

Introducer: Manhattan Neighborhood Network, in partnership with the League of Women Voters of New York State and the Gotham Gazette presents Race to Represent, a MNN Election Initiative.

Ben Max: Hello. I'm Ben Max, Executive Editor of Gotham Gazette. New Yorkers will be voting in state party primary elections on Thursday, September 13, for seats including Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, and the State Legislature with its 150 Assembly Seats and 63 State Senate Seats. Only some Legislative seats include primaries.

Ben Max: The State's Senate is the upper chamber of the New York legislature. Along with the Assembly, it works to pass bills that can then be signed or vetoed by the Governor. Legislators work with the Governor to both craft and change laws and to establish a state budget. One very closely watched race this election season is here in Manhattan between the Democrats vying to represent State Senator District 31. Today you will hear from three of the four candidates running in that primary, including the incumbent Senator.

Ben Max: The 31st state Senate District covers several neighborhoods along the west side of Manhattan, stretching as far south as Chelsea all the way up to Inwood. The seating order for today's debate was chosen at random. The candidates joining us are incumbent Senator Marisol Alcantara and challengers Robert Jackson and Thomas Leon. A fourth challenger, Tirso Pena, declined our invitation.

Ben Max: So, thank you all for being here. The first question starts with you, Senator Alcantara. That is, describe for voters, describe for people watching, what is the job of a New York State Senator? Go ahead.

Marisol A.: The job of a New York State Senator is to legislate, to provide constituent services to your district, but also to come out with new and innovative ideas on how to move the state of New York forward.

Ben Max: Mr. Jackson, how do you capture the job of a state senator?

Robert Jackson: A senator's job is to be the representative of all of the people in the district. One is from a legislative point of view, dealing with legislative processes and budget in the state senate. Half of the job, or even more than that, is dealing with constituent issues in the community. But overall, it's listening to the people, going up to Albany, fighting for the causes that the people of our district want and need. That's the job of a New York State Senator.

Ben Max: Thank you. Mr. Leon, how do you describe the job of a state senator?

Thomas Leon: The job of the state Senate is to legislate the law. But, if I become elected, I will be concentrated and sold the issues that our community have. I will mention in the example. For example, the small business owners, they are working very

hard to pay their rent. They, also, cannot afford it. like I do, I also, a small business owner.

Thomas Leon: For example, the immigrant population is not getting priority. There are a bunch of issues that we have to face, as a state senator, so we need like two or three hours to discuss all the issues.

Ben Max: Well, we've got a little bit of time, but that actually takes us into the second question, so why don't you just keep going. Talk a little bit more about the issues facing the district. The second question is, what are the top two or three issues that you believe, right now, and I'll get into others after. But, what do you believe are the top issues facing the district? Go ahead.

Thomas Leon: We have a serious problem with housing. The abusive increase of the rent, we got problem, you see that. We have to improve the services for the senior citizens and all bunch of stuff that we have to face.

Ben Max: Okay. Senator Alcantara, your answer, the top issues facing the district?

Marisol A.: To me, the top three issues facing the issue are housing, immigration, and education. In terms of housing, I have provided over \$350,000 in funding to organizations in the district that can provide legal assistance to folks that are losing their home, or have problems with their home. We have done town housing workshops all throughout the district with many attorneys, so our constituents can go and ask questions. We have an attorney in-house that constituents can come and take care of their housing issue.

Marisol A.: In terms of immigration, I worked with the governor very closely to create the first-in-the-nation immigrant legal defense fund. Where we provided over \$50 million of funding for organizations, all throughout New York State, to provide representation to both documented and undocumented immigrants. In this age where immigrants feel like they're being attacked, we thought that was a wonderful idea for New York to handle that problem.

Marisol A.: Third, education. I have provided over 2.5 millions in funding to different schools throughout our district. I worked very closely with the UFT, which is endorsing me, to create three teacher centers all through our neighborhood that would help reduce the number of students that are English learners. I have also provided over \$400,000 in funding to CUNY in the Heights, to provide training, English as a second language, and so on.

Marisol A.: Last, but not least, along with the City University of New York, I provided \$1.5 million in funding to create a campus of Manhattan Community College, in Upper Manhattan, so our students don't have to travel downtown.

Ben Max: Okay, thank you. Mr. Jackson, top issues facing the district?

Robert Jackson: Affordability of housing is a primary issue. When you look at up in Albany, as far as the Republicans, and our state Senator, and the IDC, they have basically stopped progressive legislation that deals with the vacancy decontrol. That deals with preferential rent.

Robert Jackson: That deals with the [Earn Stat 00:05:54] law that would give New York City the opportunity to govern itself. That's been held up by the Republicans, in the state Senate. Now, our state senator is part of the problem, but that's number one.

Robert Jackson: As far as number two, education. Education in the State of New York owes the state schools \$3.4 billion. How much in New York City 1.8 billion, which has been passed by the New York State Assembly, but not passed by the New York State Senate. In fact, I walked to Albany, in the Campaign for Fiscal Equity Lawsuit, which resulted in \$16 billion for the children of New York City.

