

A Guide for the Last Minute Voter, Primary 2006

by Gail Robinson
Monday, September 11, 2006 12:00 AM -

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For a guide to the 2006 GENERAL election on November 7th, click [here](#) .

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Like tantalizing cooking smells wafting from the apartment next door, the political battle in Connecticut has left many New York political junkies bemoaning their own sparse election diet this year. But while nothing in New York has captured national attention like [Connecticut's Senate race](#) , where longtime incumbent Joe Lieberman lost his primary to a political newcomer (or even [New Jersey's](#) , where two well-funded rivals are running neck and neck), New York Democrats and Republicans will go to the polls in a primary Tuesday. This week's election will set the stage for the final round on November 7 when New Yorkers will cast votes for a U.S. senator, all four statewide offices, every member of the city's 13-person congressional delegation and all the city's representatives in the State Senate and Assembly.

Unfortunately, owing to New York's Byzantine election laws and crony politics, choices will be limited in many parts of the city. Only voters registered with a party having a primary can vote on Tuesday. And even their choices are limited. Just two of the 13 congressional districts, for example, offer truly competitive primary contests. By [one recent count](#) , although there are

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26 seats in the State Senate representing New York City, only eight districts will have primaries; of 65 districts in the State Assembly representing New York City, only 19 offer primary races.

But some of these primaries are intense contests. Tuesday's ballot will also feature a hot race for the Democratic nominee for attorney general and a rare Republican primary for U.S. Senate. And even though the pundits are declaring Eliot Spitzer the winner of the Democratic gubernatorial primary and saying anti-war candidate Jonathan Tasini has no chance against Senator Hillary Clinton, the truth is, as trailing politicians always say, the only poll that counts is the one on Election Day.

To help voters before they go into the polling booth, we offer the following guide. And on the night of the election and in the days after, go to [Gotham Gazette's election results](#) .

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[How Do I Find Out Who Won?](#) **THE FIGHT FOR ALBANY**

The Governor's Race

In November, voters will chose a successor to [Governor George Pataki](#) , who is leaving office after 12 years. But this week, the only voters who get a chance to weigh in on who should hold the state's highest office are Democrats. In their primary, State Attorney General [Eliot Spitzer](#) is running against Nassau County executive [Tom Suozzi](#) .

(Republicans avoided a primary when former Massachusetts Governor [William Weld](#) [dropp](#)

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[ed out](#)

of the GOP contest, insuring that former [State Assemblymember John Faso](#) would be the party's nominee in the November election.)

Spitzer received the endorsement of the state Democratic Party at its [convention](#) last spring and holds large leads in the [polls](#)

, a massive advantage in fundraising and [endorsements](#)

from much of the Democratic establishment and advocacy groups, unions and newspapers. But Suozzi has stayed on the campaign trail, presenting himself as a [strong manager](#)

who brought sweeping reform to financially troubled [Nassau County](#)

. If elected, he say, he will shake up Albany. "The reasons I'm losing are the same reasons why I'm running," Suozzi says on his Web site.

To find out the candidates' stands on the issues, check out their Web sites and Gotham Gazette's [Eye on Albany](#) archive of press coverage. To read a transcript of their July debate, click [here](#) .

The question of who eventually becomes governor, of course, makes a lot of difference to New York City because, legally, New York City [exists](#) as a creature of the state. For example, the state requires the city to pay half of the state's share of costs of the [Medicaid program](#)

, but sets the rules about how the program operates. It determines tax policy, decides to fund or not fund various programs, and establishes the parameters for [rent control](#)

Two thorny issues provide an example of how the governor could make a big difference to city residents. One is school funding. The state's courts have repeatedly ruled in the [Campaign for Fiscal Equity](#)

suit that city schools need billions of additional dollars a year to provide students with a "sound, basic education." So far, the state has not provided the extra operating funds, largely because Pataki continues to fight the ruling in the courts.

Suozzi has said he would give the city schools an extra \$2.5 billion a year but adds that the problem is "not just a funding crisis, or educational crisis; this is a moral crisis that has to compel all of us to act." And so he has called for improving teacher quality and expanding charter schools and pre-kindergarten programs.

Spitzer says the city schools need an extra \$4 billion to \$6 billion a year.

On rebuilding the World Trade Center site, Spitzer has [criticized](#) the [Lower Manhattan](#)

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Development Corporation

, the soon to be defunct agency Pataki created to handle rebuilding. "We need to regroup and make sure that we can get this moving in the right direction with construction that will bring back the vitality we desperately need in lower Manhattan," the attorney general said in May.

Suozi, in turn, has criticized Spitzer's criticism. "Eliot has been a statewide elected official every day since Sept. 11, 2001, as well as running for governor for more than 500 days, and he has never offered one idea, constructive or otherwise, regarding the rebuilding of lower Manhattan," Suozzi said.

