

## Race To Represent 2018: A NY Primary Election Roundtable

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- Dr. Greer: Hello, and welcome to a special election edition of Race to Represent on Manhattan Neighborhood Network. I'm Dr. Christina Greer.
- Dr. Greer: New Yorkers will head to the polls this Thursday, September 13th, for party primary elections. They'll be asked to cast their vote in many local and statewide races, including governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, and both houses of the New York state legislature, the senate and the assembly.
- Dr. Greer: My two guests with me today couldn't be more qualified to discuss New York state politics, and the upcoming ballot. Joining me are political reports Brendan Cheney, and Azi Paybarah.
- Dr. Greer: Okay, so let's just jump right in. Let's start with the top of the ticket and work our way down. We know the election is Thursday, September 13th. Let's start with Andrew Cuomo and Cynthia Nixon. What are you all thinking?
- Brendan Cheney: Well so, last time around in 2014, when Cuomo ran against Zephyr Teachout, he got 60% of the vote, and I think Teachout got 33%. The question is, if Nixon can't win, can she do better than Teachout did four years ago? The latest polls are still a month old, so we'll hope to see a new one, but back then she was getting less than 30%, so it's sort of an open question, has she made ground since then, or not? And can she beat him, or can she at least do better than Teachout did?
- Azi Paybarah: I think Brendan's right. The first question is, does Cuomo's challenger do better this year than the person who ran four years ago. And I think the other question is going to be, what happens to Andrew Cuomo if he gets elected, but the people running with him do not. That includes the lieutenant governor, attorney general. If the people who are going to be on his ticket, and a part of an administration per se, or the people who sort of campaigned as a check against him, do we start seeing Andrew Cuomo sort of operate almost like Donald Trump, where there's potentially elements of his administration working against him?
- Dr. Greer: Right. So before we get to that scenario, because I find that fascinating, and I think it's a possibility in many ways, walk us through how you all see this landscape different than say, 2014. I have some thoughts on the

Cuomo/Teachout matchup of 2014 is not the same as the Cuomo/Nixon matchup of 2018. It's also very different when you're asking voters for a second term, versus a third term.

- Dr. Greer: Talk to us about what the governor has and has not done, to sort of change this landscape, because it seems as though all the papers are pretty much saying that he's the heir apparent, that he will get reelected, even with all his flaws.
- Brendan Cheney: Teachout had some benefits when she was running four years ago, that helped her. There was dissatisfaction over Cuomo's fracking, or maybe lack of position at the time. There were some concerns among teachers and educators over some of his education policies at the time. She just benefited from those, sort of getting the anti-Cuomo vote. I'm not sure what those are this time. And yet, I think Nixon has gotten out there more. She has more name recognition to start with. The question is, do those outweigh the lack of these other issues that she benefited from?
- Brendan Cheney: There's also just the idea, there seems to be some sort of a liberal surge in different parts of the country, and the question is whether or not that really ... you know, these sort of Ocasio-Cortez effect, does that help her?
- Azi Paybarah: The big different between 2014 and 2018 is 2016, and that's Donald Trump. Against that backdrop, everything looks kind of different, and familiar, in the same way. Brendan's right that the issues of fracking and opting out of high stakes testing were sort of taken off the table.
- Azi Paybarah: The other thing I think that was different was that Cuomo seemed to be caught by surprise by the primary challenge four years ago. He didn't even deign to acknowledge his primary challengers existence. Very famously, there was viral video of Zephyr Teachout trying to approach, and even shake hands with Cuomo at a parade, and she was blocked by a gentleman by the name of Joe Percoco, who seems to be in for some blocking of his own, because of a corruption conviction.
- Azi Paybarah: Now Cuomo seems to have had four years to sort of prepare for a challenge. He also, interestingly, had the Working Families endorsement, I believe in 2014, and that came very difficult. It was a very arduous process. New York City Mayor, Bill de Blasio, helped secure that. But then what Cuomo did was sort of not follow through with the promises he had made to that party.
- Azi Paybarah: So, he then had a dedicated oppositional force in the Working Families party going against him in this landscape that showed the electoral map was not entirely favorable to him coming out of 2014. So he knew his challenges, he knew his opponents, and when Cynthia Nixon jumped in the race, people thought that Zephyr Teachout's performance in 2014 was the floor, and that somebody with higher name recognition and more money could do better.

