

Queens Pols Come Out Swinging

BY CRAIG McGUIRE AND ERIC ROBINSON

While the primary elections may not be until September, some Queens politicians have already begun to trade blows.

This is especially true in two district leader races in the 23rd and 26th Assembly Districts. District leaders, elected to non-salaried two-year terms, are responsible for issuing endorsements for candidates, providing an election staff for candidates, and acting as a liaison between the community and government.

Each assembly district is divided into two parts, A and B, and each party can elect one male and one female district leader for each half.

Accusations Fly in 26th A.D.

One race which began heating up earlier this month is the contest for Democratic District Leader in the 26th Assembly District, Part A, which includes Little Neck, Douglaston, Bayside, East Flushing and North Shore Towers.

Stepping down after 25 years of service as district leader, John Roe has publicly endorsed two candidates — Jim Wrynn, a former district leader in the 25th Assembly District before reapportionment in 1992, and 18-year incumbent Mary Petro.

Wrynn and Petro are facing off against Peter Wolf, former counsel to the late Assembly Speaker Saul Weprin, and Linda Mulé. Prior to redistricting, Mulé was a co-leader with Wrynn in the 25th Assembly District. More than just running-mates, Wolf and Mulé are also law partners and husband and wife.

"My opponent hasn't once discussed what he wants to do if elected," criticized Wrynn.

Wolf countered, "My opponent will not be a good leader in this district, because he has totally indebted himself to (individuals in) the membership."

Wrynn responded that he would not allow his campaign to be reduced to name-calling and finger-pointing. "These are the the irresponsible statements of a desperate man," he said.

While the votership base is predominantly two-to-one favoring Democrats in the 26th Assembly District, the district's lawmakers — State Senator Frank Padavan, Assemblyman Douglas Prescott, and City Councilman Michael Abel — are Republicans.

"The Republicans will be safe as long as Wrynn is in," said Wolf explaining that he does not believe Wrynn would be able to motivate increased participation in the district.

Wrynn adamantly refuted this statement. "The main issue of this campaign will be who is going to best unite the Democratic voters in this district and get them to vote

"I believe this a major conflict of interest," said Simon. "He has to step out of one of the two (positions)."

Sheldon defends his positions. "There is no conflict of interest," he said. "It's not that I don't see any conflict. There isn't any. What I'm telling you is not an opinion, it's a fact."

As evidence for his argument, Simon cites a provision of the City Charter which provides that "no elected official, ... head of an agency, or other public servant who is charged with substantial policy discretion ... may be a member of the national and state committee of a political party, serve as an assembly district leader of a political party or serve as chair or as an officer of the county committee or county executive committee of a political party..." The provision provides an exception for members of the City Council.

Simon said that he brought his allegations to the city's Conflict of Interest Board last week. Board spokeswoman Laura Denman said she could not disclose whether a particular case was under study, but she did point out the same City Charter provision cited by Simon.

Board of Elections Executive Director Daniel DeFrancesco said that because the board was created by

the state, the charter provision does not apply. In some upstate counties, he said, county party leaders also serve as election commissioners.

Simon disputed this. "Since it is the New York City Board of Elections, (Sheldon) is governed by City rules," he said.

Sheldon said that the city Department of Investigation looked into his background before he was appointed to the Board of Elections.

"Everything was investigated as if I was a candidate for the FBI," he said. "There was absolutely no conflict of interest found."

A City Council staff member said that an appointment which was ruled to be a conflict by the Conflict of Interest Board would never reach the council for approval.

Democratic law secretary Resich called Simon's charges "absolutely absurd."

"Obviously Mr. Simon is ignorant of what the law mandates," he added. "All the members of the Board (of Elections) have party positions. It's absolutely appropriate."

With the Queens political landscape already beginning to glow from the volleys of allegations and charges being fired back and forth, this year's election is shaping up into a series of hotly-contested campaigns.

What's Up?

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