



## David Siffert for AD 66

### Responses to DID Candidate Survey

#### 1. Why this seat, why now?

- a) What motivates you to run for AD-66 at this moment, and what in your background best prepares you to represent the district effectively in Albany?

I love state legislation. It is my job and my hobby. I write bills, create coalitions, and do advocacy work. I teach a class on the New York State legislature, and help students draft bills for it. I love all this work. The reason I am running for office is that it is extremely difficult to pass bills from the outside. I have seen how having seat at the table gives legislators the ability to move their bills. I'm sick of seeing good bills, that will help our community, die on the floor or be vetoed when I feel that by being in office, I could get them passed and help people.

I know the legislature inside-and-out. Not just the legislators, but their staffs, committee staff, and central staff. I know the power players – I bring them to my class as guest speakers. I know how the various players interact with each other. I know who needs to be called about what. And I know that I need the “Assemblymember” title for my calls to be picked up.

- b) How have you been involved in the community/district over the past two years? Name some of the organizations, community work, coalitions, etc., that you've taken part in.

I have been a member of the Village Independent Democrats Executive Committee and a non-voting member of DID, CoDA, and other clubs. I have been a Judicial Delegate and a member of the County Committee.

I was a lead attorney in the lawsuit against Mount Sinai to save Beth Israel Hospital.

I am currently organizing the Village, with Neighbors United for Immigrant Safety, to go door-to-door to local businesses to prepare for ICE raids.

I coordinate local advocacy in support of Medical Aid in Dying legislation, alongside VID and DID.

#### 2. District triage.

What are the three most urgent issues facing AD-66 specifically (not New York State in general), and why do they rise above others?

1. The cost of housing is making New York unaffordable. Citywide, about half of all New Yorkers are rent burdened.

The Housing Access Voucher Program provides a voucher to low income New Yorkers and families to cover the extent to which their rent exceeds 30% of their income. I will push to take HAVP from a pilot to a fully-funded program.

I would also introduce legislation for a residential vacancy tax. Many of New York City's largest buildings are used largely for pied-a-terres or otherwise sit vacant. If a unit does not have a resident paying income taxes at that address, the owner should pay extra property taxes. Money raised from this vacancy tax would be earmarked for housing.

AD66 residents must also be able to age in place. As accessibility issues push long-time residents from their rent regulated homes, they are forced to leave the neighborhood they have called home for decades. New York must create a comprehensive policy that allows long-time tenants to age in place.

Lastly, housing rights mean nothing without enforcement. I believe New York State should create a statewide, fully-funded right to counsel for any New Yorker facing eviction.

2. Donald Trump has unleashed a secret police across America. They are tearing apart families and threatening the president's political enemies. New York must refuse to participate in, and actively resist, these human rights abuses.

I have been going door-to-door within to local businesses to make sure each one is prepared for ICE raids. I also sit on the policy subcommittee for the New York For All coalition, fighting to make New York a sanctuary state, and on the New York Immigration Coalition's Immigrant Leaders Council. I have served as a lawyer at the Texas border, freeing incarcerated mothers and children.

Legislation to make New York State a sanctuary state and to provide right to counsel to those facing deportation has languished in Albany. As a result, most New York law enforcement agencies are free actively to assist ICE, and New Yorkers are deported without a fair chance to demonstrate their rights. This should outrage every New Yorker with a conscience.

3. AI is going to change our lives in dramatic ways. It has the potential to improve our lives, from medical breakthroughs to improved accessibility services. However, AI also comes with substantial risks of discrimination, privacy violations, massive disruption of labor markets, and even catastrophic damage such as the development of biological weapons or hacking of global banking systems.

I have spent the last 4 years on the front lines of AI and tech policy, fighting for civil liberties in the face of algorithmic bias, mass surveillance, catastrophic risk, and labor chaos. Currently, only one state legislator has a deep understanding of AI and technology policy, and he is leaving at the end of the year. Albany needs at least one legislator who understands these issues, or else we will all be at risk.

### **3. Intellectual honesty.**

Name one position you held in the last five years that you have since changed your mind about. What evidence, experience, or reasoning caused the shift?

I'm more skeptical about development than I was 5 years ago. I have always understood that there is a housing market with supply and demand, and that as demand grows faster than supply, housing prices increase. However, I only more recently looked into the extent to which increasing supply lowers housing prices, and the evidence I have seen is that building even large amounts of luxury units has only small impacts on overall housing costs, given the extremely large gulf between supply and demand. We can't build our way out of this crisis with luxury units. The biggest impact of building large luxury buildings seems to be that developers get rich.