Dr. Greer: Could build upon that.

Azi Paybarah: And it turns out that may be the ceiling, because of the issues that Brendan raised, fracking and high stakes testing.

Dr. Greer: Do you think that Nixon is unfortunately ... her achilles heel is the fact that she is a celebrity, as is Donald Trump? Do you think that some voters are saying, "You know what? We have the celebrity's who's in the White House, and things aren't really ... He doesn't fully understand systems, institutions, norms, mechanisms. Maybe we shouldn't do that for the executive our or estate." Do you think that the Trump effect is adversely affecting Nixon?

Azi Paybarah: I absolutely think that that association is destroying her campaign. Just that notion. I think with democratic voters, they had to make this decision, if you are gonna unmoor yourself from the idea of experience and some kind of expertise in government, then are you bringing your party a little bit close to where the republicans are, that cult personality and stuff? And Andrew Cuomo very smartly tried to make the landscape of the debate experience, expertise, knowledge. Those are not questions that favored Cynthia Nixon. She should have been, perhaps, better prepared in her debate to answer those questions. But if those are the questions being asked, they seem to skew more favorably towards Cuomo.

Brendan Cheney: I'm a little skeptical of that, actually. I think that voters historically, don't usually care that much about experience, and-

Azi Paybarah: Hillary Clinton, 2016 against Obama.

Brendan Cheney: Yeah, right?

Dr. Greer: Well, isn't there a gendered element about that, though, because-

Azi Paybarah: Yes.

Brendan Cheney: There could be.

Dr. Greer: When it comes to men, it's like, "I woke up yesterday. I would like to run for-insert name of office." It doesn't always match up that way for women.

Brendan Cheney: That's true. But I just haven't heard it come up that often in this race. I wonder if voters feeling more about Trump that like, the problem isn't his lack of experience, but his personality and his temperament. So, if they're not carrying the experience factor with them, maybe they're looking at the temperament and personality. I don't see that hindering her.

Dr. Greer: Okay. It's interesting because when I watched the debate, and everyone said, "Cynthia Nixon won," for a host of reasons, even though it seems like the

endorsements are still coming for Cuomo, even after the debate, I thought in some ways Cuomo won, because he kept his cool. I thought that he essentially, had to just go there, answer some questions without seeming like he was seething, and hated the woman that was sitting next to him. Do you think some voters picked up on that, or what do you all think that voters were looking for in that particular debate? And did Cuomo deliver, or did Cynthia Nixon deliver?

Azi Paybarah: People always look for a knockout punch, and short of that, they look for gaffs, things that are a binder full of women, remarks that sort of accentuate flaws that people perceive a person to have. For a long time, people have always tried to push Andrew Cuomo's buttons to get him to burst, in essence. That's been going all the way back, since he first ran in 2002.

Azi Paybarah: I actually do think that Cuomo gave people what they thought he might do, which is sort of lashing out at Cynthia Nixon. He, number one, called her a corporation, because she files her taxes as an LLC, which is something actresses and entertainers do. And then secondly, he accused her of asking for favors of Mayor de Blasio, which is her friend. She said one of them was to ask the helicopter to stop flying over Central Park, when they're doing Shakespeare in the Park, and Cuomo says, "That's not a favor? Isn't it?"

Azi Paybarah: And she goes, "That's not a favor to me. It's a favor to New York." And I thought right there was a moment where Cuomo was sort of playing into the worst stereotypes about himself. Calling is rival a corporation, and she says, "I'm a person." And then, having her explain helicopters over a play-

Dr. Greer: And why that's actually- yeah-

Azi Paybarah: Stopping it is a favor to New York, where he can't see it. I thought those were the worst parts about him. Surprisingly, Cynthia Nixon's campaign, I don't think did an effective job of highlighting those moments. You can talk about the campaign and the apparatus, but the debate was a test of Cuomo's constitution in terms of, can he withstand pressure like that.

Dr. Greer: And he didn't flip out on her.

Azi Paybarah: Or she didn't take those moments and highlight them to the point that I thought it would. If this was a presidential campaign, you sure as imagine a room full of young people with computers would have made gifs, and all sorts of videos out of those specific moments.