Robert Jackson: But, while I walk, our state senator, who's sitting next to me, walked off the floor when it came to voting for our children's education. The Senate said, "Yes, we will phase in that money, over two years." The state senator, and others, walked off the floor, so their vote would not be counted.

Robert Jackson: Number three is for immigration reform. The DREAM Act, which deals with children that have come here young and want to get a college education, that's been held up by the Republicans. The Liberty Act, what's called for a sanctuary state, where state officials would not corroborate with ICE to deport people, the Republicans have held that up in the New York State Senate.

Robert Jackson: The IDC, which Marisol is part of it, is part of the problem. The people of the district want change-

Ben Max: I'm going to stop you there-

Robert Jackson: And that is what this is about.

Ben Max: Okay, so there's a few things for you to respond to there. We can start, I suppose, with this question around whether your membership in the Independent Democratic Conference, which was until a few months ago, a group of eight senators, including yourself that had their own conference and agreed to sort of a coalition government with the Senate Republicans. That had a one-seat majority and made it into a nine seat majority in the state Senate. How do you respond to the accusations that the IDC, by working with Republicans, blocked improvements to rent regulations and more education funding?

Marisol A.: Well, there are 63 senators in the state of New York. 32 Republicans, 31 Democrats. The IDC dissolved in April. Even when we came together as a Democratic majority, we saw that we brought issues to the floor and we were

never able to pass them. We brought a hostile amendment for the DREAM Act, we were not able to do it united as a Democratic majority. We brought the comprehensive reproductive right, we were not able to do it. I believe my record speaks for itself.

Marisol A.: I brought in a record of investment in our community. That's why I have been endorsed by the two teachers unions, because of the work that I have done in education. Like I said, we have created three teacher centers to reduce the class size. Latina, a big part of our district has a high percentage of Latinos. We created mental health programs, in ten of our schools, to address the issue of teenage suicide amongst Latina women. We did many college fairs in the district, brought in a number of colleges to help out.

Marisol A.: Like I said, we did a record investment in CUNY, to bring in a campus to our district. We brought an arts program into our school music program.

Ben Max: So, let me follow up on that, because you also listed some other funding allocations that you brought back to the district in your prior answer. You were elected two years ago, this is your first term?

Marisol A.: Correct.

Ben Max: You're you're finishing up now. You're hoping for a second. That was, basically, your calculation. That by joining the IDC, you would help bring more resources back to your district. Is that sort of the general calculation for your constituents, your voters? That's what you say, "I joined this conference and yes we aligned with Republicans, but we couldn't have had a Democratic majority anyway. I was able to then bring resources back to the district." Does that capture it well?

Marisol A.: No. I joined the ID ... When I ran for office, I reached out to all the Democratic establishment, in the city of New York. I spoke to them of the idea that I was a Bernie Sanders delegate, I'm a feminist, I'm progressive, I'm a trade unionist. There were no Latinas in the state of New York. No one from the entire establishment supported, or were interested in bringing some level of diversity to the state Senate.

Marisol A.: I had a prior relationship with Diane Savino, who came out of the labor movement like I did. That's how I came in contact and that's how I joined the IDC. If you look at my voting record, I have 100% voting record of approval from the League of Conservation Voters. My record on environmental, on labor movement, have been amazing.

Marisol A.: My bill to have all orders of protection for domestic violence victim was adopted into the budget. My car check bill, to protect public sector unions, was adopted by the governor of New York.

Ben Max: Okay. So, let me stop you there. Mr. Jackson.

Robert Jackson: I would like to respond.

Ben Max: Yeah, yeah. Your case, that Senator Alcantara and the IDC have stopped progressive legislation from passing, that would have passed without an IDC, what's that argument?

Robert Jackson: The people of the district ex ... When Marisol said that she, no one supported her. It was an open seat. The establishment really does not support an open seat. Everyone is open to run, and she ran, and I ran, and two other people ran. The bottom line is that, the people, based on ... Voted for her, but only 1/3 of the vote.

Robert Jackson: But, here's the difference. The difference is, the people of the district are progressive Democrats that want a leader that's going to stand up and fight the system. They're going to fight the Republicans, the Trump Democrats that are basically holding up everything. She talked about what she brought to the district.

Robert Jackson: Here's an example, she's playing a three-card monte game, with respects to education. The district, the 31st Senatorial District, which goes to Midtown, the Upper West Side, and all of northern Manhattan, is owed \$55 million dollars by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity.

Robert Jackson: When she walked off the floor, \$55 million dollars. Those children that have lost all of that money can never recapture it, because the Juan Pablo Duarte school, PS 132, one of the founders of the Dominican Republic, owed \$1 million dollars a year. She showed up with a mock check for \$50,000 for air condition. That is peanuts.

Robert Jackson: That's part of the shell game that's being played on the people of our district. They need a change. That's why all of the Democratic clubs, in the district, has endorsed me. That's why almost every elected a public official, except two, have endorsed me. That's why all of these groups, 60 of them on the steps of City Hall, Action Pot Love, True Blue New York.

Ben Max: Let me ask you this.