Other Statewide Posts

New York has three other statewide offices -- lieutenant governor, comptroller and attorney general. But the only office that will be on any primary ballot is that of attorney general. The spirited contest for the Democratic nomination to succeed Spitzer has come down to three contenders: former federal housing secretary [Andrew Cuomo](#), former New York City Public Advocate [Mark Green](#), and corporate attorney and former Bill Clinton aide [Sean Patrick Maloney](#). (Former federal housing official [Charlie King](#) dropped out last week.)

Cuomo won the [backing](#) of the state's Democratic establishment, capturing 67 percent of the delegate votes at the [state party convention](#). This compelled his rivals to mount petition drives in order to a primary and get on the ballot. (One, [Denise O'Donnell](#), bailed out of the race at that point.)

Most of the coverage of the race has centered on Cuomo and Green. The contest has had its absurd and even ugly touches, with Green lambasting Cuomo's record as federal housing secretary and Cuomo attacking Green for attacking Cuomo.

Click [here](#) to read a synopsis of the debate between the candidates or to listen to the whole thing. And go to Gotham Gazette's [Eye on Albany](#) for a press archive on the race.

For better or worse, in his eight years as attorney general, Spitzer demonstrated how important a person in that office can be to New York City. Although attorney general is technically the state government's lawyer, representing it in legal cases, Spitzer used the office to pursue investigations of Wall Street and the mutual fund industry, leading major firms to agree to change long held practices. "He has transformed a sleepy office into the nation's dominant regulator and reengineer of the financial services industry — all in the name of protecting

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consumers,” Daniel Gross wrote in [Slate](#) .

Whoever wins the Democratic primary will face Westchester County District Attorney [Jeanine Pirro](#) in November.

THE LEGISLATURE

In the last few years, the cry to reform Albany, particularly the state legislature, has become a kind of mantra. But with most incumbents running unopposed or facing only token opposition, the opportunities for sweeping change in the Capitol seem scant. (For an overview, see [State Races](#) and Incumbency -- How New York Is Not Connecticut.)

State Senate

In the State Senate, Republicans hold an edge -- [35 seats to 27](#) for the Democrats. But in New York City, Republicans have only five of the city's 26 seats. And on primary day, only one Senate district offers a Republican primary. Most of the day's Senate action will be for the Democrats.

For a list of all the city's State Senate primaries, including candidates, links and brief descriptions, go to [Contested State Senate Seats](#) .

State Assembly

The State Assembly is controlled by Democrats who hold more than two thirds of the 150 seats. In the city, the numbers are even more one-sided, with Republicans holding only four of the city's 65 seats. (One Republican, Dov Hikind, has the Democrat's backing as well.) On Tuesday, 16 districts will hold Democratic primaries, two will have Republican contests, and there will be one Conservative Party primary in the Bronx.

For a list of all the city's State Assembly primaries, including candidates, links and brief descriptions, go to [Contested State Assembly Seats](#) .

NEW YORK'S REPRESENTATIVES IN WASHINGTON

Across the country, the campaign for a third of the 100 seats in the U.S. Senate, as well as all 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives is in high gear, with Democrats hoping [six seats](#) in the Senate will change hands and give them control. They need to pick up [15 more seats](#) in the House to be the majority party there.

Operatives of both parties, along with reporters, commentators and consultants, have drawn

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lists of those posts they believe to be in play â€” the seats that could change from one party to the other. While some House seats [upstate](#) comes up with some regularity, none of New York City's [13 seats](#) -- 12 of which are held by Democrats â€” are considered likely to switch parties this year.

But any shift between parties will not happen until November. This week, both the Democratic and Republican parties have primaries for U.S. Senate. One of the city's congressional seats is open and features a hard fought Democratic primary. And one veteran member of Congress faces a serious challenge.

U.S. Senate

In the Democratic primary, [Senator Hillary Clinton](#) is facing a challenge from [Jonathan Tasini](#)

Billing himself as a “real Democrat,” Tasini, former president of the [National Writers Union](#)

, wants an immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq and, while he holds positions on other issues, is largely challenging Clinton on her support for the war.

Obviously he would like to copy [Ned Lamont](#)'s success in Connecticut, but unlike Lamont, Tasini does not have money to fund his own campaign and some progressive Democrats, such as MoveOn.org, which backed Lamont, have not offered their support to Tasini.

The GOP contest to face Clinton in November could be the year's weirdest race. Last year, the party seem on track to nominate Westchester District Attorney Jeanine Pirro but Pirro's campaign quickly faltered -- she lost a page of her speech announcing her candidacy, could never raise money and lost the backing of key officials -- and in December, Pirro [decided](#) to run for attorney general instead.

