by unions because they know I'm on the side of working people.

**ESTHER YANG:** Regarding the Board of Elections filing: I do have it notarized, I do have it affidavit, but they somehow disappear. My attorney sent it back.

**BRIAN KAVANAGH:** Just to get the numbers straight, I've raised about \$120,000 since the last filing and Silvia has raised \$60,000. I would respond by saying that I need to raise that kind of money - which I would say is not out of the ordinary amount of money to run a campaign to communicate with 140,000 people within this district - in part because I need to compete with Assemblywomen Friedman. She is an incumbent, and has many advantages of incumbency, including the ability to send all of you the very thorough newsletters about her activities in Albany - which I'm sure you've received. So between that, and staff, and an office in the district, there are obviously advantages of incumbency.

The way I have raised money in this race, in spite of one or two contributions from labor unions is by going directly to people who are not in the business of buying influence in Albany. Nearly all of my money has come from ordinary people, many of whom are in the district, more of whom are in this district than anyone else in the race. I've gotten money from people who have not previously contributed to any candidate in this state. They are supporting me because of the vision I have offered you here tonight.

## DEVELOPMENT AND NOISE

**EDWARD ISAAC DOVERE:** We are going to move into the questions by the audience. Our community is being decimated by overdevelopment, New York University expansion, and nightlife proliferation. We are losing our commercial diversity, our historic churches, art centers, and long-time residents due to rising rents and real estate values. How can East Village history and community be preserved against these market forces?

**SYLVIA FRIEDMAN:** We talked a great deal about rent regulation, and of course that's one way to preserve our affordable housing. We have got to regulate rent, we have to repeal the Ustادت law, we have to end vacancy and luxury decontrol and major capital improvement

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increases. We have to stop permitting landlords to demolish their buildings, or pretend to demolish their buildings, and chasing out their rent regulated tenants, to bring in market rate tenants. I have suggested repeatedly, we also need commercial rent regulation. Certainly we cannot maintain our laundry stores, our shoemakers, our mom and pop bodegas if we can keep raising the rents, when bars and lounges are ready to pay a higher rent and move in.

**BRIAN KAVANAGH:** We've seen the effect of the housing crisis on many of our long-term residents. As Assemblymember Friedman just said, that is a large part of preserving the character of our community. But we do need to do more. Many of us, and I see many people in this room, have been involved in the site specific fights that we've had: over Charis, over St. Bridgets, over many other sites where somebody wanted to tear something down that people really cared about, or wanted to build something that was out of the character of the neighborhood, because of the type, or the density, or type of use. And those fights are very important, and I commend all of you. I have been involved in those; I have testified in favor of Charas at the Landmarks Commission, I have been in many of the other preservation fights. A big way we regulate land use in the city is the Zoning Resolution. We need height caps in our Zoning Resolution on all of these low-rise blocks in the Lower East Side. We need contextual zoning that keeps people from building out of the local context, and we need zoning that prevents bars from moving into many of these blocks, so that the rest of the neighborhood doesn't get steamrolled by the continued proliferation of bars.

**ESTHER YANG:** It's really important that we fight for the community. I think it's very important that we demand the developer to build affordable housing. If we don't demand it, how are we going to be able to do that? I think it's really create animosity when the gentrification comes in. If we don't preserve it, then who will?

**EDWARD ISAAC DOVERE:** I am going to do my best to do a representative sampling of what has been submitted. First question. Noise is often cited as one of the biggest problems by New Yorkers. If elected, how to you propose to address this problem? Please provide specifics.

**BRIAN KAVANAGH:** The first thing we need to do is diminish the tension between bars and nightlife in our communities and residential uses. The best way to do that would be, like I called for last year when I was running for City Council, to bring about a city liquor authority rather than the State Liquor Authority. Take that out of the hands of unresponsive state legislators, and unresponsive executive branches, and bring it down to the city level, so that bars in our community can help to address these concerns, rather than be part of the problem. There are many good and decent bar owners in the area, but there are also a lot that are happy to put up with unruly patrons in order to make a buck at the expense of people that are living around

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them. The second thing we need to do is increase enforcement in the community. The third part: when the city passed the smoking law, there was an ability to have an inside smoking room to keep the people off the sidewalk. The state version of the bill eliminated that, pushing smokers out onto the street. I favor the city version of the bill. I think that the state version was excessive and pushed people who were making a lot of noise out onto the streets.

**ESTHER YANG:** I think that any bar owners that lie on their application, and we know that there are plenty of them should just get their license revoked. I'm not against nightlife, I'm against irresponsible bar owners. My grandmother always taught me, the only thing we've got is our word. We have to have some control over the complaints to 311. I know that some constituents call 311 and the Community Board many times, but there are no results. On the civilian complaint review board, I know that if there are five complaints, the officer does not get a promotion. So maybe there's a way that if we do complain, then there will be a suspension.

**SYLVIA FRIEDMAN:** About noise: the State Liquor Authority is not concerned about bars in the Lower East Side. The SLA does not have the problems that we have. We don't need a city liquor authority; we have to have very strong and serious representation on the SLA. I am very pleased that I voted for increasing the number of agents, to enforce the Liquor Authority's rules, and to insist that one of the members of the Liquor Authority come from the city. It's extremely important that we do that, because the Lower East Side has become a tourist destination, and it is a residential neighborhood that is being seriously destroyed.