### **4. Independence in practice.**

What concrete actions in your career demonstrate independence from party leadership, political machines, or entrenched interests?

A big part of my job is to sue NYPD. I sued Mount Sinai Health System. I regular endorse against the Manhattan Democratic Party. I advocate for progressive legislation to defend the most vulnerable New Yorkers when powerful forces align against it. I write bills taking on the tech industry. I support regulations and legislation in opposition to the real estate industry.

### **5. Campaign finance and ethics.**

What specific reforms would you champion to strengthen New York's campaign finance and ethics system (e.g., coordination rules, disclosure, enforcement, ethics oversight)? Please be concrete.

New York State's system should look more like New York City's. I don't mind matching funds being limited to in-district donations, but maximum donations must be limited substantially further, and there must be maximum spending caps like New York City has.

### **6. Outside employment.**

Should state legislators be allowed to hold outside employment? If yes, under what limits (type of work, income caps, conflicts rules, disclosure)? If no, why not?

I don't mind state legislators, for example, teaching a class. In fact, I co-teach a class on the New York State legislature with an Assemblymember. But I do think that state legislators' engaging in the practice of law can present conflicts of interest. Overall, I favor moving the legislature to a full-year calendar and further limiting outside income.

## **7. Judicial selection.**

Should New York reform how judges are selected, including the judicial convention system for State Supreme Court? If so, how?

Yes, dramatically. I am a leading member of the Court New York Deserves Coalition, which not only worked to make Judge Wilson the Chief Judge, but has been focused on the details of improving the judicial system.

I have spent countless hours working proposals for selection/election reform specifically, including a full rewrite of the judiciary article of the state constitution, written when it seemed former Chief Judge DiFiore's power grab constitutional amendment had momentum, to be used as an alternative. When her proposal died, we decided to hold back on the proposal.

To start, we should eliminate the election by cocktail party that results from judicial nominating conventions.

Instead, the first reform is that each judicial selection or election must start with an independent screening panel. While Manhattan's work on these has been laudable, these panels should be official and required by state law. The members of the panels must be fully independent of the appointing authority for the position.

Another important reform is to spread out the appointing authorities. Rather than having the Mayor and Governor appointing most judges, we should have various different elected officials appoint different positions, including potentially borough presidents.

## **8. Strengthening democracy.**

a) Should ranked-choice voting be expanded beyond NYC? Why or why not? (in brief)

Yes, I believe that all elections should be ranked-choice. It encourages a more diverse field of candidates to run without risking "spoiling" another candidate, and it encourages a more collaborative campaign process.

b) Are there any changes to the New York Constitution you support? Why?

Many. Three that I have pushed for very hard:

1. Lift the cap on Supreme Court justices – the current cap has led to a shortage of judges that makes litigants wait too long for decisions and receive short, under-reasoned decisions, and forces court administration to reassign judges to courts for which they were not elected/selected.

2. Overturn *Silver v. Pataki* – this Court of Appeals case gives the Governor disproportionate power over the budget. The constitutional amendment to overturn it has long been a priority of mine.

3. Add a right of privacy to the constitution – several other states, including California, have one, but New York does not. I drafted one, and it was recently introduced in both chambers. I will be spending time this year advocating for it.

### **9. Zoning and housing supply.**

Do you support statewide zoning reforms to increase housing production (e.g., by-right housing, transit-oriented upzoning, legalization of multifamily housing)?

If yes, what model and guardrails do you favor?

If no, what scalable alternative do you propose?

Yes, I support all three listed, though these rules should not override protections in historic districts. I also support eliminating parking requirements. I don't think any of these state-wide zoning reforms that I support would dramatically impact AD66, especially after recent zoning rule changes. I would support some zoning reforms in AD66, but those would have to be made locally, not state-wide.

Rather than focus on constructing a few luxury buildings, I think it's more productive to try to make sure more parts of our city and state support 6-story multi-family apartment buildings, especially increasing the supply of housing in working class areas.

For zoning reforms in the district, I would use our air rights as a bargaining chip to try to build large amounts of permanent, accessible, deeply affordable housing. These, again, would be one-off instead of state-wide.

### **10. State vs. local authority. (1,479/1,500)**

When, if ever, should the state override local zoning and land-use rules?