Azi Paybarah: But I thought overall, the conversation, Cuomo handled himself well, and he said, "Look, I've been doing this. This is not a time to sort of change leaders, because we have Donald Trump in the White House, and we need a barrier between him and us."

Brendan Cheney: I think that she showed that she knew the issues, and I think she did get under his skin a little bit, but not enough, I think, to really cause a big problem for him. I think that he was able to show his experience without getting too upset.

Dr. Greer: Let's start working our way down the ticket. The lieutenant governor's race. So most of the time, I can't remember in recent memory, where I've really paid attention to the number on the ticket. I think some New Yorkers do remember when Spencer resigned, and David Paterson became the governor. It was like, "Oh, okay. So maybe we should pay attention to the number two, because it is possible that this person could become our governor, and maybe run later on."

Dr. Greer: So what are your thoughts on Hochul versus Williams. I mean, we almost can't have two more different ... I mean they are so different in their style, in their mission, and how they conceptualize the role that the lieutenant governor plays. Do you all want to make any predictions?

Dr. Greer: But, you know, I'm fascinated by Williams' getting the New York Times endorsement. I'm fascinated by the traction that his campaign has gotten, and because so many people don't really know who Kathy Hochul is, it's not an anti-Hochul campaign. In some ways it's a quasi anti-Cuomo campaign. But I wanted to hear what you all thought about that?

Brendan Cheney: The last poll, again, was about a month ago, I think had Hochul at 30 and Jumaane at 21, and then a lot of people undecided. So there's a lot of room to move. I think the question is, how much does the Times endorsement of Jumaane Williams help him?

Dr. Greer: And with whom?

Brendan Cheney: Yeah, exactly. Yeah. And to what extent people know that there's a ticket of Cuomo of Hochul together, and how many of them are happy to split the ticket, or how many of them want to keep the ticket together if Cuomo does end up winning? It's just so hard to get a really good sense of where voters are thinking on those things.

Azi Paybarah: And Hochul has described herself as the eyes and ears of the governor, and Jumaane Williams has described himself as the eyes and ears of the people, as a counterbalance to Cuomo. There's this notion that, if Cuomo's inevitable, the way you sort of vote against him with meaning, might be in these other races. You sort of elect the anti-Cuomo's in the other races.

Azi Paybarah: In fact, sort of how Donald Trump was the deciding issue in the presidential race, and in all the races below him in 2016, and again in 2018, it feels like Andrew Cuomo is the deciding issue in the governor's race, but also in the lieutenant governor, and the attorney general's race. If you want a partner with Cuomo, you know who to vote for. If you want someone to challenge him some ways, you know who to vote for in those races also.

Dr. Greer: Well, I think also, it's been fascinating how she has tried to use his past debt as a negative issue that will hopefully resonate with voters, but it seems, and we've seen this across the country, it's actually not having the same effect that it's had in the past, where there seem to be a lot of voters who are saying, "I'm in debt, too. Finally, can we get a non-millionaire as my representative?"

Dr. Greer: So I think that we're in a very fascinating moment post Trump. Sort of in a leftward moving democratic, big D, Democratic party.

Azi Paybarah: And there was also the issue of guns, and on issues of abortion and LGBTQ issue. Hochul has evolved. She had an A rating from the NRA when she was a congress member for one term, and now she has an F rating, and she says she supports the Safe Act. Jumaane Williams an anti-gun activist who has personal positions on LGBTQ and abortion positions, but he has taken votes very much in favor of gay rights and abortion rights, and has gotten endorsements to reflect that. And Hochul is saying, "Well, you can't have personal views and public views." But then, she herself says, "Well, I've evolved on the issue of guns." And she seems to be having a double standard about how to view a public official's change over time on certain positions.

Brendan Cheney: I feel like on those liberal issues, on LGBTQ rights, and choice, they seem to be big barriers when he was running for speaker the last two times on the city counsel. And you can imagine them being a barrier now, but the New York Times endorsement was very strong, and said he's taken votes that support both of these positions, and we think that he's supported these positions. To anyone who is reading that, and had any doubt, I think the goal was to wipe that doubt away.

