

Race To Represent 2018 State Assembly District 74 Democrat Primary Debate

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Moderator: Julie Walker

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Julie Walker: Manhattan Neighborhood Network in partnership with the League of Women Voters of New York State presents Race to Represent, a MNN election initiative.

Julie Walker: Hello, I'm Julie Walker. New York Voters will head to the polls on Thursday September 13th for party primary elections. They will cast their ballots in many statewide and local races including for governor, attorney general and members of both houses of the New York State legislature, including state assembly district 74. The New York State assembly is the lower house of the New York State legislature, and works with the governor of New York and with the state senate to create laws and establish a state budget.

Julie Walker: The assembly's legislative authority and responsibilities include passing bills on public policy matters, setting levels for state spending, raising or lowering taxes, and voting to uphold or override gubernatorial vetoes. Today, you will here form two of the candidates running in the democratic primary, including the incumbent Harvey Epstein, who won the seat in a special election earlier this year. The 74th assembly district covers the east side of Manhattan including the neighborhoods of the Lower Eastside, East Village, Alphabet City, Stuyvesant Town, Peter Cooper Village, Mary Hill, Tutor City and the United Nations.

Julie Walker: The candidates joining us today are incumbent assembly member Harvey Epstein and one of his challengers, Akshay Vaishampayan. Welcome gentlemen, and thank you for being here. This question goes to both of you, and we'll start with assemblyman Epstein. What makes you the best choice over your opponent?

Harvey Epstein: First of all, good morning, and thank you for hosting this debate, and really the League of Women Voters who are letting us be here.

Harvey Epstein: I've been active in my community for decades. I've been a legal services lawyer, I've represented thousands of people, and I know my community inside out. I've been working on affordable housing issues, public school issues. So many concerns around the MTA, bail reform, criminal justice reform and early voting. And when I ran in April to get this seat, I started acting what I ran on. I've been able to move forward on the issues I care deeply about.

Harvey Epstein: I believe with my experience, and my knowledge and my ability that I will represent the 74th assembly district well. I am the best person to represent the 74th assembly district, by raising my kids here, being here, being active. I know the needs of the community, and I look forward to continue to represent my neighborhood.

Julie Walker: Mr. Vaishampayan.

Akshay Vaishamp: Thank you so much for having me today. As a resident of this community, I feel that I walk out my door every morning, and I see the problems that persist within our community. We have homelessness, we have a train system that doesn't work. As a member of my co-op board for the last five years, I have worked with my fellow community members and my neighbors to help solve a lot of these problems, but a lot of the issues that persist and that continue to hamper us from coming to a complete solution are caused by Albany, and Albany's inaction. We can't help our neighbors get to work on time when their train doesn't work. We can't solve homelessness and affordability of housing issues when Albany does not help us and work with us to make housing and homelessness a core issue for them to solve.

Akshay Vaishamp: I started my career working at the New York Urban League working on scholarships for students, low income students and students who were looking to go to college, first in their families to go to college. And through that work, I've learned that given an opportunity, people will take it. Albany just has to give that opportunity to the people. As the demographics in our district continue to change, I think I'm best suited to represent our district to achieve those goals.

Julie Walker: You mentioned your work with the community, what have been the accomplishments that you're most proud of that would display your ability to be a successful assembly member for this district?

Akshay Vaishamp: So, in our community, within my co-op at least, and within our co-op on our street and our community association, we have worked together to combat, especially, property tax increases. Property taxes have gone up in our area, because of new developments coming in, and the city assessing us at the luxury rate, which we are not. We are normal co-ops with a citizenry that's lived there for 10, 15, 20 years, and we have worked with people to help combat fight the city, and fight the state on those increases to help bring their maintenance and their rents down in order to make sure that their housing is still affordable for them.

Julie Walker: Assemblyman Epstein, we know you arrived in April. In your short time in Albany, what legislative accomplishments are you most proud of, or did you have any major disappointments?