Given the lack of available green space in New York, I think it's not a bad idea for Albany to maintain the ability to reject parkland alienation. I also think that statewide zoning reforms, listed above, are necessary. I am skeptical of overreach from right-to-farm rules, but there is probably some place for preventing municipalities from shutting down traditional, long-standing land uses via zoning rules due to an influx of new residents who take issue with those long-running land uses.

### **11. Preservation vs. homes.**

How should New York balance historic preservation with housing needs in Manhattan?

If a project meets objective standards but faces organized neighborhood opposition, how would you approach the decision?

Every decision must be case-by-case. My priorities are (1) to preserve historic districts and (2) to build as much permanent, accessible, deeply affordable housing as possible. I generally oppose giving air rights to developers for free, but I often support providing air rights in exchange for construction of sufficient permanent, accessible, deeply affordable housing.

## **12. Rent regulation philosophy.**

Is New York's housing situation best served by expanding tenant protections and rent control regulations, reforming them, or rolling them back? What evidence informs your view, and what would change your mind?

Expanding. Rent regulations are currently the most practical, feasible solution to a massive crisis facing renters. I support many other reforms and programs to make housing more affordable and accessible; however, the current crisis requires using every tool in the toolbox.

## **13. Elizabeth Street Garden**

Elizabeth Street Garden is now officially designated parkland. Under the public trust doctrine, land formally dedicated as parkland cannot be sold, leased, or used for non-park purposes without express legislative authorization. If elected, would you vote to remove Elizabeth Street Garden as parkland if that vote came up? Why or why not? (In brief)

No. Elizabeth Street Gardens is magical. Destroying everything that makes New York special and replacing it all with glass condos might be an effective way to lower rents, but only because no one would want to live in a place like that.

## **14. Making it easier to get stuff done.**

a) Briefly state your diagnosis of what most impedes housing delivery in New York and how that diagnosis informs your policy approach.

There are countless impediments to housing delivery, but certainly the City's procurement process has made construction by the City a nightmare, and has prevented an expansion of public housing, or even the maintenance of existing public housing. This is on top of NY's construction costs in general, which are astronomical.

b) Name one specific approval, review, discretionary power, or program you would limit, reform, or eliminate—for housing or transit—while preserving safety and environmental review.

Rather than eliminating specific reviews, I think the important thing is to streamline them – which can happen at the same time? How can agencies collaborate in reviews of a single application, as opposed to going through multiple application processes in sequence? Can we reduce the amount of paperwork and the number of steps, without reducing the strength of oversight?

## **15. Disruption tradeoffs.**

Would you support policies that allow more short-term construction disruption (noise, street closures, visual impact) in exchange for faster and cheaper delivery? What limits would you impose?

This must be case-by-case, but there are times when I would allow that. I don't think a categorical rule on the issue would benefit the community, city, or state.

Again, limits must also be case-by-case, and ideally we would listen to local communities to figure out how to mitigate the worst impacts.

#### **16. Infrastructure cost crisis.**

New York infrastructure projects often cost multiples of peer regions. What specific reforms would you support to reduce costs and timelines (e.g., standardization, procurement reform, in-house capacity, limiting late scope changes, narrowing veto points)? What tradeoffs are you willing to accept?

We definitely need to do a lot of what is discussed. Procurement reform will be critical. Streamlining review processes – currently too many different agencies oversee permitting processes, making compliance time consuming and expensive. These agencies need to work together. Certainly improving in-house capacity instead of hiring more expensive outside contractors and consultants can help. We should alter contractual terms to reduce pricing fluctuations and uncertainty. The tradeoffs this would entail are likely to be political – there are entrenched interests that want to have their own say and veto, as opposed to working collaboratively and efficiently to solve problems and move projects.

#### **17. MTA governance and accountability. (1,302/1,500)**

What is one governance or accountability reform you would pursue for the MTA (board structure, transparency, capital oversight, procurement, labor rules, or operations), and what problem would it solve?

I have sued the MTA, multiple times, to force them to turn over public records about their surveillance systems. I will say that the MTA is one of the most infuriating agencies to work with. We have tried to get constructive feedback on legislation, and their response is usually, “But we are great at our job, why would you need to regulate us?” I have tried submitting open records requests to get more information on their artificial intelligence camera systems, for example to detect fare evasion, and the requests are always denied or stymied. To appeal, you need to mail them a paper copy of the appeal – the only agency I have encountered still requiring that as opposed to email. They do everything in their power to avoid transparency. It’s a mess.