Two Republicans stepped into the breach: former Yonkers mayor [John Spencer](#) and [K.T. McFarland](#)

, who worked in the Reagan administration (the extent of her responsibilities has been open to debate). Although real issues undoubtedly separate the two -- she is pro choice, while he opposes abortion, for example -- the campaign has been mired in accusations about each other's personal life.

In an [August debate](#), for example, McFarland criticized Spencer for fathering two children with his chief of staff while he was married to another woman. McFarland's personal life -- her alleged abuse as a child, her abandonment of a brother who died of AIDS -- have also been grist for the political mill.

House Seats

District 10 (East New York, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Fort Greene): Democratic primary

â€” [Charles Barron](#)

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â€~ [Roger Green](#)

â€~ [Edolphus Towns](#)

Towns has held this seat since 1984 and has had tough primaries before. This time he faces a challenge from City Councilmember Charles Barron, a former Black Panther known for his outspoken style on the council, and from State Assemblymember Roger Green.

Towns has been under attack from Barron -- who has called him "lackadaisical" and part of a machine -- and from the Democratic leadership in the House of Representatives. But his campaign skills and the advantage of incumbency have helped him hold on before.

For more on this race see Gotham Gazette's [U.S. Congressional District 10](#) "Taking On Ed Towns. To link to a radio talk by Green and Barron click [here](#)

. (Towns has declined to participate in the debates.)

District 11 (Park Slope, Flatbush, Brownsville): Democratic primary

â€~ [Carl Andrews](#)

â€~ [Yvette Clarke](#)

â€~ [Chris Owens](#)

â€~ [David Yassky](#)

The race to fill the congressional seat being vacated by Major Owens has been New York City's most heated contest for the past several months. One reason is that congressional seats rarely become open in New York. This contest also combines race (Yassky is the only white candidate in the predominantly black district), money (at one point Yassky had raised more money than any other Democrat seeking an open seat in the entire country) and nepotism (Chris Owens is Major Owens' son; Yvette Clarke is the daughter of Una Clarke, who once challenged the senior Owens).

Few issues divide the Democratic contenders, who have vied to see who can be the most outspoken opponent of the war in Iraq. They do differ over Atlantic Yards; Owens opposes the arena and residential complex in downtown Brooklyn, Andrews and Clarke support it, and Yassky favoring it with modifications. And the candidates have clashed over each other's connections and background, with Andrews under attack for his ties to now convicted Brooklyn Democratic boss Clarence Norman and Clarke having had to deal with embarrassing disclosures about her college transcript and loans as well as campaign funds.

For more see Gotham Gazette's [Running for Brooklyn's Open Seat](#) . Other articles on the race have appeared recently in the

[Times](#)

and the

[Village Voice](#)

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District 13 (Staten Island): Independence Party primary

â€™ [Vito Fossella](#)

Anita Lerman Lerman, the vice chairperson of the [Staten Island Independence Party](#), is challenging Fossella, the one Republican in the city's congressional delegation. Regardless of who wins the primary, Fossella will still appear on the November ballot as the GOP nominee.

District 17 (north Bronx): Democratic primary

â€™ [Eliot Engel](#)

â€™ [Jessica Flagg](#)

Engel, a former New York City schoolteacher and member of the State Assembly, was first elected in 1988. According to the [Almanac of America Politics](#), his "once strongly liberal voting record has become more moderate." That appears to be the impetus behind Flagg's candidacy. A business consultant who says she became more politically involved after "the Supreme Court intervention" in the 2000 presidential election," Flagg's Web site says that she decided to challenge Engel "because of his position on the Iraq war, the way he speaks about Iran and his lack of support for the resolutions calling for Censure, impeachment or even investigation of the Bush/Cheney administration."

OTHER CONTESTS

Judicial Races

One of the ironies of New York politics is that judges are supposed to be apolitical but run in political party primaries. This years ballot features Democratic primary contests for two countrywide Civil Court judgeships in Brooklyn, and two Civil Court contests in districts in Manhattan and an Independence Party primary in Manhattan. Aside from party machines, one of the few groups that pays attention to these races is the [bar association](#), which evaluates candidates, listing them as approved or disapproved, without further explanation. These ratings are not currently on the web site.

All the candidates in the three boroughs were approved except for John Serpico, Robin Sheares and Pia Wood in Brooklyn; and Mary Rosado in Manhattan's 7th district.

The Democratic and Independence parties will also hold primaries for internal party posts, such as county committees, for state committee, district leader and judicial conventions.

For more on this, see [Albany Matters](#).

For a complete list of candidates, borough by borough, go to this pdf file on the Board of Elections Web site -- [Candidacy List, 2006 Primary Election](#)

BEFORE YOU GO TO THE POLLS

Where and When Do I Vote?