Robert Jackson: All are supporting me.

Ben Max: Senator Alcantara mentioned that she has the support of these two education leader unions, and teachers union, principals union. Why would they be supporting her, if she had a bad record on education and education funding?

August 24th, 2018

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Robert Jackson: Sure. Well, obviously, you know that the Governor sat down with Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Jeff Klein at a press conference, which we all heard. Basically, the governor tried to put together a formula that basically said that, "We will support the people that have come back." But if you really look at it, after that press conference, several days later, the IDC, the Independent Democratic Conference, put out they're holding a fundraiser, not for all of the Democrats of the State Democratic party, but only of the IDC, with \$1,000 and \$5,000 a plate.

Robert Jackson: Who attended that? Real estate money, hedge fund, charter school money. That's what it is. it's a sham that's being played on the people of New York City. Four years ago, there was a deal that broke down. Everyone expects that this will not hold. The governor is looking at running for mayor. I mean, for the president. He's trying to put this together. But the bottom line is, this has occurred for years, and the governor has allowed this to happen.

Ben Max: So, I need to bring-

Robert Jackson: The time is now for change.

Ben Max: So, I'm going to bring Mr. Leon back in, in just one second. Senator Alcantara, can you explain a little bit? The IDC did not necessarily make a Republican majority?

Marisol A.: Correct.

Ben Max: But, if instead of 40 seats between the IDC and the Senate Republicans combined, if it was 30 to 31 with a strength in Democratic conference, and perhaps trying to persuade Senator Felder, from Brooklyn, who has made that 32 majority for the Senate Republicans. Wouldn't it be closer to how you brand yourself as a progressive, as a Democrat, to stick with the Democrats, and try to figure out a way to put more pressure on the Republicans, and put more pressure on Senator Felder? Do you have any regrets about making that choice?

Marisol A.: Let me address some of the issues that he brought up. the fundraiser that we had, in Washington Heights, was the fundraiser to raise funds for Shelley Mayer, who was running for Senator in Yonkers. We, all the members of the IDC, donated \$10,000 apiece for Shelley Mayer. I am running for this district. I represent this district proudly, because of the work that I have done on immigration.

Marisol A.: I carry the bill to keep ICE out of the courthouse. I carry the bill to make ... Instead of you got arrested for hopping the subway, or a minor misdemeanor, instead of them giving you a ticket, or something for 365 day, would let ICE know that you could be deported. That's my bill. That is that of 364 day, 65 day, can make it 364 day. I am an immigrant. I was born out of this country.

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Marisol A.: For Mr. Jackson to sit here. The teachers union, I take their endorsement with pride, because I'm a trade unionist. I believe that teachers are not here to ... They didn't endorse Governor Cuomo. I am the only IDC member that they endorsed. It's because of my record on education.

Marisol A.: I do not believe that unions should be demonized, or that unions are special interests. Unions look out for the children of New York, for the working-class people, and for teachers. I am proud to have the endorsement of the UFT.

Ben Max: I think on one hand there's a lot of people that give you credit for some of the bills, some of the funding that you've mentioned, and some of the votes that you've taken. On the other hand, even with some of that record, the money trail from, as has already been said, real estate interests, and charter school interests, education reform interest, that heavily, heavily funds the IDC, and that money then went to help get you elected two years ago.

Ben Max: Since, has continued to flow into you. How do you reconcile your record, but also the membership in the IDC and the money that's flowed in from the interest that you say you're opposed to?

Marisol A.: For example, I voted for charter school to be capped. I have voted for more transparency and the ways charters cooperate. Just because they gave me money, it has not stopped my vote on how I feel and what I think is the best for the students of my district. I am supported by TWU. I believe in congestion pricing.

Marisol A.: So, just because someone ... I am not the only Democrat in the state of New York that receives money from real estate. We have people that are running for office that have received money for real estate. My record speaks for itself. The work that I have done in the district, in terms of immigration, I have been supported by every major labor union in the state of New York. 1199, DC37.

Marisol A.: They are not supporting me, because they think I'm tied to special interests. They have seen the work that I have done for working-class New Yorkers and for the people at my district.

Ben Max: Great. Let me stop you there. Mr. Leon, tell us, tell ... You know, both of your competitors on the stage were on the ballot two years ago. Mr. Jackson is well known, from being a City Council member and he's run for other offices. Tell voters a little bit more who you are. What makes you qualified to become a state senator?

Thomas Leon: So, good morning everyone. My name is Thomas Leon. Thank you MNN, Manhattan Neighborhood Network, for inviting me and for being fair, because I was excluded from New York One. Yesterday, I was very lucky. I become grandpa for the second time. My daughter have a beautiful and healthy baby.

Ben Max: Congratulations.

Thomas Leon: Thank you.

Ben Max: Tell us a little bit about the work you've done-

Thomas Leon: Thank you. Okay.

Ben Max: In your preparation for the role.

Thomas Leon: In the debate that was at New York One, I find out that they attack. They are attacking each other. Is it necessary? I don't believe. I don't want to run a negative campaign. My campaign will be based only in good ideas. I don't have money. I don't have agenda, except to help people of the District 31st that really need help.

