

# Party lines say little about candidates in D.A. race (commentary)



The platforms of Republican Joan Illuzzi and Democrat Michael McMahon vary little in the race for district attorney, leaving voters to consider the candidates themselves. (Advance composite photo)



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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- While the district attorney holds elected office, he tends to stay away from the sort of politics in which most other officials engage.

In the case of Michael McMahon and Joan Illuzzi, the candidates running for the open seat last held by now-Congressman Daniel Donovan, the two are highlighting their own backgrounds and focusing less on the history of their opponent. For the most part.

While the candidates are battling over the Conservative Party line on the November ballot — registered Conservatives can vote in a primary on Sept. 10 — there's less in the race tied to party affiliations and more about the candidates themselves.

McMahon, a former city councilman and one-term congressman, is known for being a personal injury lawyer on Staten Island. He is now a partner, lobbyist and co-chair of the government relations group at the law firm Herrick, Feinstein LLP.

## THE RACE FOR DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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He has never been a prosecutor, and while he touts his background as a lawyer having had cases in every court in New York, whether he has any experience in criminal law is unclear, with his focus being in personal injury, real estate and other business transactions.

McMahon is well known among civic associations, where he got his start on the Island. Now president of the Democratic Organization of Richmond County club — affectionately called DORC by its members — his takeover of the club came suddenly and after years of inactivity. Some said it signaled a desire to get back into elected politics after several years sitting on the sidelines.

Illuzzi, while a lifelong Staten Islander like McMahon, isn't known on the Island, having spent her whole career in the Manhattan D.A.'s office as an assistant district attorney, senior trial counsel and head of the Hate Crimes Unit.

She spent 27 years in that office, handling murder cases and other violent crimes.

Illuzzi has never run for public office before, and has had no involvement in civic or other Island associations to give her name recognition.

She is running on her experience as a prosecutor.

Both are touting their backgrounds — Illuzzi as a seasoned prosecutor, McMahon as an attorney and an administrator, having had staff under him in elected office.

Illuzzi too has administrative experience, both running the Hate Crimes Unit and as senior trial counsel.

While their backgrounds are different, their takes on crime on Staten Island are similar. Both see the heroin and prescription drug epidemic as the main issue to tackle in the D.A.'s office. Both identify steps to take to address it.

Richard Flanagan, political science professor at the College of Staten Island and co-author of "Staten Island: Conservative Bastion in a Liberal City," sees the race as different than others for elected office because for the most part, the candidates agree: crime is bad.

"Everyone wants criminals in jail and don't want drunk drivers driving around," Flanagan said. "The differences between the parties aren't that salient and so it turns to candidate competency. For the D.A.'s race ... a party label doesn't provide much of a cue for voters about how candidates may perform differently."

Instead, things like endorsements from powerful law enforcement unions play a larger role.

The **Patrolmen's Benevolent Association endorsed McMahon** recently and while the candidate's **campaign fights allegations of fraud** in collecting petition signatures, having the PBA's support "provides an important alternative to the charges of fraud" because they "represent honesty and integrity," said Democratic political consultant Hank Sheinkopf.

Flanagan too noted the PBA's support as an indication to voters. "That's a real signal to law-and-order types that McMahon can be trusted," he said.

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**NorthShoreKid**

Sep 6, 2015

For those of you who haven't met Joan Illuzzi yet, here is her six-minute introduction speech at the Staten Island Political Action Club <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxjzJ8wPS0A>

Clearly she far surpasses her opponent in experience.



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**NorthShoreKid**

Sep 4, 2015

I am really looking forward to the Sept 10th Primary when Conservative rank and file will have the opportunity to write in Joan Illuzzi's name to select their candidate.

After all, the voters on Staten Island are the ones that count in this DA election.

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**NorthShoreKid**

Sep 4, 2015



It really comes down to experience.

Joan Illuzzi has it and McMahon doesn't.

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**NorthShoreKid**

Sep 4, 2015

McMahon voted with DeBlasio 97% of the time when they were in city council.

We don't need McMahon and DeBlasio playing politics with the Staten Iskand DAs office.

Vote for the Republican candidate Joan Illuzzi.

Conservatives don't forget to vote in your primary on Sept 10 and write in Joan Illuzzi's name.

Staten Island deserves a DA with Joan Illuzzi's experience.

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**j1fmj2r**

Sep 3, 2015

Contrary to Mr. Sheinkopf's opinion, the law enforcement union's endorsement in this election is more an indication of the same old politics at work than a signal of McMahon's law and order stance. The perceptions among union officials is that Mr. McMahon has political capital because he voted for the Zadroga bill, and therefore is owed their allegiance.

Make no mistake, he should have voted for the Zadroga bill because it was and is the right thing to do for all of the people so viciously affected by their 9/11 exposure. In other words the bill's merit. That vote has nothing to do with the current state of law and order on Staten Island. So just as McMahon should have voted for the Zadroga bill on it's merit, so too should these unions support a candidate on the candidate's merit. Merit in this election is not currying favor with union officials, it is the ability to do the job better than any one else running.