Harvey Epstein: Well, thank you. Since April, I was able to co-sponsor over 200 bills in the assembly, dozens that were passed in the assembly this year including a 10

point housing package that we were able to do to strengthen the rent laws. I introduced my own two bills that were passed by both the assembly and the senate. One on extending affordable housing program, and the second on giving nurses the opportunity to leave the country to deal with medical issues overseas, and maintain their jobs.

Harvey Epstein: But more [inaudible 00:05:13] able to do is advance the issues of affordable housing, and community development and the MTA. On the MTA alone, I've worked with the MTA to get them to commit to making the L train accessible in the future bath at 6th Ave and 3rd Avenue stops.

Harvey Epstein: Unaffordable housing, I was able to help Waterside maintain 325 units of affordable housing, and we're going to keep those permanently affordable for the next 75 years, and then reset the rents [inaudible 00:05:38] to have them affordable.

Harvey Epstein: On the bail, I was able to work on getting a legislation passed to reform bail and bail system, so we know there's a raising class issues around bail. I've cosponsored a bill on legislations of marijuana, that's likely to pass through the assembly. And early voting, we have a voting system that's not working in this state. We have one, two primaries, which is problematic, but two, we don't allow people to vote if they don't vote on that day. We need a comprehensive early voting system, which I will be able to move forward on the assembly this year. I look forward to expending that again next year.

Julie Walker: A question for both of you. District 74, what are the major issues facing your district, and what policy proposals would you want to pursue to address those issues? Mr. Epstein.

Harvey Epstein: The main things that I see effecting the 74th assembly district are affordable housing, the public transportation, public education, and our overall political issues whether it's around bail, criminal justice reform and voting. So, on affordable housing, I just mentioned the Waterside deal that we were able to announce in the last two weeks. I've supported a packaged bill that not only strengthen regulation, so helping support tenants who are seniors and disabled [inaudible 00:06:53]. We need to [inaudible 00:06:55], and create new affordable housing programs, and expand a mandatory inclusionary housing program across the state.

Harvey Epstein: On early voting, I cosponsored legislation to have early voting, having voting sites two weeks before the election across the state. This is to ensure that people have more opportunities to vote, including creating a campaign finance system that exists in New York City that does not exist in Albany.

Harvey Epstein: On the MTA, I mentioned the L train, but we need to talk about accessibility issues across the system. Only one out of every four stations are accessible for people with disabilities. That means that a high percentage of our people don

have access to our public transportation system, and we don't have enough resources. So, I've supported increased revenue for MTA, including millionaire's taxes so that we can ensure that our public transportation system works, and works on time. We have the lowest on time rate of any system in the world, not only just the United State, but the entire world. In Paris, they have a 99% on time rate. Here in New York we have 58% on time rate, we need to fix that, and we need to fix that now.

Akshay Vaishamp: I think the three issues we have to address first and foremost are the MTA, our education and student debt system, and affordability of housing, and creating a pathway to ownership. On the MTA, the state has completely failed. Our elected officials have allowed the MTA to get into its current decaying state. It's been decades coming, they've seen the problems coming, and the money has not been invested in places where it needs to be invested. Problems are not solved before they occur, problems are only solved after they occur, and they become emergency crisis situations. You take the L train, nobody paid any attention to repairs on the L train until it became a dire situation, and now the L train's going to be closed for 18 months, it's going to effect our economy, it's going to effect accessibility for everyone who lives along the 14th Street corridor, and it's also going to effect our neighbors in Brooklyn. They're not going to have any one going in on the weekends, they're not going to have any economy that is going to be palpable for them and their businesses through the weekends, through the week, because no one's going to be able to get there, and that is a direct result of Albany's neglect of our transit system.

Akshay Vaishamp: On education, we need to focus on student loans. For many people, my wife and I recently graduated from college about five years ago in graduate school, and we are absolutely burdened by student debt, and nobody addresses the student debt issue. For us, we can't ever move forward in our lives, and have children, and do all the things that normal people do because we're too busy paying for our student loans.

Akshay Vaishamp: And on the affordability of housing issue, one of the biggest problems with the affordability housing is that landlords are encouraged to kick current tenants out, because they can charge a new tenant an absurd rent that's almost twice or three times as much as what they currently charge.