Ben Max: Is there any one, or two, things on your resume that you'd highlight for voters?

Thomas Leon: Oh, in my resume, I will work hard for housing, for the abusive increase of the rent, for education, against the crime. We have a big problem in the neighborhood with the drug.

Ben Max: Okay. Thank you.

Thomas Leon: I would like to open-

Ben Max: I'm going to stop you there. Thank you.

Robert Jackson: I disagree with what he's saying, because he indicated, in his statement, that we are attacking one another. I don't feel that I'm attacking the Senator. I feel that I'm just exposing the truth of facts. The fact is she walked off the floor, when the vote for education. The fact is that as far as contributions, yes we have over 9,000 contributions to our campaign, with the average contribution is under \$32. Whereas the Senators contributions, 500 of them or so, from major real estate, hedge fund, charter school, and other sites.

Ben Max: I think, you know, generally, that obviously the tenor of this race, and many other races, have been fairly negative. Because, you have challengers trying to unseat incumbents. That's what's going to happen. My next question is this though, coming back to you, and we'll start with you Senator. As I mentioned, both of you ran two years ago. It was a four-way race. There were three candidates that all got around a third of the vote. You, obviously, were successful.

Ben Max: But, this time, there's two of the three that got a third of the vote. That means there's basically a third of the vote up for grabs. What have you done, in this

campaign, to reach out to those voters that did not support you, they did not support Mr. Jackson last time, how do you bring new voters to your side? What have you been doing?

Marisol A.: Right. We've been working. My team, when I say we, I mean my team. I've been working very hard, all across the district, educating our voters, having an open-door policy. We believe are the only Senate office that is open on Saturdays, and late hours on Wednesdays, to make sure that we address the needs of those folks that don't have a traditional nine-to-five work hours.

Marisol A.: We have done town halls, all throughout the districts, on issues that are important. We make it a point, in our office, of addressing whatever questions our constituents have within a 24 or 48 hours period. We have had town halls on environmental issues. The, you know, not using plastic bag. We have created community gardens.

Marisol A.: We have done walks all across all the parks in our district. So, we have done a great job in my office and reaching out to everybody in our district. Our district is very diverse, so people have different interests. We have done a lot of work in NYCHA, not only in our regular NYCHA buildings, but also in our 55 and older buildings. Making sure to reach out to everyone that is in our neighborhood.

Ben Max: Michael Lasher was the third candidate that got about a third of the vote last time around. The people that supported him, are those folks that, in the campaign, putting the government work aside, but I heard your answer on that. In the campaign, are those voters that you've tried to reach out to convince to come to your side?

Marisol A.: You know, we send out mailers, like every campaign, to everybody. I do door knocking. When you door knock in the buildings that you are able to get to, because of security. We have tried to reach out to everyone in our district, and work with everybody in our district, regardless of what are they from. Because, we feel that, that's the best way to represent. To have an open-door policy, even with people that have been in my campaign. The work that I have done on issues of environment, education, in trade unionism, are issues that affect everyone in the district.

Ben Max: So, Mr. Jackson, let's just assume, for the sake of this discussion, that many, or most of the voters that supported you last time, will do so again, and the same thing for the Senator. There is this sort of third of the vote that's been up for grabs, let's say. Plus, potentially, many new voters. We know there's a lot of energy, obviously, in the Democratic Party. How have you tried to reach out for new support?

Robert Jackson: Sure. Well, as you indicated, the three of us, there were four of us in a race, but three of us basically garnered 95% of the vote, give or take a couple hundred.

Michael Lasher, who was involved with the two years ago, he is a whole heartedly supporting my candidacy for the New York State Senate. So, the expectation is all of the votes that he received are coming to me, give or take a few. But beyond that, since Donald Trump has become president, there has been so many groups that have risen up from the ground, like beautiful flowers in the springtime, that are extremely involved in the democratic process.

Robert Jackson: I named some of them before. NO IDC NY, True Blue New York, Indivisible, Harlem Indivisible, Inwood Indivisible, Action Pollack. All these groups are very active. All of them are supporting me in this campaign. It's obvious, to me, and to people that are involved in the democratic process, when you know that there's 16 Democratic clubs in the district, and 15 out of 16 have endorsed my candidacy.

Robert Jackson: Marisol's own Democratic club did not endorse her. What does that say to you? When I say to you, the people of the district, they want to change. They know that she is aligned with the Republicans and they don't need that. I've taken a pledge, right now, and I took it two years ago, I will always be a Democrat, a true-blue Democrat, and never swim across the river in order to sleep with the Republicans.

Ben Max: Let me come back to you. I mean, I think we've obviously covered a bit of the IDC and the alignment, but there are a lot of people, including Michael Lasher, elected officials, community groups, political clubs, supporting Mr. Jackson. Why do you think he has so much support? Is that something about something you haven't done or have done?

Marisol A.: Well, I can't speak. You know, that's a question that they would have to answer. One of the other gentlemen that ran the last time, Lewis Tejada, is supporting me. you know, Mr. Jackson comes here, and makes up a lot of stories, that are really interesting. But the fact is, I have the support of the entire labor movement.

