

Race To Represent 2018 Attorney General Reform Interview: Nancy Sliwa

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Eleanor Tatum: Manhattan Neighborhood Network in partnership with the League of Women Voters of New York state and the Amsterdam News presents Race to Represent, an M and N election initiative.

Eleanor Tatum: Hello, I'm Eleanor Tatum, publisher and editor in chief of the New York Amsterdam News. New Yorkers will head to the polls on Thursday, September 13th for primary elections. This election season, New York has many primary races, both local and statewide. Governor, Lieutenant Governor, State Assembly, State Senate, and the Office of New York State Attorney General. The current attorney general is Barbara Underwood. She was appointed attorney general by the state legislature earlier this year after serving as acting attorney general since the resignation of former office holder, Eric Schneiderman. She is not seeking reelection. You may have heard a lot about the four candidates running for the Democratic nominee for New York state attorney general. You can watch an interview with all of them on our website, racetorepresent.com, but there is also a primary election for the Reform Party candidates. Voters will also get the option to select from one of the three Reform Party candidates running to be their nominee for the attorney general. The candidates are Nancy Regula Sliwa, Chris Garvey and Michael Diedrich. Mr. Diedrich talked with us earlier this month. His interview is on our website, racetorepresent.com.

Eleanor Tatum: Joining me now in our studio is Reform Party candidate, Nancy Regula Sliwa. Welcome. Can you tell viewers why you chose to run on the Reform Party and explain what that actually means?

Nancy Regula: Sure. So for many years I've considered myself an independent voter. I was never affiliated with any particular party and as of about a year or so ago, I became very aware of the Reform Party and the party itself and sort of what it stands for. And what I like about the Reform Party is it takes a very big tent approach in terms of people who are running on the line or people who want to be involved. So it's not in my opinion as dogmatic as the two major parties where there are certain principles that everyone across the board would have to

adhere to. It's much more open to differing opinions and differing viewpoints and they only have three main tenants, which they expect people to abide by, which are supporting referendum and initiative and supporting term limits, and my favorite bipartisan elections. I think the fact that people would align themselves with parties is kind of part of the problem. It's the ... sort of the culture today of the political warfare where each party is at each other's throat, really disserves the public and it disserves moving any agendas forward.

Nancy Regula: So the Reform Party is fantastic and also what I've noticed as well to become someone who is going to be running on any of those party lines, it's not an easy thing. You can't just be someone who has good ideas or wants to contribute to the political process. There's such a mechanism and machine in place where it's not easy for people to get involved. Now with someone like myself, I mean I came into the party and I had ideas based on agendas I wanted to move forward and I was given the ability to do so. So that to me, signifies a lot of what the Reform Party is about, really civically engaging people.

Eleanor Tatum: Now the attorney general is required by state law to represent the interests of the people as consumers. What does that mean to you?

Nancy Regula: Well one thing that I do like about ... sort of the website, the way that it's set up currently with the attorney generals, is that you have anytime a citizen has a complaint related to any business they're dealing with, if there's something that's maybe fraudulent, if there's something that is deceptive, that's when they make calls, when they reach out to the attorney general, and there's lists. Like about the top 10 reasons why people are reaching out to the office. Now in terms of how effectively those are being addressed or how often they're being prioritized, that I'm not sure of. But I definitely think that when people are being taken advantage of and it is at the hands of usually a business interest, something that is robbing people of money or it's somehow representing itself incorrectly and it's harming people. You do need to have someone step in because a citizen on their own, it would be very difficult for them to get redress.

Eleanor Tatum: So in that same vein, which attorney general in the past, do you see yourself as being closest to philosophically and in matters of interpretation of the law?

Nancy Regula: You know, to be honest with you, I don't know if I would necessarily be able to make a comparison. One thing that I've noticed, especially just as of late with Schneiderman having gone and now with Underwood, I think that a lot of focus is unfortunately addressed to the federal level. So there's many lawsuits that are going against the president and while I understand that it could make sense to see impacts from the federal government on the state and, and want to be a part of preventing that or keeping the state secure. There's so much internally that you could be going after in terms of even corruption, things of that nature.