Julie Walker: We're going to get back to housing in a moment, but let's discuss some of the other issues that both of you brought up. Rikers Island, criminal justice reform, to both of you, are you for or against the closing of Rikers, and moving the inmate population to the borough facilities, and is 10 years too long? Mr. Epstein.

Harvey Epstein: Yes, we need to close Rikers. We need to close Rikers in less than 10 years, there's opportunities to do it. We've had a plan that we can have facilities in different boroughs across the city, and I think it has to happen. I've been to Rikers, unfortunately I have friends who've been to Rikers. I was a foster care

worker, and I had to visit with parents and children in Rikers. It is not a good facility, it is not a healthy facility. With mass incarceration of low income people of color, Rikers is a system that's failed. We need to reform our criminal justice system, and we need to close Rikers now.

Julie Walker: So, do you have a plan, or proposal, or is there something that you are backing to relocate the incarcerated?

Harvey Epstein: Yes. I said earlier there's a plan right now in effect where they're going to have locations in each of the boroughs, facilities in each of the locations. In each borough, we're going to have a site. One right next to a criminal court in Manhattan, which is not in our assembly district, but in another assembly district. And so, the opportunity will be to move inmates to places closer to the courthouses, to places closer to their communities in each borough. And I think more important than just closing Rikers, is reforming our criminal justice system.

Harvey Epstein: Because if we legalize marijuana, if end bail and cash bail, we'll reduce the number of inmate population. One example is, people wrote in the paper a few weeks ago, there's a person who spent six months in Rikers that his Bail was set for \$1, and didn't know it. He spent six months in Rikers. That's a waste of his life, six months of his life lost for a \$1 cash bail. We need to reform the bail system to only hold people that are real worries of flight, not hold people because they're poor.

Julie Walker: Mr. Vaishampayan.

Akshay Vaishamp: I think we need to absolutely close Rikers, and as an assembly person, I would work with both the city, and the mayor and the city council to ensure that our inmates are transferred properly, and most importantly our juvenile population is looked after, that they are not placed with violent criminals. But I think that we also need to use Rikers as a learning lesson. I think that we need to see all the abuses that took place at Rikers, all of the people who were held without being charged, which is flat out unconstitutional, and all the people who were not told of their bail amounts, and we need to make sure that, that does not happen at these new facilities that are designed in there five different boroughs. Rikers can be a learning lesson for our city, and we have to use it as such, otherwise we're going to continue to implement the same abuses that we have in the past, and have many Rikers in five different boroughs.

Julie Walker: And just briefly, your position on bail reform.

Akshay Vaishamp: I think we are in desperate need of bail reform. I think that the current bail system unfortunately targets people of color, which is very unfortunate, and it's flat out criminal. Like, it's not fair that someone who just because of the color of their skin should be unfairly targeted by bail when someone who is a non-person of color gets out Scott free on their bail the first day.

Julie Walker: Okay. Mr. Vaishampayan, going back to transportation, it's a hot issue in your neighborhood, in your district. So, the shutting down of the L train, as you mentioned before. Do you have specific plans to address this, and if so, what are they?

Akshay Vaishamp: So, I think one of the things we need to look at is how we solve the problems before they occur. The problems that exist right now are there, and we're working on solving them, but we need to invest into the system before the problem occurs. We have a signal system that's 100 years old. We have switches that were absolutely ravaged by Hurricane Sandy that have not been switched out. We need to focus on these problems, and invest in the transportation system before the problem actually occurs, and the best way to do this is by instituting a millionaire's tax, and legalizing marijuana, and taxing it, and using that money to then go back into our transportation system. It's money that we can use to improve our day-to-day infrastructure so people can get to work on time, the trains can run on the weekend, they can run on time, and we can actually have a system that works. Taking the train on the weekend is the work experience ever. I'm sure you've done it, all of us have done it, and you wait for hours, the trains don't run, they skip stations, and we need to make sure that it's a system that's viable for everyone.

Julie Walker: But getting back to the original question.

Akshay Vaishamp: Sure.