Marisol A.: Almost everyone. From DC37, 1199, the nurses union, TWU. I come out of the labor womb. To me, to have the support of workers, to have the support of working-class folks, is very important. I'm proud. I respect everyone's decision. I've been endorsed by Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins. Every woman of color in the New York State Senate has endorsed me, so that speaks value.

Marisol A.: I'm proud to show the support that I have in my district. I'm out there campaigning, door knocking, in the subway stations, talking to voters about the work that I have done. Out of all the senators, new senators, I am the first senator that have had more bill signed into law than anyone else. 12 of my bills have been signed into law, by Governor Cuomo.

Ben Max: So, you've mentioned, I want to move into some other topics here. So, you had mentioned in a previous answer, something about the MTA. So, let's talk about transit. Let's talk about what can be done in Albany, on that subject. So, why don't you continue Senator. What needs to be done? You mentioned, you support congestion pricing, but go a little bit further. What needs to be done, to help your constituents in this district and people around New York City, especially in Manhattan, get around better, or fix the subways, improve the buses?

Marisol A.: Totally. For example, in my district, there's a subway station, on 168th Street, along Broadway, that is under construction. One of the elevators, the elevators have been closed, because it's under construction. One of my other stations, 163rd and St. Nicholas is also under construction. The subway system, in New York, is the oldest in the country. It opens 24 hours a day, seven days a week, which I believe is the only one in the country.

Marisol A.: We need to make sure, this year, the governor put over 200, and something, million dollars in the budget to improve the subway system. We need to work better and find out new ideas. Revenues, for example, the money that we make from congestion pricing, we need to put the money in the subway. Because, not only do people from New York City depend on the subway, but people from the outside.

Marisol A.: If we legalize marijuana, we can use some of the funding for education and to improve our subway system.

Ben Max: you do support congestion pricing, as you mentioned?

Marisol A.: Yes, I do sir. We need to-

Ben Max: And you want to see that-

Marisol A.: Correct.

Ben Max: Instituted?

Marisol A.: I support congestion pricing. We need to get more cars off the streets. You know, we have a high asthma rate in the district. We can do two things by construction pricing. We can fix our asthma and our environmental issues and we can bring in funding for our subway system.

Ben Max: Mr. Jackson, then we'll come to you Mr. Leon. The MTA, what needs to be done in Albany?

Robert Jackson: The Governor needs to be able to deal with that because he's the primary one responsible for the MTA. As you know, the MTA board, he appoints most of

them and the Mayor only appoints four, so the onus is on the state government, in order to pour in the billions of dollars for infrastructure, for the all of the computer system to be up to speed. I agree with Marisol, we agree on this, congestion pricing is necessarily important, in order to reduce the congestion, the log jam in New York City.

Robert Jackson: I support that, but there needs to be a better working relationship between the governor and the mayor, to work together to address the issues. Right now, it seems as though the friction is there. I'm always hearing the Governor like pouncing on the Mayor. But the bottom line is this. That the Governor, the State of New York, is responsible for the MTA. the primary responsibility is for the State of New York to provide the resources.

Robert Jackson: Obviously, we hope, and expect, the federal government. It's going to take the federal, the state, and the local, and people working together, to make sure that, over the next several years, that the needs of our growing population in New York City deals with the MTA problem.

Ben Max: Okay. Mr. Leon, what would you do-

Thomas Leon: We have to work together, first of all. Now, the way that they are doing, they cannot sit down on the table to discuss a project that we have to face. For example, Daniel Rodriguez and [inaudible 00:29:26], Marisol, they can not sit together. We need a team. In order to make the economy forward, we need a team.

Ben Max: Okay, so another major issue, obviously, facing your district, Manhattan, and the city, is NYCHA, another big authority. But, this one, less of a state responsibility, more of a city responsibly. We're going to start with you, Mr. Jackson, and then come around this way. On NYCHA, \$30+ billion dollars needed to get into a state of good repair. Similar to the MTA, there's a huge need and we don't necessarily know where the money is gonna come from. What needs to be done to address the issues at NYCHA?

Robert Jackson: Well, when you look at the NYCHA developments, about 21 of them are state and city developments. The federal government pays for about 90%. So, the federal government, basically, needs to step up their responsibility. It is my opinion, it's unfortunate that under this current leadership in the White House, that that's not going to happen. That's why you have #bluewave2018, in order to try to change the house and the US Senate to a democratic lead. So that, some more funding can come to NYCHA.

Robert Jackson: But clearly, besides funding, you need true leadership at NYCHA. An individual that's going to make sure that all of the management people, and even the online people on the ground, are carrying out their duties and responsibilities.

Some of the rules need to be adjusted. Besides the funding, you need good management.

Robert Jackson: Right now, I believe that that is taking place, under Bill de Blasio as the mayor, but everyone needs to be held responsibility. Someone asked before, should criminal charges be brought against some of the people that have not told the truth? I said, everyone needs to be held responsible. If necessary, people need to be fired. People need to be fired, in order to get our act together, as far as NYCHA.