## 9/11 HEALTH BENEFITS

**EDWARD ISAAC DOVERE:** Today Governor Pataki signed legislation providing benefits to workers and responders to September 11th, at the World Trade Center. These are additional benefits, and the time to apply for them has been extended. Mayor Bloomberg did not support this legislation because of the cost to NYC; also problems of verification of legitimate claims would be very difficult. What is your opinion of this legislation?

**ESTHER YANG:** I disagree with Mayor Bloomberg, because these people were our heroes, and need to be taken care of. It took all of us, it pained us. It's really wrong of the governor to lie about the safety of the air. The same with Con Edison lying about air safety. So, I think it's really wrong - because my focus is always on mind, body, and health - for Mayor Bloomberg not to compensate people - because they were there, and should be taken care of. At least each one of us has gone to at least one funeral, and it's just awful.

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**SYLVIA FRIEDMAN:** I find it very difficult to comment on a piece of legislation that I haven't read. It seems to me that if Pataki has legislation to help the responders of 9/11, that's a good thing. I would hope that the state would fund it; if the state isn't funding it I would understand the mayor's problem. But again, without reading the legislation, I find it very difficult to comment.

**BRIAN KAVANAGH:** I think the trajectory of this particular idea and bill are a very good example of just how dysfunctional Albany is. In 2001, many of us experienced that tragedy, in a more or less personal way. We all understood almost immediately that many, many people were going to be effected in a negative way, and particularly people who were responding to the emergency. This is not a new issue. And yet, today, we have a governor signing a bill, that largely has been pushed by several front page stories by the Daily News the last couple weeks, insisting that the governor take action, naming him personally, and putting his face on the cover. That's not how government ought to be. This bill does have some problems in terms off not preventing who were not responders from getting some kind of benefit. But, the fact that we're today signing something that genuinely responds to people's needs who otherwise have not been addressed over the past five years is a travesty.

## CLOSING STATEMENTS

**ESTHER YANG:** President Woodrow Wilson said "I will use all my brains, and I will borrow everybody else brains." So when I get elected, I will use all my brains, and I will borrow all of your brains. When I get elected, my office will be open 24/7. I will open the free medical and free legal advice. I'll end with a Chinese proverb: When there's a light in the soul, there'll be beauty in the person. When there's beauty in the person, there'll be harmony in the house. When there's harmony in the house, there'll be order in the nations. When there's order in the nations, there'll be peace in the world. So I'm going to start by saying to you, that the peace begins with me, and the change begins with me, and this is why I'm running for office. Because I want a change. I want things to be better for my daughter, I want things to be better for my good friend Larry, who is 85 years old. I want things to be better for Terry, who lives with emphysema and couldn't breathe because of the Lower East Side. I want things to be better for all of us.

When I get elected, I don't want to represent just Asian people, I don't want just white people. I want us, what we are: the greatest city in the world. And I want the power to go back to the people, not to the elected officials. When I get elected, I want everybody to take the fundamental right, the right to vote, behind that curtain, where nobody really knows who you're voting for. That's the only thing we've got that no one, not Silver, not Pataki, not Bruno knows. I expect you to kick me out of office when I don't give you results, and I expect you to kick me out of office when I don't want to hold accountable. I expect you to be part of my team, because I can't do it by myself. I tell people free coffee, free tea, but you have to wash your own cups.

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**BRIAN KAVANAGH:** I think that your interest tonight, and the interest of so many people I've seen campaigning for months now, really needs to be met by a commitment on the part of the people who want to represent you. A commitment to really think about how we can change the system, and not just move along with the status quo. And you have a real choice tonight in this race with three candidates who are offering you competing visions, and competing experiences - those criteria we talked of earlier.

What I offer you is my commitment to change things, my experience, and my independence of the Albany system. So many of us work so hard at each election to elect Democratic candidates, but we don't always get that kind of Democratic values represented in our government. We don't always get the kind of independence of our elected officials to actually represent us, rather than representing the special interests. To work with us here in the community and on our needs, rather than working within the Albany system under Albany's rules. I'm committed to changing that, I've been working very hard to get that message out to you and many others. I ask for your support tonight, because I believe that if we work together, we can change the system, and make Albany a better place, more responsive place to our needs. And that will benefit all of us individually, and our community collectively.

**SYLVIA FRIEDMAN:** There's one issue that we haven't mentioned at all, and it's a very important issue to many of us: health care. I was a supporter and a co-sponsor of a bill called Fair Share for Health Care; requiring companies with over 100 employees provide a certain amount of money for health care for their employees. It's urgent that we start providing health care for all New Yorkers. Medicare Part D has caused tremendous problems for many people. The first bill I introduced put a cap on the amount of co-payments those who are dual eligible for Medicaid and Medicare would have to pay for their prescriptions. Those people originally paid zero or \$2 co-pay, were all forced into Medicare Part D. Their co-payments went up to \$25 or \$30 for each prescription. My bill capped that at \$200 a year, with Medicaid picking up the rest. I'm very, very proud that that bill passed Assembly without a single dissenting vote. And members of the Senate are excited enough about that bill that we expect to get it through the Senate in the coming term.

Timothy's Law was named after a child of twelve who had mental illness, and was unable to get the health insurance to provide the medical care he needed. At the age of twelve, he committed suicide. Timothy's Law requires insurance companies that pay for physical illness, also pay for mental illness. The bill, which I voted for, passed the Assembly, and now must come to an agreement with the Senate. We'll go back into special session to turn it into law.

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