Julie Walker: Do you have any plans to address the issue of the L train shutting down? Do you have any ideas on anything from for hire cars, or any ideas at all?

Akshay Vaishamp: So, the L train shutting down, the city has a plan in place that is going to increase bus service along 14th Street that is going to increase ferry service from Brooklyn into the city. One of the things that is going to happen, is we are going to have a 14th Street corridor that is going to be jam packed. When you don't have the train there, there is now way for anyone to get across 14th Street without a public transportation system. I think we need to encourage people to take more buses. I think that we need to make some of those services free of cost, so people can take them without having to pay into it, because it's frankly not their fault that the L train is not working, or that they have to walk up to 23rd Street to take the 23rd Street crosstown. So, I think by easing the cost and the burden upon the people, we can solve their transportation issues. Unfortunately, the line has to close, and there's no way around that, but we can ease the financial burden upon our neighbors.

Julie Walker: Assemblyman Epstein.

Harvey Epstein: So, the three things we've been talking about with the L train closing is, one, we mentioned the 14th Street corridor. Closing 14th Street cars only for the west of 3rd Avenue I think is a problem. If you look at east of 3rd Avenue, 1st Avenue to

Avenue C, we're going to see a lot of car congestion. We're having buses coming across on 14th Street, 60 buses an hour going up 1st Ave. You're stopping on 15th Street first, and 14th is going to be a terrible corridor. I think the plan the MTA has right now is not a good plan. We need to, I think, close the car traffic at an earlier point, that's one thing we've been talking about.

Harvey Epstein: Two is the diesel. We're talking about 60 diesel buses going across 14th Street, coming up 1st Avenue an hour. What does that mean for people who live in the community? We've talked about clean technology. The MTA bought 15 electric buses, which is great that they have 15, but 15 in their fleet of Manhattan when you're talking about hundreds and hundreds a day are going to be going up in our community.

Harvey Epstein: Third is the L train construction right now that's happening on 14th Street. The amount of noise, the amount of pollution, the amount of diesel. The MTA does not have good plans to take care of the health and safety of our community. So, I've been meeting residents of 14th Street, been meeting with the MTA. We have a meeting next week about how they fix it. They've talked about trying to insulate the noise, they're changing from the diesel machines that they have on 14th Street to electric machines. So, we're trying to cure some of those short term plans, but we also have longer [inaudible 00:16:48] problems when the L train shuts down. And I don't think the solutions they have are appropriate. I think we need to talk about how we fix 14th Street corridor. I think we need to talk about how the ferry service is going to work. Maybe we need to use 23rd Street as a better corridor, because 14th Street's going to be so congested.

Harvey Epstein: We've talked about that, and we also talked about not having the layover stations between 15th and 1st, because all we're doing is talking about a tremendous number of people coming up 1st Avenue, and coming over the Williamsburg Bridge, and just being placed at 15th and 1st. It's not a really good end location.

Julie Walker: You mention limiting cars. What's your position on congestion pricing?

Harvey Epstein: Yeah, so, this past year in the assembly they passed a modest congestion pricing plan, only for higher cabs. I think we need to go further. We need to talk about how we protect people in this city from the congestion. I think we have to, one, think about less for hire cars in our city, because the volume is just clogging our streets. Not just cars, but other vehicles. We have places like NYU, which has their own bus service, which is clogging up our city streets.

Harvey Epstein: We also need to talk about the core of Manhattan. So, if you're driving from Avenue C to Avenue A, are you causing congestion? No. But if you're causing congestion because you're driving into the central businesses, there used to be a real cost to driving into that district, so we need to have a congestion pricing plan that works, that's targeted, that will affect reducing the number of cars. I think what we had earlier this year was a good first step, but it's not the whole

solution. We need to really tailor it to something, and we also need to talk about car-free locations. We have car-free Park Avenue South just on August weekends. We need to talk about having car-free places in New York, because the pollutions rate are so high that people are getting sick, the asthma rates are going up. We need to talk about protecting our city like other cities like London is doing.

Julie Walker: Mr. Vaishampayan, congestion pricing.