Ben Max: You mentioned this idea of changing the rules. You're talking about work rules that, sometimes, have limited when repairs can take place?

Robert Jackson: Sure. Sure. What I'm saying is that, as you know, most of NYCHA employees are represented by unions. There needs to be negotiations, as far as, not only between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., but in the evenings, and late at night. If there's emergencies, they need to be dealt with.

Ben Max: Okay, we're gonna come to Senator Alcantara. On NYCHA, what needs to be done? Mr. Jackson seems to believe, obviously, that the federal government needs to step up in a much bigger way. Do you agree with that and you have other solutions?

Marisol A.: I have other solutions, because that's an issue that I have been working very closely with. I provided over \$600,000 in funding, to organizations that organize tenants around NYCHA. We did a survey, on NYCHA. I was one of three senators that called for an independent monitor of NYCHA.

Marisol A.: We did survey over 1,000 NYCHA members. After we got the results of the survey, we did a press conference where we brought the number of apartments that have mold, that have lead painting, apartments that are vacant in NYCHA. Because of that, we did a huge press conference, with Richie Torres, with Councilmember Salamanca, in City Hall, bringing attention to the issue of mold in NYCHA buildings.

Marisol A.: Because of that, we fought very hard in the state budget. We put over \$200 million in funding to go to NYCHA. I have toured of my NYCHA building. For example, I have a seniors building, that is NYCHA, that has six apartments that are vacant. Why are they vacant? Because, the roof is not working and it leaks into the apartment. Dyckman Houses-

Ben Max: So, let me ask you. When you see a roof leaking, like that, and vacant apartments just sitting there, what do you do? What's the first step that you do, when you see something like that?

Marisol A.: I take a picture and I send it to NYCHA. I say, "Look, you have six apartments empty. We have a homeless crisis in the city. We could house six different families in these apartments." I work very closely with NYCHA, because I feel ... NYCHA has a population over 400,000 people, more than the city of Newark, more than the city of Syracuse, Albany, and Yonkers.

Ben Max: Mr. Leon, on BYCHA, is there anything else that hasn't been mentioned, that you would try to do as a state senator?

Thomas Leon: Okay, as a state senator, I will have a good team. Because, if you don't have a good team around, you cannot do a good work. We need to be concentrated in the issue that we afford. For example, Robert Jackson is serving for the community for more than 30 years. The problem, instead of getting better, are getting worst. We have in front of me, a lot of homeless people, that they are sleeping in the front of the church.

Ben Max: Do you have any ideas about fixing NYCHA? What would you push for?

Thomas Leon: Yeah, I got so many ideas.

Ben Max: Sure.

Thomas Leon: As an educator, that I work in the city for more than 20 years, I learned that our students need a technical school. Because, they cannot learn to go to a school and learn all the subject that the teacher are explaining to them. They need to have something with the hand. That they could learn very quick to repair a cellular phone, computer, to repair a car, a lot of things they will do, but we don't have nothing.

Ben Max: So, let me ask you a group-

Thomas Leon: It's because-

Ben Max: Let me ask a group follow up, about NYCHA. Nobody mentioned the idea of the state dedicating billions of dollars more in state funding, the city dedicating billions of dollars more, raising taxes, perhaps infill development on NYCHA land, to bring in revenue. That's something the city has been moving, inching a bit, towards some mixed market rate affordable, some all affordable. But now, there's discussion about perhaps some mostly market rate, or all market rate, new housing on NYCHA land, to bring in revenue.

Robert Jackson: I think that all of these things need to be discussed. There needs to be a comprehensive approach. Not only with the city, but with the state, working together. Unfortunately, the two leaders are not seeing eye-to-eye. But, there was a, recently, I heard on television and radio, about an agreement to build 100% affordability of housing in an infill. Where de Blasio, our Mayor, is now

saying that he prefers market rate. Gale Brewer, the Borough President, who was a City Councilman at the time, said, "No, the commitment was for 100% affordable."

Robert Jackson: I go along with the commitment that was made several years ago. Because, quite frankly, the homeless population has been rising. If that commitment was made, as far as to move forward on other development, it needs to be fulfilled.

Ben Max: So, I'm gonna go to you.

Marisol A.: I-

Ben Max: I'm gonna go to you in one quick sec. The argument there though is, while the affordable housing that could be built could help with the homeless situation, affordability situation, it's not really bringing in much new revenue for that \$30 billion in need for NYCHA. Sort of what I'm getting at here is, where does that 30 billion come from, unless you can get the federal government to jump in, in a way that it just hasn't, and you indicated probably isn't anytime soon? Anything else on that revenue front?

Robert Jackson: But then, that's what ... The state of New York has about \$185 billion budget and the city of New York \$78 billion. They have to be able to, from a legislative point of view, and an executive point of view, dedicate X amount of billions of dollars for that. Instead of reducing taxes on some of the wealthier, we need to be able to dedicate billions of dollars, in order to take care of this housing need. Because, when the people are homeless, it's costing the city so much money to put them in hotels and other places, so we're wasting money. We can't waste. We have to be able to consolidate.