Dr. Greer: Right. And also the fact that he's running with Cynthia Nixon. I mean, if she had any issues with his stances, we probably wouldn't see this very strong alliance. In the Amsterdam News endorsement writeup, it made reference to something Councilman Williams said, essentially one of the questions posed was, "If you have to work with Cuomo, it's going to be tense. It always has been tense, and so how will you be effected?" And it seems as though he's been able to make the case, not just to editorial boards, but to voters, where he said, "I have a Metro Card. I'll take Metro North. I'll be on the bus. That's what I've been doing, as far as my campaigning, so why would that change? It doesn't matter if he takes my budget away."

Dr. Greer: And the Times endorsement mentioned that Hochul couldn't come up with one single issue where she had acted separately from the governor, which I think your point, Azi, is political, if people are looking for a foil to the governor, we're gonna talk about the AG's race, and that's definitely one way to do it. But the LG seems to be a new strategy.

Azi Paybarah: And one of the things is, we have to talk about those candidates because they are not talking to each other in a debate. Kathy Hochul, amazingly, reneged on a commitment she gave to New York One, to debate.

Dr. Greer: And keep in mind, Kathy Hochul and Jumaane Williams did debate on this network, and it's online, if voters want to go-

Azi Paybarah: Thank God they did-

Dr. Greer: Watch it, okay.

Azi Paybarah: Because, she reneged on a very public, very clear, very unambiguous promise to debate. Now, debates, how much do they matter in the grand scheme of public life? That's one thing. But when you can so easily take back a promise you made on television, that you made, that may call into question other commitments you make going down the road. And I think what she did may haunt her going forward, when people say, "Well, you gave us your word, but how good is your word?"

Dr. Greer: So this is a perfect segue, because-

Azi Paybarah: I like to offer those.

Dr. Greer: Now that we're thinking about the AG's race, the attorney general's race, we weren't expecting an exciting race. We know that Schneiderman had to resign pretty quickly, and almost within 24 to 48 hours, Tish James was the heir apparent. The front runner, and has been up until say, maybe two weeks ago, or so. But, going back to your point, Azi, do you think voters, as we see sort of some of the support for Tish erode, we see major newspapers not endorsing her, but choosing instead to endorse Zephyr Teachout. Is it because she turned her back on the Working Families party, and that's where she got her start? Is it because she had certain strong progressive issues in the past, and seems to be moving to more of the Cuomo land? Is that what editorial boards and voters are picking up on, or is it something else that you all think?

Azi Paybarah: I think the Cuomo coattails are working against her in some ways. I think the campaign she is running may not as good as she is. I think putting under more scrutiny, her record as public advocate. She had eight lawsuits against the mayor, and if you scratch the surface, they're not entirely all, very impressive lawsuits, although the work she does on behalf of people who need attention, in terms of criminal justice, are very laudable, for people who are directly effected by them.

Azi Paybarah: But, when Zephyr Teachout came out and said, "We need someone to use the job of attorney general to check the president, the emolument's clause, and all these other investigations, people started re-imagining, "What should that

attorney general do?" And I think one very small point, but a stinging point, at one of their debates, they were at John Jay College of Criminal Justice-

Dr. Greer: And keep in mind for viewers, they also debated on this network, that it is online if viewers want to check out this debate as well, on MNN.

Azi Paybarah: One of the things that Tish James had done, is refer to Zephyr Teachout derisively as "Professor," and saying that this is not an academic exercise.

Dr. Greer: I did hear that.

Azi Paybarah: And denigrate academia and professionalism, and to sort of denigrate that, it sounded very much like what Donald Trump and republicans do, with elites and expertise. And I think that soured some voters, in terms of who they're looking for. And when it's a low information race, when people agree on a lot of issues, they take cues on these smaller things that happen.

Brendan Cheney: I think you're right. I think her alignment with Cuomo could hurt her because you might have voters who don't really want to vote for Cuomo, but feel like they have to, using the same logic that the New York Times endorsement did for Cuomo, but might feel like the way to punish him is in the lieutenant governor's race and the attorney general's race.

Brendan Cheney: The other thing I'm thinking about though is, if you look at where voter's bases are, Tish James, for me, has a really strong base in New York City, has a lot more name recognition there. Zephyr Teachout did well upstate when she ran for governor. She also ran and lost a congressional race two years ago in the Hudson Valley, and one of the competitors in the race is Sean Patrick Maloney, a congressman from that neighboring district in the Hudson Valley. If he wasn't running, she might be able to have much more of that Hudson Valley, and upstate region, but now she's competing with him for that area.