Nancy Regula: So to be constantly looking outward when you're ignoring what's going on in the state to me is really a shame. I definitely agree with the lawsuits that are aimed

at particularly protecting the environment, anything that's gonna be rolling back and sort of taking away some of the safeguards that have already been put in place. Absolutely no reason to be doing that because again, it's only set there to protect people health wise, the environments and it's ... I think that there are certain instances where it makes sense, but like for example, like with Schneiderman, he had 100 lawsuits before he left office filed against Trump and that's almost one every three days that he's filing. I can't possibly see why he would be fixated so much on external when the reality is you could be looking internally and helping the state itself.

Eleanor Tatum: Right. You're running on an animal rights platform-

Nancy Regula: Correct.

Eleanor Tatum: Which includes no kill New York shelter system, tax credits for adopting shelter animals, stopping puppy mills and you say that schools should institute mandatory animal education. What priority would these take in your office?

Nancy Regula: Well I think the most important thing in my opinion, is the no kill shelter. I think that it's the fact that the state is tasked with caring for animals and their welfare and there's a model that's set in place where within two days to three days after an animal goes into a shelter, it's likely being put down. I don't think that the public is really made aware of how much they're not going out of their way to really re-home these animals or to really step in at the front end and keep the populations down. So like the exploding populations, things they could be going out to ... fixing the homeless animals so they're not constantly winding up in the shelters or really being very aggressive about people who have dogs and cats and getting them spayed and neutered, so that they're not getting ... inadvertently just creating a population. Things that could be done because ... I mean I don't agree with the death penalty and to me it's the same exact concept of what's going on in the shelters. I mean to think that they're being brought in there and in 72 hours being euthanized is just unacceptable.

Eleanor Tatum: Now you have a very focused platform.

Nancy Regula: Correct.

Eleanor Tatum: Why not work for the Department of Animal Welfare or the Humane Society?

Nancy Regula: Well what I have been for ... For over a decade, I have actually been volunteering myself and working again with the homeless animals. I'm spaying and neutering, getting them set up into this concept of a colony structure and also adopting young ones out, getting medical care where necessary. And having met a lot of people along the way who do the same thing, I think there are unfortunately some hurdles internally either within organizations where there's only so much you can do, so much leeway that you have and I think you can make an impact that way. But I think that the more aggressive thing that

needs to be done at this point is not only implementing laws to what extent you can, but enforcing ones that are out there in place already to protect animals. And that's a big shortfall that I've noticed, people who are doing so much to help them and then they run into a brick wall because they can't actually utilize the laws that already exist in the state to protect the animals. So that to me just really needs to be fixed on a whole nother level and I think this is a great position to do it.

Eleanor Tatum: Now you have a little friend with you here today.

Nancy Regula: Yes, I do.

Eleanor Tatum: Why don't you bring him?

Nancy Regula: Sure. So this is Jersey. This is a rescue cat. My husband actually rescued her about a month ago and when we first brought her in, she had eye issues. She had some problems where she just needed to be ... It's what happens when they're outside by themselves. Now if someone had been there and they said, "Well oh, why don't we call the animal care and control?" And right away you have to step in and tell them no. That to me is really ridiculous and unfortunate that the animal care and control ... like the shelter systems that are set up, which are supposed to help these animals I've learned are the last place you ever want to bring them because there's absolutely no way that they would have had this cat up for adoption. They would've said, "Oh, well the cat has medical issues. We're gonna put it down." This cat would have been euthanized.

Eleanor Tatum: There are a lot of people that don't put animal rights on the same level as say you do and would really ask the role of AG. How does that really fit into this animal rights platform?

Nancy Regula: Well, I think that ... I mean in addition to being tasked with the protection of people within the state, I think you wanna encompass the protection of animals and I think that it may seem very singularly focused, which I understand, but there's so many areas that it touches. So like for example, increasing ... not only increasing, but even forcing the penalties for animal abuse. Now, part of the reason why that doesn't happen as much as it should ... I'm gonna put her back, is because I think people put animals on a different level. It's not quite as important to have an abuse against an animal. But when you see that ... how many people wind up in prison, who wind up abusing people, they started off earlier in their life abusing animals. So if you're changing the mentality and you're addressing it as the crime that it is, and also this gives people ability to intervene a lot earlier and also the fact that now this person may not have been able to do that to a person. So I ... Yeah.

Eleanor Tatum: So would you be starting a new taskforce for [inaudible 00:11:43] would be ... You'd be pulling from other tasks force to staff that would that. How would that work?