Additionally the union leaders making these endorsement decisions are so far removed from the day to day enforcement of the law that they have lost touch with what actually occurs on the street. Some of them have not made or been involved in an arrest or any enforcement activity in more than twenty years. They are however intimately involved in political affairs. To be fair their job is difficult and they have to play politics in order to protect their members.

Unfortunately there will come a day when one of their members will find themselves in the crosshairs of the District Attorney. I don't mean the dishonest cop or detective that has willfully committed an egregious act for their own gain. Those people deserve the full measure of the law. I mean the honest, hard working cop or detective that has done their job to the best of their ability yet find themselves the target of the badly focussed hindsight of the current climate.

So the question is, do they want an inexperienced lobbyist lawyer. One beholden to the current democratic political puppets making decisions about their unfortunate member. Or do they want an experienced prosecutor that has seen almost every conceivable scenario involving their members making the decision. One who will make those decisions based on facts and the law.

This is kind of a no-brainer. The union leadership has gotten wrong.

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**NorthShoreKid**

Sep 3, 2015

@j1fmj2r An excellent, well-thought out post.

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**ronniegirlny**

Sep 3, 2015

Simple choice, an experienced prosecutor or a lobbying politician?

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**NorthShoreKid**

Sep 3, 2015

Ms. Shapiro,

You left out an important point. As an ADA, Joan Illuzzi was prohibited from political activity. Ms. Illuzzi had to resign her position to campaign for this office.

I know many people in **law enforcement** and **THEY TRUST JOAN ILLUZZI**. So do the many crime victims who she has tirelessly advocated for during her 27yrs as a prosecutor.

The unions back McMahon because he is a Democrat and voted for the very important Zadroga bill.

McMahon still has ZERO experience as a prosecutor.

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**Dicky Priest for City Council**

Sep 3, 2015

@NorthShoreKid She must have thought that the ban on political activity made it illegal for her to vote in DA elections - LOL!

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**NorthShoreKid**

Sep 4, 2015

Dicky maybe you can vote with DeBlasio like McMahon when you get to the city council.

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**ronniegirlny**

Sep 3, 2015

@NorthShoreKid well said

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**Torus34**

Sep 3, 2015

We would be better served by the candidates if they would comment upon the current functioning of the D.A.'s office and list specific improvements they would attempt to accomplish if elected.

As the stock hucksters like to say, "Past performance is not a guarantee ... !"

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**Melamine**

Sep 3, 2015

@Torus34 Unfortunately anyone can say they have plans but the candidate's experience speaks to their ability to implement them. In McMahon's case, he has zero experience.

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**Torus34**

Sep 3, 2015

@Melamine: And what experience would that be? Overseeing the operation of a group of professionals? Law School?

Regards.

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**Cmkennedy**

Sep 3, 2015

Donovan had zero experience when he beat Lehr as well. Then he ran for Congress with zero legislative experience. Won both.

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**Melamine**

Sep 3, 2015

@Cmkennedy No that's wrong. Donovan had eight years of major prosecutorial experience, as an ADA under Robert Morgenthau and then as a Deputy Bureau Chief with the City Special Narcotics Prosecutor's office. Lehr was Deputy of what was at the time the DA office with the worst felony conviction rate in New York City and New York State. Lehr along with Murphy allowed the City Council to cut the Staten Island DA budget, a cut McMahon voted for.

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**vjg**

Sep 3, 2015

Party lines don't have to say anything in this case. Do you want an experienced prosecutor or a politician? Case closed.

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**sanity62**

Sep 3, 2015

Um...I do believe, Ms. Shapiro, that McMahon is more well-known as NYC Councilman and US Congressman than a personal injury lawyer. That's where he devoted so much of his time and energy serving the public.

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**Melamine**

Sep 3, 2015

@sanity62 You're right. McMahon was well known in the City Council for raising property taxes and voting for congestion pricing and now we learn for cutting the District Attorney budget and making us all less safe. What a record.

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**eastshoredem**

Sep 4, 2015

@Melamine @sanity62 McMahon was well known in the City Council for helping to save New York City after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks left the City devastated and with a several billion dollar deficit -- McMahon saved the JOBS of thousands of Staten Island residents! They would not have had to worry about property taxes if their houses were foreclosed on as a result of them losing their jobs, as would have happened if McMahon had not voted to save their jobs.

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**NorthShoreKid**

Sep 6, 2015

@eastshoredem @Melamine @sanity62

Joan Illuzzi has been endorsed by **Rudy Giuliani** whose leadership did more for NYC than anyone else.

McMahon didn't author Zadroga he voted for it...who wouldn't?

Illuzzi has experience McMahon has ZERO.

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**NorthShoreKid**

Sep 3, 2015

@sanity62 He was also cited for ethics violations in 2007 as a Councilman.

What McMahon has experience in is running a campaign and this is his 3rd. Yet his campaign had to admit to fraud and forgery in the signature gathering for petitions.

Can you imagine how he will run the DA office with ZERO experience as a prosecutor?

Joan Illuzzi is the most qualified candidate and will be our next DA. Staten Island deserves her experience and talent.

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**Rachel Shapiro | rshapiro@siadvance.com**

Sep 3, 2015

@sanity62 He's more well known in those roles because they were public offices, yes. But he spent much more time as a lawyer in private practice.

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