

New York election for George Santos' seat reflects bipartisan anti-immigrant, pro-war agenda

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12 February 2024

The special election to the US House of Representatives for the seat of expelled New York Congressman George Santos is underway Tuesday in New York. Both candidates, Democrat Tom Suozzi and Republican Mazi Pilip, who were handpicked by their respective parties, are running anti-immigrant campaigns that reflect the bipartisan embrace of national chauvinism, bigotry and police repression. Neither candidate has a clear advantage in pre-election polling.

Santos, a right-wing Republican, was elected to the 3rd congressional district, which encompasses parts of Queens in New York City and some of the adjacent upper-middle-class suburbs of Nassau County, Long Island, in 2022. He was expelled from Congress in December 2023 for violating ethics guidelines and House rules, although he had not yet been convicted of a crime.

The race has attracted national attention because it could affect which party controls Congress and influence how both parties campaign for the November elections. The Republicans seek to maintain their tenuous majority, and the Democrats hope to reverse their 2022 defeats in the New York City suburbs, which played a major role in their losing control of the House as a whole.

One sign of the election's importance to the big-business parties is the remarkable amount of money that they have lavished on it. As of February 8, the Democrats had spent more than \$10 million, and Republicans had spent \$6.6 million. "I think it's actually more money that is even approximately plausible or needed in this kind of election," Grant Lally, publisher of local newspaper *North Shore*

Leader, told CBS New York.

Pilip, the Republican candidate, is a registered Democrat who previously served two terms as a Nassau County legislator. She supported Santos in the 2022 election but now claims that he lied to her. Pilip was born in Ethiopia and fled to Israel with her family when she was 12. An Orthodox Jew, she served as a gunsmith in the Israel Defense Force's Paratroopers Brigade. Pilip is strongly pro-Israel and has vocally supported the Netanyahu government's genocide in Gaza. She has enjoyed the backing of conservative billionaire Ronald Lauder, a longtime apologist for every crime of the Israeli government. Pilip also stands foursquare behind the police and grotesquely cites her experience as a refugee to argue that she is qualified to keep desperate migrants and asylum seekers out of New York. She presents herself as a political outsider.

Suozzi, the Democratic candidate, is trying to distance himself from his party and from any taint of liberalism. He held the congressional seat for which he's now running for three terms before leaving Congress to pursue an unsuccessful bid for governor of New York. Suozzi is also a former mayor of wealthy Glen Cove and a former Nassau County executive.

He is now advertising himself as an experienced, moderate legislator who, as a former member of the Problem Solvers Caucus in Congress, can establish consensus and find bipartisan solutions within the realm of acceptable capitalist politics.

At the same time, Suozzi is trying to outflank his opponent from the right, especially on immigration. He previously denounced calls to abolish Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and is now appealing to nationalism by arguing that migrants are taking jobs

from American citizens or residents.

Hostility to immigrants and asylum seekers has been the hallmark of this ugly election campaign. Pilip, for example, held an event outside a migrant shelter in Queens to accept the endorsement of the right-wing federal Border Patrol union. During the candidates' one acrimonious debate, Pilip hurled accusations against her opponent. "Tom Suozzi opened the border. Tom Suozzi funded the sanctuary city. Tom Suozzi kicked ICE from Nassau County," she said. "This is absolutely you; you have to own it."

Such vituperation is an appeal to openly chauvinist and fascistic forces, while avoiding spelling out the most barbaric methods that might alarm middle class voters. Pilip has spoken broadly in support of completing the wall on the Mexican border and has called for technology and surveillance to monitor migrants who try to enter the United States. She also wants to "tighten" the standard used for evaluating asylum seekers.

At the debate, Suozzi sought to turn the tables on Pilip. He rebuked her for opposing the recent Senate border/war bill that would have severely restricted asylum claims and expanded the border police. He called Pilip unprepared to serve in the House and boasted that he could strike a deal with his fascistic colleagues across the aisle. Suozzi supports restricting asylum, building the border wall, offering foreign aid to Mexico to stop migration, and creating a path to citizenship for some migrants. He would fund these efforts through a charge on the migrants themselves.

The debate was far from the only occasion on which Suozzi sounded a strident nationalist note. Throughout his campaign, he has called on President Joe Biden to shut down the border. He also demanded the deportation of Venezuelan asylum seekers who were assaulted by New York City policemen on West 42nd Street. "That's outrageous. Kick 'em out!" cried Suozzi, adopting the fascistic position of presumptive Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump.

Suozzi's father was born in Italy, and Pilip became a refugee as a child. But throughout this degraded campaign, neither candidate has displayed basic humanity, let alone sympathy, toward the migrants who are seeking asylum and better lives in the United States. It is not the candidates' nationality, but their class orientation that determines their politics. Suozzi and

Pilip both defend the interests of the corporate and financial oligarchy, which seeks to stir up prejudice and backwardness among workers to preserve its own hold on power, which means, above all, to prepare for war against Russia and China. The candidates differ only on tactical considerations.

Although immigration has dominated the campaign, it is not the only issue that the candidates have been raising. Suozzi and Pilip are vying to show who is the more steadfast defender of the Israeli state.

In fact, little separates the two candidates on this issue. Both support unconditional military aid to Israel, and both oppose a ceasefire in Gaza.

Similarly, both candidates present themselves as tough on crime. Moreover, they tie the issue of crime to the alleged invasion of migrants, although immigrants are far more likely to become the victims rather than the perpetrators.

Abortion rights have been another significant issue. Attempting to thread the needle during the debate, Pilip called herself "pro-life" but said that she does not support a national abortion ban. "Are you saying that you're pro-choice?" Suozzi asked. Pilip became angry and refused to accept that characterization.

The campaign is a part of a shift in New York and national politics, particularly by the Democrats. The funding for the proxy war in Ukraine against Russia, and even for the genocide in Gaza, has become tied up with the anti-immigrant program of the most right-wing sections of the Republican Party. In recent days the big-business media and leading Democrats in the state have called for the expulsion of immigrants, just as New York City's Democratic Mayor, Eric Adams, has reduced services and unleashed the police on the city's nearly 170,000 recently arrived asylum seekers.

Whoever wins the election Tuesday, the result will reflect the shift to the right of the entire ruling class. Suozzi and Pilip's blaring xenophobia is a part of the political establishment's preparation for world war and the deepening attacks on democratic rights that come with it.



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