The election will be this Tuesday, Sept. 12, with polls open from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Only registered voters who have registered at least 25 days before the election can vote. If you have moved within your election district, you can still vote. But if you moved to another election district you must have notified the Board of Elections of your new residence “ unless you moved within 20 days of the election. Then you can still vote in your old district.

To vote in the primary, you must have signed up with a party to vote in the primary and you can vote in that party’s primary only.

You should have received a notice in the mail telling you where to vote, but if you do not have it, you can go to [the Board of Election’s poll site locator](#) or call 1.866.VOTE-NYC. This number can provide you with other information as well, such as registration deadlines.

On their website, the Board of Elections also has [instructions](#) for how to work the voting machine.

Absentee ballot applications can be obtained calling the Board of Elections at 1-866-VOTE-NYC, e-mailing a request to vote@boe.nyc.ny.us .

Those who wish to vote by absentee ballot have two choices:

- Deliver by mail: To be counted, an absentee ballot must be postmarked by the day before Primary Day, September 11, and reach the Board of Elections no more than seven days after the election. Or you can drop off an absentee ballot at one of the Board of Elections borough offices by 9:00 p.m. on Primary Day.

If the deadline for requesting an absentee ballot by mail has passed and you cannot appear at the polls on Election Day because of an accident or sudden illness, you may send a representative with an authorized letter to receive an Absentee Ballot Application and Absentee Ballot and return both to the Board of Elections by 9 P.M. on Election Day at your Borough office.

What Are My Voting Rights?

The New York Voter’s Bill of Rights guarantees the right to:

“ **Vote:** The right to vote includes voting for candidates and questions on the ballot.

“ **Have Your Vote Count:** Vote on a voting system that is in working condition and that will allow votes to be accurately counted.

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â€˜ **Secrecy in Voting:** Secrecy in voting will be preserved for all elections.

â€˜ **Freedom in Voting:** Cast your vote, free from coercion or intimidation by poll workers or any other person.

â€˜ **Permanent Registration:** Once registered to vote, you will continue to remain qualified to vote from an address within your county or city.

â€˜ **Accessible Elections:** Non-discriminatory equal access to the election system for all voters, including the elderly, disabled, alternative language minorities, military and overseas citizens, as required by federal and state laws.

â€˜ **Assistance in Voting:** You may ask for help in voting because of blindness, disability, or inability to read or write.

â€˜ **A Ballot in Your Language:** Voters in New York City are entitled to a ballot in Spanish. Voters in Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens have the right to a ballot in Chinese and Queens voters must be able to obtain a ballot in Korean.

â€˜ **Instructions in Voting:** You can view a sample ballot in this polling place prior to voting, and before entering the machine, you may request help in how to operate the machine.

â€˜ **Absentee Voting:** If you will be out of your county of residence on Election Day, or are unable to go to your polling place due to illness or physical disability, you may cast an absentee ballot.

â€˜ **Affidavit Voting:** Whenever your name does not appear in the official poll book, you will be offered an affidavit ballot.

What Do First Time Voters Need To Know?

New Yorkers who registered to vote for the first time via mail, may be asked to provide identification, such as a driver's license, when they go to the polls.

Those without a driver's license can also offer a copy of one of the following:

â€˜ a valid photo ID

â€˜ a current utility bill

â€˜ a bank statement

â€˜ a government check or other government document that shows the voter's name and address.

Those who don't have any form of identification or refuse to supply one will be allowed to vote on paper ballot, not in the machines, according to the Board of Elections. Those votes will be counted if they are verified to match registration forms.

The new rule is part of the federal Help America Vote Act, which Congress passed after the turmoil in Florida during the 2000 presidential election.

What If You Encounter Problems at the Polls?

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If a poll worker says you are not on the list, ask an inspector to verify that you are at the correct Election and Assembly District for your address. If you believe that you are eligible to vote, you can ask for a paper or affidavit ballot. After the election, the Board of Elections will check its records and your vote will be counted if you are deemed eligible to vote and were at the correct polling site.

The Board of Elections says that it has increased efforts to make polling places accessible for senior citizens and handicapped voters, but they admit that there are still problems at some sites. Voters who feel that their polling site is inaccessible should call the Voter Registration Unit of their local borough office for information.

If you encounter problems at the polls, call one of the following places:

- New York Public Interest Research Group: 212 349-6460
- League of Women Voters Election hotline: 212 725-3541.
- New York Civil Liberties Union: 212-344-3005

For assistance in Chinese, Korean, Tagalog, Hindi, Khmer and English, call the Asian American Legal Defense Fund at 800-966-5946. **HOW DO YOU FIND OUT WHO WON?**

On the night of the Primary Election and in the days after, visit [Gotham Gazette's Election Results](#).