Ben Max: Senator?

Marisol A.: Yes. Like I said, we put over \$200 million in the budget for NYCHA. We have to be honest and say that NYCHA was also neglected under the Obama Administration. You know, this problem with NYCHA didn't just happen. The federal government has abandoned public housing. Not just in New York, but all across the nation.

Marisol A.: Like you said, they want to build housing in NYCHA. We need to get together with the residents of NYCHA and come up with a plan that works for everybody. Because, as you stated before, everything sounds beautiful, but NYCHA needs money in the city of New York. Like I said, a lot of people blame the Mayor, but people forget that we had other folks that were in there for 24 years, both Bloomberg and Giuliani, that never did anything for NYCHA.

Marisol A.: So, I don't expect Mayor de Blasio to solve the issue of NYCHA overnight, but I do expect the City of New York to put a commitment to invest more money. We

need to work with NYCHA to find ways of bringing more money into NYCHA. Because, NYCHA is under terrible condition.

Ben Max: Any specifics on what those ways, what you'd consider on that?

Marisol A.: Maybe, you know, we want to do housing inside of NYCHA. It's speaking to the residents of what kind of housing they would like to see. NYCHA has a lot of parking spaces. What can we do? I know that the city, last year, started renting out some of the parking spaces. If we can, maybe, work with the tenants on ideas. You know, maybe some tenants want to have market rates apartment inside of the building. But, like it was stated before, we need more affordable housing in the city of New York, period.

Ben Max: So, it doesn't sound like there's any firm commitments, here, on a sort of radical new approach to market rate housing, on some of that parking, or some of that land, that would bring in the types of hundreds of millions of dollars, potentially, in revenue to dedicate towards repairs. That's not something that anybody feels like is on the table, right now?

Marisol A.: Well, we have a homeless crisis in the city. 80,000 people live in shelters. They don't live in shelters, because of a lack of luxury apartment. They live in shelter, because they cannot afford to live in the City of New York. We, as a city-

Ben Max: Yeah, I think the issue's separate, in terms of revenue really just dedicated for repairing the NYCHA buildings. I think that's also, obviously, part of the conversation, as well.

Robert Jackson: I have-

Ben Max: Last comment on NYCHA, unless Mr. Leon has something?

Robert Jackson: I'm open to consideration, as the state senator, going up there. I want to be able to examine everything. I want to hold hearings, in order to get the input from government officials, and from advocates in the field, and from the public. I'm open to consider everything, but the end result should be where that the residents are involved, as Marisol said. And we come up with a plan from the federal government, the state government, and local government, in order to make sure that the needs are met, over a short period of time. I'm not talking about 25 years. We're talking about a short period of time, as far as NYCHA's concerned. We're talking about five years, ten years at the absolute most.

Ben Max: Anything else to add, on NYCHA?

Thomas Leon: Yes. We do have the fund, and the state have the money. The only problem with this is, those fund, and those money, are not going to the places that they supposed to receive it. So, if they used the money in the right way, I believe we

will have New York the best place to live. All the problem that we have with the homeless, with the violence, and the crime, and all this, will be solved. We have, again, a good city to live.

Thomas Leon: As a state senator, I will not talk too many beautiful words to confuse the borders. I will be concentrated in the issues the community have. So, we don't have enough housing. For example, Marisol is endorsed by a Daniel Rodriguez, who approved the rezoning. You know, to have the opportunity to get an apartment for the rezoning, we need to have very high salary, more than 40,000. Our workers, they hardly make 20,000 a year.

Ben Max: That was my next question. The Inwood rezoning, that's part of the district, that just passed, through the City Council, obviously, the de Blasio Administration had helped craft it and supported it. So, there's parts of Inwood that are gonna have new rules around land use. That's what a rezoning is. So, Mr. Leon just expressed some real concern about it, related to what the affordable housing is really going to be, in terms of who it's gonna be affordable for. So Senator, and then Mr. Jackson, what are your stances on the Inwood rezoning? It's going forward, so what do you think about it and what will you do next?

Marisol A.: I remember when my neighborhood, West Harlem, was rezoned, in 2014. We have seen the number of people that have moved out of our neighborhood because of that rezoning and what that means for real estate. Seeing the Inwood rezoning is like playing the same movie again.

Marisol A.: The Inwood rezoning, I sat down with a city, on various occasions. I sat down with the labor unions and also with the groups in the community that are concerned and with a council member. The city did not address the issue of the environmental impact, building those towers by the river. What kind of ...

Marisol A.: We saw what happened a Bellevue Hospital with Sandy. The city didn't address the issue of infrastructure. What does that mean when you're gonna have an additional 20,000 people taking the A and the one train, in Upper Manhattan, without building any additional space. The city didn't address the issue of Con Edison and building the infrastructure in that part of Inwood.

Marisol A.: I was against the rezoning because I felt that the city was not clear. There's no labor agreement. We have seen the number of construction workers that have died in this city, over thirty. Most of them, immigrants from Latin America. I am afraid that, if we're gonna start construction on Inwood, how come we didn't address any of the labor issues?

