

# Take Back the House: Update on Long Island Congressional Seats

By Wendy Diller

Tom Suozzi's win in NY's Congressional District 03 special election on Feb. 13 to replace George Santos, followed a few weeks later by the finalization of New York State's controversial congressional district election maps, clarifies the 2024 political landscape in crucial swing districts on Long Island.

New York is expected to play a key role in determining which party controls the House of Representatives next year, with six seats considered in play in the narrowly divided Congress. Getting voters to the polls will be key, especially on Long Island, which has a sizable population of independent voters, who lean moderate.

Here are preliminary takeaways, based on news reports and discussions with Long Island Democratic groups.

- **NYS CD3:** Suozzi, who won by a 54% to 46% vote against Republican nominee Masi Pilip on Feb. 13, will not face a Democratic

primary opponent on June 25. In the November election, he is likely to be modestly helped by the final NYS congressional maps, which resulted in few significant changes statewide, but importantly in CD-03, transfers portions of one Democratic stronghold, in Huntington, into CD-03 from CD-01, and removes Massapequa, a Republican stronghold, from CD-03 to CD-01. Suozzi, a three-term congressman from Nassau County who gave up his seat to primary Gov. Kathy Hochul, appears to be running a strong campaign with \$1.1 million in cash, compared to four Republican candidates who are vying to oppose him and have just begun fundraising, according to *Newsday*.

- **NYS CD4:** CD-04 is likely to be a battleground. The leading Democratic candidate there, Laura Gillen, a former Hempstead Town supervisor, lost in 2022 by a narrow 3% to Republican Anthony D'Esposito, and a rematch is anticipated in 2024. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee has added

Gillen to its “Red-to-Blue” campaign, which targets 21 vulnerable Republican seats in November. While Gillen faces a June primary against real estate agent Gian Jones, she has a tremendous cash advantage over Jones, and importantly, access to the DCCC cash devoted to its Red-to-Blue campaign. If she wins the primary as expected, she will face D’Esposito in November. D’Esposito, by several accounts, has taken an increasingly hard-line MAGA-Republican position on key issues like transgender youth in sports, abortion, immigration, and other hot-button topics. This is in contrast to Andrew Garbarino, the Republican congressman representing CD-02, says Barry Nisman, a volunteer leader of Bend The Arc Nassau County and co-chair of its election committee. Garbarino votes the Republican line but has taken moderate stances on a number of local issues, he notes. D’Esposito reported about \$1.3 million in cash on hand for a possible rematch with Gillen, who reported \$879,583 in the bank according to federal

finance campaign documents cited by *Newsday* on April 16.

- CD-02 and CD-01 in Suffolk County are considered to favor Republicans.
- **Organizing local Democratic and activist groups:** Local independent Democratic clubs on Long Island have taken a beating over the years as Republicans swept local offices. Revitalizing them has become particularly important since Republicans control the Nassau County legislature and much of its local governing bodies. Suozzi's victory appears to have rejuvenated the Democratic base, including barely active Democratic clubs. Concerned Citizens of NY-03 (CC-03), which was formed in early 2023 with the goal of removing former Congressman George Santos from office following "revelations that he had fabricated his resume and defrauded voters and donors," also sees these

revitalization efforts as critical. In December 2023, it transitioned into “a grassroots good government organization that supports candidates and policies that strengthen democracy,” the group says. Organizer and co-founder Jody Kass is leading efforts to better organize local independent Democratic clubs throughout Nassau County, many of which have been dormant since before COVID.

- **The Blakeman Militia:** Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman’s proposal to form a Nassau County militia, consisting of armed private citizens with gun permits who could be called upon in emergencies to help ensure public safety, has created a local firestorm. Emergencies would be determined by the executive director, and certified militia personnel would be paid \$150 per day for their services. The Nassau County Legislature has yet to approve funding for the militia, and groups are organizing to contest the plan on legal grounds. While this does not fall directly within the

responsibilities of a congressional representative, it heightens partisan tensions in ways that could spill over into the congressional races. New Yorkers with friends and relatives on Long Island are asked to alert Nassau residents about this issue and the start of an activist-led campaign to convince the County Comptroller (Republican) and the Inspector General of Nassau County (Democrat) to oversee this process, and what they argue is inefficient use of funds, given the county's existing robust police force.