Akshay Vaishamp: So, congestion pricing, I mean, I think the issue of congestion pricing is definitely one that we'll have to tackle, but I also think we have to look at the reason under congestion pricing, which is why people have to take a cab, or why they have to take an Uber to get somewhere. And the fact of the matter remains, if our public transportation system ran properly, we wouldn't have to do any of those things.

Akshay Vaishamp: When my wife and I go to dinner, and we want to go down into Lower Manhattan, we could take the six train on the weekend. We could walk to the 28th Street station, it's closed now, but it'll open again in December. We could walk to the 28th Street station, and take the train downtown, but we can't, because most weekends that station is closed. We have absolutely no other option but to get in a cab or an Uber, which is four or five times more expensive, and take that into downtown.

Akshay Vaishamp: Now, if we had a public transportation system that actually worked, we would solve many of our congestion issues because people wouldn't even bother with cabs or Ubers. They could take the public transportation system, which is cheaper, which is more efficient, and which would run better.

Harvey Epstein: I actually have to disagree here. I think people are going to continue, whether we have a high functioning public transportation system, the subways get fixed, they get clean, they become on time, we're still going to have people who take their cars into Manhattan. We're still going to have people who drive around Manhattan. We are still going to have people who take Ubers and Lyfts, and I think we have to fix our subways, but that isn't going to resolve the problem with congestion. We need to do more than just fix the subways. We need a real comprehensive plan that just doesn't focus on fixing the subways.

Akshay Vaishamp: But I think it's going to solve our issues with congestion. It's not going to, obviously, eliminate them, but it is going to ease them a little bit. You'll see fewer people taking taxis and subways, and if you are dealing with a system that has been eased somewhat, instead of a system that's in complete disarray, I feel like you're making at least one step in the right direction instead of starting at point zero where we're at right now.

Julie Walker: Does this mean that you are for congestion pricing?

Akshay Vaishamp: I think that we need congestion pricing. I think that we need it in the sense that we need to not have as many cars on our avenues and our streets during rush hour times, but I also think that we need to look at why those cars are there in the first place. We have to get to the root of the problem. The biggest issue with Albany, and many of these bandaid legislation pieces, is that we never get to the root of the problem. The root of the problem is that we have a decrepit not working transportation system, period.

Julie Walker: We could go on about this, but we are at a limited amount of time, so I'd like to shift gears, and move onto NYCHA, the New York City Housing Authority, plays a vital role in maintaining a large portion of the city's affordable housing stock. However, the living conditions in public housing have been the subject of several investigations in the last few years, and to say that it's deplorable living conditions is not overreaching. Assemblyman Epstein, do you have any policies or proposals that begin to chip away at those deplorable living conditions that people are in?

Harvey Epstein: Well, first off, thank you for the question about public housing. It is the largest affordable housing stock that exists in New York City. We need a strong public housing system, and this started because of federal disinvestment in public housing, and the state and the city have done a terrible job investing, as well.

Harvey Epstein: So, we've seen incredibly public housing units all over the city. I represented thousands of public housing residents on repair issues when I was a former legal services attorney. I represented them for decades, and that's what we did is, building by building getting conditions fixed. But that's because they have a squeaky wheel, the problem we have is we have a system that's broken. Why is it broken? Because we have, one, not enough money to do the work, two, not enough support within the public housing system to understand the issue. We don't have a strong leadership. We need to really changer leadership. I know the mayor started doing that.

Harvey Epstein: And three is we have to have the knowledge in place. Example, in Baruch Houses there's a huge rat problem, and the rat problem exists because there's construction going around the entire area, and they're not monitoring their construction, and the rats are going there. Two is because the basements are dirt basements, and no one cemented those basements, so the rats can go in. So, there's really simple solutions to problems that can save us lots of money, and we need to act on those solutions.

Harvey Epstein: Third is we don't have a strong capital plan. And the why don't we have a strong capital plan, is because we haven't invested in the thought that public housing matters for decades. The state has not invested in decades. This year, we put \$250 million in new public housing funds, but we have not done that for decades. So, how do we do this with a \$30 billion capital need? We have to dig in and spend money on public housing, and to say that the residents of public

housing matter, they live in our city. In our district alone there's over 20000 apartments. Those families should matter, and we need to do more.