More than any specific policy, there needs to be a deep culture shift at the MTA. The MTA carries more debt than most states. Their budget is about \$20 billion, which is higher than many states’. With this much money at stake, the MTA must be transparent and accountable.

The past August, Comptroller DiNapoli issued a report that despite requirements in 2019 that the MTA create and engage a transformation plan to solve these and other problems, the MTA failed to engage in the requisite reforms. Comptroller DiNapoli recommended creation of a reform plan that included specific dates, activities, and cost savings – this is an obvious first step, and I would support legislation to implement the Comptroller’s recommendations.

### **18. Congestion pricing.**

What, if any, specific changes do you support to the existing congestion pricing model, and why?

I would increase prices for Uber/Lyft, I would create an exemption amount (or lower rate) for in-zone residents, and I would probably increase the overall toll amount. The toll was originally created to be simple. I think it should be made less simple and more fair. We should look through who is paying what and figure out how to change rates to raise equal or more revenue while making sure working class people who have no choice but to use cars for work (e.g. work with heavy tools) do not pay as much as someone taking a limo around our neighborhood for fun. I also believe different classes of vehicle should pay different rates.

### **19. Street safety authority.**

Would you grant NYC broader authority to use automated enforcement (speeding, blocked crosswalks, bus and bike lanes), subject to due-process and privacy safeguards? What else can be done to improve street safety for pedestrians in New York?

Yes, but the privacy safeguards are important. We should also issue old-fashioned tickets to vehicles that break the law.

### **20. State vs. city climate power.**

Should the state remove obstacles to city-led climate policies (e.g., building electrification, performance standards, clean-energy siting)? Where should statewide uniformity prevail, and where should local flexibility apply?

By-and-large, we should use the higher standard. State-wide rules should set an emissions/climate floor, and municipalities should be free to set more stringent standards.

### **21. Climate strategy.**

Should New York incorporate explicit carbon pricing (tax or fee), or rely primarily on regulation and targeted investments? Why? (in brief)

New York must implement CLCPA's cap-and-invest program. The climate emergency, like the housing emergency, needs every tool in the toolbox.

### **22. Environmental review reform.**

Should New York's environmental review process explicitly assess the environmental costs of *not* proceeding with a project (such as increased emissions, sprawl, or displacement) alongside the impacts of development? If so, what changes would you support?

Yes, there is no reason to restrict the scope of environmental review. However, there is reason to restrict the time and cost of environmental review. These two points can be in conflict. I believe we must streamline the environmental review process.

### **23. Schools: outcomes vs. process.**

How should Albany approach NYC public school governance, funding formulas, class-size mandates, and charter school policy to prioritize student outcomes and family needs? Where should flexibility increase, and what accountability should accompany it?

I supported state legislation to lower New York's class sizes, and we must ensure that NYC actually follows those mandates without issuing countless exemptions of questionable legality.

Similarly, data has not demonstrated that charter schools are improving outcomes for students over and above traditional public schools.

We should trust our public school teachers and give them the flexibility to teach to their students as opposed to the tests. Rather than holding teachers accountable solely for the scores their students get, schools should look more holistically at student outcomes in evaluating success.

### **24. Mental health and addiction capacity.**

What state-level changes would you support to expand the supply of effective mental health and addiction care in lower Manhattan, beyond simply creating new programs?

Much of this comes to funding and outreach. We should also expand harm reduction programs including safer consumption sites. However, we also must take a housing-first model, expanding supportive housing so that New Yorkers can get both housing and care in one place.

### **25. Critical health infrastructure.**

Lower Manhattan lost a major hospital (Mount Sinai Beth Israel) after years of financial struggles and legal challenges, despite efforts by community advocates to keep it open. What specific actions should state government take to ensure that critical health care access is preserved in high-need neighborhoods when major hospitals seek to close? How would you tailor these actions to suit the medical needs of downtown Manhattan? Be concrete.

Lower Manhattan needs a hospital, and specifically a hospital that takes Medicaid for most services. The closest we have is Bellevue, which is too far north and is already dramatically overcrowded. The state must provide funding and work with NYC H+H, NYP, and Northwell to expand services and capacity at existing facilities and, ideally, transfer the main Beth Israel building to another health care system.