Ben Max: It sounds like you're largely opposed to what has been passed.

Marisol A.: Correct.

Ben Max: Is there one specific thing to try to make it better, in your view, that you're gonna try to do?

Marisol A.: Well right now, we are sitting, making sure that the jobs go to people in the neighborhood. Making sure that people from community board twelve have access to all the new things that are gonna happen, in the neighborhood, and that the small businesses that are there have an opportunity to move into the new real estate space, that is gonna open up.

Ben Max: Thank you. Mr. Jackson, on the Inwood rezoning?

Robert Jackson: So, I was opposed to the rezoning. I am a member of Northern Manhattan is Not for Sale. I've given testimony locally, when town hall meetings were held, where hundreds of residents spoke out against it, down at the City Planning Commission. Even at the City Council. I waited five and a half hours to speak on that, as a former member of the City Council.

Robert Jackson: I've said, loud and clear, that if I was a City Council member, I would be voting no on that particular matter, because it's going to have a negative impact on the people that live there. It's going to accelerate gentrification. Ten years ago, in the census data from 2000 and 2010, many people were displaced. Over 20,000. Mainly due to higher rent. Most of those people moved to the Bronx.

Robert Jackson: I foresee, unfortunately, by the year 2020, when census will be done again, we're going to be losing more people. It should have been voted down, but in fact, it's moving forward. People are looking at what the options are. The inward united plan was put forward by Northern Manhattan is not for sale. That was the plan that we were pushing for, for Adonis Rodriguez and the city of New York, to take. That did not happen.

Ben Max: So, you're opposed to it? All three of you have some real reservations about that plan that's moving forward. I'm going to actually move to closing statements, now. So, give your closing statement to the voters, and viewers watching, about why they should support your candidacy.

Thomas Leon: Okay. To the border's, I will set ... I will not do negative campaign. They already know that both of them did something wrong in the past. I will not mention it again. That would be the last time. You are swimming on the same boat. I'm honest, hard work, and without misdeeds and finger that will point me. Also, I will not say this again. So, I'm a hard worker. I will fight to make New York the best place to live.

Thomas Leon: I will start opening the technical school. I was invited by the George Washington High School, where I was teaching math for 15 years. I saw the senator was with a baseball league. You know, they have problems during the winter. One second. They have problems, during the winter, to practice baseball. This field

could be closed very easy. All people, they will practice baseball, football, whatever sport, during the winter.

Ben Max: Okay. One idea for the district, there. Senator, your closing statement to voters for this debate?

Marisol A.: Great. Thank you for having me here. I have passed a record for any junior senators of 12 bills that have been signed into law, addressing issues of domestic violence. I have 100% score from the environmental groups. I have done work to uplift unions and to bring a voice of a group of people that was never addressed or never had a seat at the Senate. I look forward to, in 2019, I'm going back to the Senate with the help of the voters of the 31st district, so we can address more issues that everyday New Yorkers face, in terms of immigration, women's right, and of course, labor rights.

Ben Max: Thank you. Mr. Jackson, your closing statement?

Robert Jackson: Well first, let me thank Manhattan Neighborhood Network for having this forum and you being as a moderator. My name is Robert Jackson. I'm running for the New York State Senate. I am a true-blue Democrat. I hope that I receive the voter's confidence on September 13th, the Democratic primary. When you look at me as an individual, born and raised in New York City. The public school system. Involved not only in the community, as far as tenants association, as far as on the executive board of my kids school for 19 years, school board, City Council.

Robert Jackson: My record, overall, shows that I've been engaged in the community and has shown leadership skills, in every area. As you know, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, where we won billions of dollars for the children of New York. My record in the City Council, as a Co-chair of the Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus. We filed briefs to end the stop-and-frisk. We filed briefs in a FDNY case, as far as a discriminatory case.

Robert Jackson: I saved thousands of teachers jobs. Fought Bloomberg administration, when it came to the unions, as far as the bus drivers. My record, overall, is one of advocacy and fighting for the people. The small business survival bill. I took that and I ran with it as far as I could, to make sure that we protect small businesses. The first one in New York City, the minority and women-owned business, local law 129, that occurred in the City Council, that was my ... moved that forward.

Robert Jackson: I say, to all of you, that Marisol, and the IDC, were basically Trump Democrats. They've been called that by the New York Daily News. This is about a change that is needed. When you look at my record, overall, all of the Democratic Clubs, all of the elected public officials, are supporting me. I hope that you understand that this is not a shell game being played, this is the truth. Vote true-blue in 2018. I hope to have your vote. Thank you very much.

August 24th, 2018

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Ben Max: Thank you all, for participating in today's debate. Good luck on the campaign trail. Thank you for watching. Please remember to vote. Party primary elections will be held on Thursday, September 13th. The general election will be held on Tuesday, November 6th.

Ben Max: For more information on voting, locating your poll site, and all the candidates, you can visit the race2represent.com website from MNN, GothamGazette.com, or the League of Women Voters' website, at lwnvny.org. Thank you for watching Race to Represent on Manhattan Neighborhood Network. Goodbye.