Dr. Greer: So let's bring him up, because I've been very vocal about his entry into the race. Seeing three qualified women, and then deciding, or having someone convince him that he should run, and possible change the composition of democratic control in Washington D.C.

Azi Paybarah: Sitting in a swing district seat that was held by republicans, he wins it, defends it, and he's apparently putting it up.

Dr. Greer: Yeah, and it could very easily go towards a republican. And so, essentially choosing his own individual goals over the party. That being said, can you all tease out a little bit more about what some of the math could look like for a win, for Sean Patrick Maloney?

Azi Paybarah: In terms of the math, I'll leave it to Brendan. He's much smarter about that stuff than I ever will be, but there is something I think he's doing, in terms of very

simplistic math, and you're speaking to it very directly. There's three women who are running, and him. He is an openly gay man. He and his husband have adopted children who are of different ethnicities, and there's something very beautiful about that kind of image it presents.

Azi Paybarah: But when Sean Patrick Maloney, when he speaks directly to the camera in some of these videos, he performs an identity of masculinity that is very hard to imagine isn't strategic in some ways, when he's running against three women. He very much talks about winning. He had, I think, a baseball bat in one of his ads, and he sort of mimics the language of Trump in a way, and talk about, "Winning, winning, winning. We gotta get back to winning," kind of thing. It sounds sort of like what I hear at sports games, when people are rooting for their team. It's hard to imagine that being something that a person does, if the gender ratio is different than what it is now.

Brendan Cheney: It's interesting. I mean, I haven't seen that side. I think I've been looking at the numbers, and assuming that since he's in third place, and I haven't seen a path for him, and he hasn't gotten the big endorsements, I figured that the most he can do is maybe prevent Teachout. But I feel like that's an interesting point, and that could be something that really helps him.

Azi Paybarah: And he's also gotten a lot of money from real estate, and he's transferred money from his congressional campaign into his real estate, and the republican who's in this race, who's Keith, uh-

Dr. Greer: Wofford.

Azi Paybarah: Wofford, thank you. His media buyer gave me, and I put it out online, the amount of money that the democrats are using to run ads. And Sean Patrick Maloney, up until about two weeks ago, had over a million dollars of ads running statewide. He was the only one doing it at that time. So even though he's the only guy in the race, he doesn't have the kind of institutional support, he is putting money on TV ads, and the other candidates, at this point, had not.

Azi Paybarah: Leecia Eve had put a-

Dr. Greer: One-

Azi Paybarah: Small.

Dr. Greer: But where does Leecia Eve factor into this conversation? Does she factor in at all, besides possibly taking away black voters from Tish, either upstate, or in Harlem? Or is she just a complete non-factor? I mean, she too though, was not endorsed by the New York Times, but they did have a pretty favorable paragraph about her in Zephyr Teachout's endorsement.

Brendan Cheney: It's just hard to see how she breaks through. I think she starts off with lower name recognition, and without a big endorsement. If she's not spending a lot of money on ads, it's hard to see how she can break through, and get voters to know who she is, and then choose her.

Azi Paybarah: I think she acts as a spoiler, in some respects. There's this notion that, anytime you attack a person in a multi-candidate field, it's a murder/suicide. You look bad, the other looks bad. The person who benefits is the person who wasn't engaged at all. Well, if Zephyr Teachout is the front runner, and receives all the incoming attacks, there will be some diminishment in, probably, her support. The people who are launching the attacks look bad, and Leecia Eve could potentially benefit by not being part of it, being above the fray.

Azi Paybarah: The other thing where I think she might benefit is also, if there's a person who's acting like an incumbent, Tish James running with Cuomo, is sort of having that establishment present, all of the other candidates will pick up the antiestablishment vote, anti-incumbent vote, and if that's split three ways, that diminishes Zephyr Teachout. Zephyr Teachout is looking for the Anti-Cuomo vote. If that anti-Cuomo vote goes to any other candidate other than her, it benefits Tish. Leecia Eve potentially is taking votes from Zephyr, because anyone who is looking at that side of the ledger, could have potentially voted for Zephyr, because they know who Cuomo is, and who Cuomo's preferred candidate is.

Azi Paybarah: I think in that respect, she could be siphoning votes away from Zephyr, just by her present of being a non-Cuomo candidate.