### **26. Public order and civil liberties.**

What role should **New York State law, funding, and oversight** play in keeping streets, transit, and public spaces safe and functional, and how should the state set standards for policing and public safety that protect civil liberties while allowing effective enforcement?

There are many important ways state law plays a role. To start with, on the one hand, the criminal legal system is almost exclusively a creature of the state. This includes what we criminalize, to what extent we criminalize, how we punish, and more. New York State has dramatically overcriminalized its residents for decades, and it has cost us money and created

long-term crises.

On the other hand, New York State supplies the resources necessary to create meaningful public safety. This includes housing-first models, mental health services, harm reduction services, recovery services, and more.

**27. Oversight muscle.**

What is **one** area where the Assembly should use oversight more aggressively, and what would be the first hearing, audit, or information request you would push for?

AI bias – tech companies have already rolled out AI to screen resumes and housing applications. Most resumes submitted online are already screened by AI and never seen by a human unless they pass. I want to find out if people of color and women are being denied jobs and housing on the basis of protected classifications.

**28. AI, privacy, and civil rights.**

As New York increasingly uses AI systems and large-scale data processing in government and the private sector, what guardrails should be required to protect New Yorkers' rights and democratic accountability?

Please discuss your view of the recently enacted RAISE Act, and describe the core principles you would prioritize—such as limits on data use, transparency and oversight for high-risk systems, meaningful notice and human review for consequential decisions, and effective enforcement—along with how those principles should be applied in practice.

I was among the lead advocates state-wide who made this bill happen. It is an essential, bare minimum first step towards AI safety against catastrophic risk. It does not touch on other risks from AI, including privacy, bias, climate, or labor.

I have focused on tech policy the last 4 years, and we cannot cherry pick certain principles in regulating AI and big tech. We must have legislation on data use and privacy, on transparency and oversight over any system that makes consequential decisions, on data center energy use, on workplace surveillance, and on AI's threats to destabilize the labor market. I have written bills on many of these subjects and have deep knowledge on how to legislate on all of them.

**29. Do you support: Treatment Not Jail Act, prioritizing community-based treatment and services over incarceration.**

Yes

**30. Do you support: Ending Qualified Immunity (S1991/A4331)**

Yes

**31. Do you support: Fair & Timely Parole (S7514/A4231A) and Elder Parole (S15A/A3475A)**

Yes

**32. Do you support: Daniel’s Law (S4814/A4697), which would remove police officers as first responders to most mental health and substance use crises and instead deploy trained mental health professionals, peers, and other health workers**

Yes

**33. Do you support: Any further rollbacks of New York’s bail reform laws? If so, please explain (in brief)**

No, and I have fought tooth-and-nail against such rollbacks.

**34. Do you support: Any rollbacks of Raise the Age? If so, please explain (in brief)**

No, and I will fight tooth-and-nail against such rollbacks.

**35. Do you support: Any rollbacks of New York’s discovery reform laws? If so, please explain (in brief)**

No, and I have fought tooth-and-nail against such rollbacks.

**36. Do you support: Eliminate Mandatory Minimums Act — eliminating mandatory minimum sentences, including New York’s two- and three-strike laws, to allow judges to consider individual circumstances**

Yes

**37. Do you support: Second Look Act — allowing judges to review and reconsider excessive sentences based on demonstrated transformation or changes in law and norms**

Yes

**38. Do you support: Earned Time Act — expanding and strengthening earned time, good time, and merit time programs to support rehabilitation and family reunification**

Yes

**39. Do you support: The full decriminalization of sex work? Please explain (in brief)**

Yes. Sex work is work, and I am committed to passing this bill and others that affirm this principle. I have already met with multiple legislators in support of this bill, including some vigorous arguments with legislators who support alternative models that put sex workers in danger.

**40. Constituent accountability.**

How will you maintain ongoing, transparent communication with constituents?

I have already done this work. Many of you know me personally, and you know I'm easy to reach. When I was VID President, I was available to VID members, community members, DID members, and more. I have maintained that level of availability.

I have also dedicated myself, on a policy level, to increasing government transparency. I convened a FOIL working group, which has done extensive work towards improving New York's open records system, most recently passing legislation in the City Council just this year. I will take that commitment to transparency personally.

Obviously, the demands grow with elected office. I will prioritize staffing for constituent services and constituent relations. My office will be open to the community. I am not running in order to have my voice heard in Albany. I'm running to have our community's voice heard in Albany.