

# In Fight For Ballot Space, Southampton Democrats Launch Clean Water Party

Stephen J. Kotz on May 25, 2021

Southampton Democrats are fighting back over what they say is an unethical, but legal, practice in which members of the Conservative or Republican parties have registered as members of the Working Families Party to force primaries in races where Democrats have won the minor party's endorsements for town elected office.

Facing the risk of losing a voting line on the ballot because of the relatively few people who vote in the primaries, the Democrats have created the Clean Water Party as a landing place for those voters who might agree with the Democratic position on clean water initiatives but might still not want to vote for a Democratic slate.

Sean McArdle, who had been registered as a Conservative, and his wife, Miranda Shultz, who had been registered as a Republican, earlier this year changed their registration to Working Families and are challenging Robin Long and Tommy John Schiavoni for the Working Families nomination for Town Board in the June 22 primary. Mr. McArdle is the son of Charles McArdle, a registered Conservative who is running for highway superintendent on the Republican and Conservative lines.

Marc Braeger, who was formerly registered as a Republican and Conservative, also joined the Working Families Party and is challenging its nominee, Thomas Neely, a Democrat, for town highway superintendent.

**MS. LONG**, vice chairwoman of the town's Democratic Committee and candidate for Town Board, said it was important to not make **"a false equivalency"** between what she said was the issues-oriented Clean Water line and an effort to take over the Working Families line by Conservative and Republican Party candidates who have little in common with the party's positions on the issues.

**"I don't care if someone wants to primary, but this is a subterfuge,"** she said, adding that she and other Democratic candidates had gone through the screening process to obtain the party's support. **"They have no intentions of debating the issues. I call it politics without policy."**

Ms. Long went a step further, calling the practice a subtle form of voter suppression. **"There are ways of creating chaos and attacking the voting system,"** she said. **"This may not be as obvious as telling someone you can't give someone a bottle of water on the voting line, but it's just as devious."**

Calls to Mr. McArdle's phone were answered by a message stating he was not accepting calls.

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— ROBIN LONG  
candidate for Southampton  
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Supervisor **JAY SCHNEIDERMAN**. "I think if Democrats did this to the Conservatives and tried to knock Republicans off the Conservative line, it would be met with a lot of anger and resistance."

He said the Clean Water Party gave voters who want to "send a message that they are interested in clean drinking water and clean bays and harbors something they can firmly believe in" on the ballot because the ticket is populated with candidates who have taken a strong stance on the issue.

The practice of Conservatives "raiding" the Working Families Party in Southampton, and Huntington Town as well, has not gone unnoticed by that party's leaders, who have also charged that it undermines the electoral system.

"The GOP's influence is weakening. They know they can't win on the issues, so are resorting to cynical tactics to deceive voters," said Sharon Cromwell, the deputy director of the state Working Families Party. "We expect Suffolk County voters to hold the Republicans accountable on Election Day."

Southampton Town Democratic Chairman **GORDON HERR** said this week the party had succeeded in getting the approximately 600 signatures it needed to run a largely Democratic slate on the Clean Water Line. "We are a party of issues. We stand by our values, we believe what we do and what we stand for," he said. "That's really what the issue is."