Julie Walker: When was the last time you were in one of those apartments?

Harvey Epstein: Two weeks. A week and a half ago.

Julie Walker: Okay. Moving on.

Harvey Epstein: And I've been to hundreds and hundreds of apartments.

Julie Walker: Okay. Moving on. Your response to that question.

Akshay Vaishamp: So, I think that the current state of our public housing system is frankly just pathetic. We have completely dropped the ball as a city, as a state, and as a country. Just because someone lives in a low income housing unit, that does not mean that they don't have the right to live in a nice, clean and well run housing system. And one of the things we have to do is, many time what we hear from Albany is we're going to throw money at the problem, and the problem's going to go away, but there's no followup, and there's no accountability from the state. And what we need to do is we need to make sure that the money goes into actual repairs. If an apartment has a repair issue, we need to make sure that, that problem is actually taken care of. If there's asbestos in a building, we need to make sure that, that is removed.

Akshay Vaishamp: And many times, money is spent into NYCHA, and there's no accountability. They go into crony contracts, and they go into a system that is considered to be a void, and it's unfair to the people that live there. We have to do better by then, and we frankly especially in our district, they have to hold us accountable. As their assembly people, they need to know who we are, and they need to hold us accountable for everything that does not happen in their housing unit.

Julie Walker: When was the last time you were in one of the NYCHA apartments?

Akshay Vaishamp: We were on Avenue D last week, two weeks ago.

Julie Walker: In an apartment in NYCHA?

Akshay Vaishamp: We were not. We were in a building.

Julie Walker: You were in a building, not an apartment. Okay. So, staying with this for a moment, a report found that the housing authority needs nearly 32 billion, and you both mentioned the money needed over the next five years to carryout the repairs and renovations. That's overall in the entire city.

Julie Walker: So, earlier this year, Governor Cuomo declared a state of emergency for NYCHA housing, and in order to expedite some of the repairs. So, they started a new

plan called Next Gen NYCHA. What's your position on this solution? Mr. Epstein, would you like to start?

Harvey Epstein: Sure. Good question about Next Gen. I have some real reservations about privatizing public housing, and I think Next Gen is really a step in that direction, brings private developers in to oversee and monitor. Some of the developments, like Complice Plaza, and Complice One, has seen some benefits from Next Gen, and seeing some increase in repairs to kitchens and bathrooms, and 15 years ago I represented that building, and getting repairs done because the poor conditions, and I know some people in Complice One are excited about those improvements, but I have some real reservations. The way to do it is to privatize. They think the better solution is really investing in a public housing system, not trying to get private money into our system. This private public partnership really will lead to the privatization of our public spaces, and we've seen that happen time and time again. So, I don't want that to happen to our public housing.

Harvey Epstein: I know we've talked about protecting the residents that are there, and there's a commitment from NYCHA that people will continue to be able to stay there. People with all incomes will be able to stay there, they'll have more additional section eight vouchers. But we're talking about a longterm solution, not just this short term solution, oh, we're going to do a kitchen and bathroom repair, and then we don't have to worry about 30 years. I have to worry about 30 years, because we're all going to be living in this community, and I want to make sure that those units are decent, affordable, safe housing for decades to come, and I'm not sure the Next Gen is the solution.

Julie Walker: Mr. Vaishampayan, your ideas on Next Gen.

Akshay Vaishamp: I think that the privatization aspect is always worrisome, because at the end of the day when you put something for profit, someone is making money off of it, and when there's money involved, and there's capitalism involved in this whole system, you're always going to get someone who's ripping the residents of NYCHA off.