Dr. Greer: In both scenarios, either she can siphon votes away from Tish, or she can siphon votes away from Zephyr. Okay, so before I let you all go, the IDC, Albany, you know, we've talking about these, sort of, eight rogue democrats that have been caucusing, and behaving republicans. All those races are quite interesting, but I think the one that is fascinating a lot of folks is Alcantara versus Jackson, just because she's been running some literature saying, "We really do need a Latina in Albany. I came in the race late. That's why I sort of hitched my wagon to the IDC. I was never really with them, the way you all might think of it, and so obviously, my representation, my intellect, all of these things are needed in Albany."

Dr. Greer: And Jackson is saying, "No. She had her chance. We see what she did, and I would like to serve you all again." What do you all think about that particular IDC/anti-IDC race in particular?

Azi Paybarah: I'm so glad you mentioned that, the racial element of it, because what Alcantara is not commenting on is the fact that she is currently the only Latina in the state senate, which means that that demographic is underrepresented in the state. What she is not referencing is that there are other women of Latin and Hispanic descent, who are currently running, that she is not supporting.

Dr. Greer: Jessica Ramos, and-

Azi Paybarah: Jessica Ramos, Julia Salazar, who may have some other issues. But there are other candidates who are stepping forward, that if she makes the argument, "Support me because of these-"

Dr. Greer: "I will be the only one, or not-"

Azi Paybarah: She's currently the only one, but if her argument is to elect because of that, there are other candidates who are not IDC members, who she would potentially be supporting, and she does not reflect that in her ads.

Brendan Cheney: I mean, I think these IDC races are interesting because last time around, there was this same thing, where there are people challenging the IDC in the democratic primary, and none of them won, and the IDC won reelection relatively easily. I mean, they did put up a fight, but they won.

Brendan Cheney: The question is whether it's different this time. If no polling in the race, it's really hard to figure out, to get a sense of it. To get a sense of whether or not, again, this like liberal spark is going to carryover in these races. Whether or not there's enough knowledge and anger about what the IDC did. Whether or not people feel like, "Well, they did it, but they're back with the democrats now, and we trust that they'll stay with the democrats."

Brendan Cheney: So there's a lot we don't know about whether or not this time is different than last time. Robert Jackson has some stuff going for him. He's a former council member. He knows how to run a race. He probably has a good amount of name recognition in the district. I think he could put up a strong fight.

Azi Paybarah: Alcantara just released a mailer featuring Barack Obama on the mailer. On one side it's attacking Robert Jackson for being dishonest, and the other side, it has all these flattering things about Alcantara, and it showed the picture of Barack Obama, who is obviously not endorsing this race.

Dr. Greer: Right. Wow. Well, thank you all so much. Any very quick last minute races that you all are watching, besides the AG, the lieutenant governor, and the governor's race? Any other races that our viewers might be interested in?

Brendan Cheney: I'm interested to see, similar with the IDC, to see if Jeff Klein is easily reelected, or if his challenger defeats him.

Dr. Greer: Okay.

Azi Paybarah: Jessica Ramos, IDC challenger, running against Jose Peralta in Queens, who joined the IDC shortly after Trump's election, but also Jesse Hamilton in Brooklyn, IDC member-

Dr. Greer: And Zellnor Myrie.

Azi Paybarah: Zellnor Myrie, where the issue of gentrification and newcomers in the district, seems to have a lot of tentacles, into other conversations about race and identity and class. I think that's a debate that a lot of people are following.

Brendan Cheney: I should say, Kline's challenger is Alessandra Biaggi.

Dr. Greer: Yes, whose grandfather was a congressman.

Brendan Cheney: Right.

Dr. Greer: Right. Well, thank you all so much for joining me, and hopefully our voters will remember to vote on Thursday, September 13th.

Brendan Cheney: Thanks.

Dr. Greer: Great.

Dr. Greer: That's all the time we have today. Thank you Brendan and Azi, for being here. And thank you for watching this election edition of Race to Represent on Manhattan Neighborhood Network. Please remember to vote. A closed primary election will be held on this Thursday, September 13th, and the general election will be held on November 6th. For more information on voting, locating your poll site, and all of the candidates, visit our website, [racetorepresent.com](http://racetorepresent.com). Bye-bye.