Nancy Regula: What I think that ... I think so much of this just comes from shifting of the resources that are already there. I mean one example would be like the animal care control. They get roughly 20 million per year budgeted and that's beyond just the facility space they get. So to have that much money at your disposal to implement plans of action that are gonna help animals and consistently be in the situation where you're only putting them down. It just shows that okay, you don't have a successful model.

Eleanor Tatum: Right. But that has nothing to do with the budget of the AG's office. That's animal care and control's budget.

Nancy Regula: Well, no. But just the concept of ... No. I mean I think that there are already ... Like for example, there's ... In the Queens' district attorney's office, they have a special prosecution unit that started a couple of years ago and it's specifically focused on that. I think that there's enough people already within the mix already doing stuff and if you're just diverting one sort of attention, like a little bit of focus from one group, you're putting it where it belongs. I mean these things in many instances really work together. So to be focusing on so many independent areas when in actuality, you could be pulling people from one group and it's actually gonna help that.

Eleanor Tatum: Right. Now ... But the AG's office has a really wide range of responsibilities.

Nancy Regula: Correct.

Eleanor Tatum: How will you be focusing on these other things? There are criminal investigations-

Nancy Regula: Correct.

Eleanor Tatum: Internal affairs, New Yorkers who are being harassed and victimized by landlords, the opioid crisis, Wall Street. How are you gonna be dealing with anti-fraud, the Martin Act? How are you gonna be dealing with these other issues?

Nancy Regula: Well I ... Again, I think that the good news about the AG's office in addition to they're well staffed and there's a very clear amount of resources available to you to address a lot of issues. I don't think that they're necessarily addressing things in the wrong way. But I think for example, just that the focus of saying the AGs, for them to have spent as much time as they have with lawsuits against the federal government, that just shows that even with all the resources they have, the people they have, this is what they're doing with them. They're putting them into these singular focus.

Nancy Regula: Now in terms of anything like for instance, the opioid crisis. I mean I'm definitely well aware of that, how many people are suffering because of that, and I think that ... I mean I've taken Narcan training myself. I carry it around with me. I mean there are things that you can really start implementing and I mean ...

Again, a lot of educational, a lot of outreach. I mean there's sometimes this mentality that when you see people who are sick or they have these issues that they get swept up, unfortunately into the criminal justice system. You're penalizing them on the tail end because of something that they've done, as opposed to focusing a little bit more on the front end. So even with like the homeless sort of crisis that's going on, it's one thing to put a roof over people's heads. But then if you don't join that with any meaningful intervention of how are you getting these people back into society, how are they going to be employed again, how are you addressing likely issues they already have, whether medical or psychological.

Nancy Regula: So I think that there's ... And also I think corruption ... There's a big, big need to have ... to hold politicians and anyone who's being tasked with overseeing any part of government to something like an integrity test. I mean, you want to be able to have a valid way to acknowledge when people are doing something wrong and be able to get them out of the system.

Eleanor Tatum: So what professional achievements make you more qualified than your opponents to be AG and have you ever held public office?

Nancy Regula: I have not ever held public office, which I actually think is a plus. I think the fact that people can come in with good ideas and good intentions and not be entrenched in the system ... I mean I don't, I don't believe that people should be making careers out of running for office again and again. I think that you should go in, you should contribute what you have to offer and then let other people come in as well. I mean that to me I think would do a lot to get the corruptive influence out because it opens up the spectrum more to people to jump in.

Nancy Regula: Personally I would say what I've done when I was ... I had my own practice and I focused on family law and also criminal defense. So those two issues just to sort of see what the face of criminal prosecution looks like in the court systems and to see the fact that so many people are ... I mean it's just being run like a ... just a mill.

Eleanor Tatum: Well thank you so much-

Nancy Regula: Yeah.

Eleanor Tatum: For coming in today. It's a pleasure.

Nancy Regula: Thank you for your time. Thank you so much.

Eleanor Tatum: Thank you. Thank you for watching and please remember to vote. A closed primary election will be held on Thursday, September 13th and the general election will be held on November sixth. For more information on voting, locating your polls site and all the candidates, visit our website racetorepresent.com or the League of Women Voters website, lwvny.org. Thank

you for watching Race to Represent on Manhattan Neighborhood Network.
Goodbye.