Akshay Vaishamp: The other issue is that, with the capital investment, at the end of the day, if you have a state capital investment, you need to know where that money is going. You don't necessarily need to privatize to have accountability, and I think that's one of the biggest problems with NYCHA, is that nobody is holding them accountable. There isn't an accountability structure where people can come back to one person, their assemblyman for instance, and say, "You know what, I'm holding you accountable, and if my house is not repaired, and if my building is still in a state that's not acceptable, then it's upon me to hold you accountable. I know who you are, and you need to solve my problem, or you need to tell me who I need to go to solve my problem," and I think with Next Gen, you're going to get a lot of those same issues, especially when you get into the privatization aspect of it. You won't have any accountability, because a

private company will be accountable, and who's going to hold them accountable? The state? My faith is limited.

Julie Walker: Okay, let me just ask you very quickly, please answer where do you stand on the legalization of marijuana on any level.

Akshay Vaishamp: I fully support the legalization of marijuana, and I fully support the taxing of the legal marijuana that is sold, that is then reinvested into public services, education, the MTA and our housing system.

Julie Walker: Assemblyman Epstein.

Harvey Epstein: Yes, I've cosponsored the legalization of marijuana bills, I will continue to push for its passage.

Julie Walker: Okay. Let's go to closing statements. Assemblyman Epstein, we'll stay with you.

Harvey Epstein: Okay. Well, thank you very much for moderating this debate, and Akshay, thank you for being here with me. I appreciate this collaboration, this conversation to the betterment of the 74th assembly district.

Harvey Epstein: As people know, I ran earlier this year to get elected to the state assembly, and through that process, I've been able to talk to thousands of folks in our district to talk about their struggles and their needs, the needs for affordable housing, the needs for better community space, needs for better public schools, and that's exactly what I did. When I got elected in April, I started working on my five point plan to strengthen our public housing system, and private housing system, strengthen regulation, and strengthen our public schools, because as a parent of two public school children, I understand their needs.

Harvey Epstein: I've been active in this district for decades, and I will continue to be active, and as your assembly member, I believe I'm the best person to represent our community going forward. I understand the needs, I have the vision and the ability to get things done. Thank you, very much, and have a lovely day.

Julie Walker: Mr. Vaishampayan.

Akshay Vaishamp: Yeah, thank you so much for having me. Assemblyman, thank you so much. I think this was a great debate. I think that one of the most important things that we have to focus on is that competitive elections like this are the soul of our democracy, and we need to keep these things going. We need to keep our community engaged. One of the biggest reasons why I ran is because of the state of our public transportation, because of the state of our student issues, and because of affordability of housing and a complete lack of a pathway to ownership for people live within our district.

Akshay Vaishamp: We have an infrastructure system that is dated, and we need to make sure that we focus the money and our energy on making sure that it comes back up to par. As someone who has student debt, as my wife has student debt, we are definitely people that are burdened by our outstanding debt issues, and we need to make sure that there is a state policy to make education more affordable and create sunset policies on outstanding student debt for people who already have it.

Akshay Vaishamp: On education within our district, my wife and I plan on sending our children to our public schools, we're very invested in them, and over the course of the next four or five years, we will be parents in those public schools. So, we do have a personal interest in each of those issues.

Akshay Vaishamp: And on the affordability of housing, it's unfair that people are getting pushed out of the neighborhood that they've called their own, but it's also unfair that people who are coming into our neighborhood now see rents that are three, four, five times what they once were. It's creating a neighborhood where only the rich can live in it, and that's not the community that I want to live in, and that's not the community that I want to raise my family in. So, I think we need to focus on all of these aspects, but I also think that we need to remember that new ideas and the changing demographic of our district are definitely something that I will represent, because I feel I am one of those people who is a clear reflection of that, and we definitely need to move forward in this district. We definitely need to invest money in the right places, and I thank you for the opportunity to be here.

Julie Walker: And I want to thank both of you for being here with us.

Harvey Epstein: Thank you.

Akshay Vaishamp: Thank you.

Julie Walker: And thank you for watching. Please remember to vote. Primary party elections will be held Thursday September 13th, and the general election will be held on Tuesday November 6th. For more information on voting, locating your poll site, and all the candidates, you can visit RaceToRepresent.com, or the League of Women Voters website, LWVNY.org. Thank you for watching Race to Represent on Manhattan Neighborhood Network.