

Happy Special Election Day! The Winner Was Decided for You

February 2026

Two State Assembly members and two State Senators were elected last November to municipal offices in New York City and Buffalo. Because their seats were vacated mid-term, special elections to fill those vacancies are being held on February 2, 2026.

Together, these four districts represent nearly one million residents across Manhattan, Queens, and downtown Buffalo. Yet rather than a democratic contest, voters in these districts are participating in elections that look more like a coronation.

Like regularly scheduled general elections, special elections for state offices are often uncompetitive. Most Assembly and Senate districts are dominated by a single party - in these cases, the Democratic Party - meaning that the candidate who secures the party's nomination is almost always assured victory.

In state legislative special elections, however, party nominees are not selected through primary elections. Instead, a small group of party officials chooses the nominee, effectively eliminating any opportunity for voters to participate in the selection process.

The result is a system of predetermined elections that encourages patronage and routinely produces voter turnout below 5%, yet is the path that sent nearly one in five current state legislators to Albany.

There is another way. For nearly four decades, New York City has used nonpartisan special elections that generate greater competition, more campaigning, and significantly higher voter participation.

Here are the details.

Special Elections Held on February 2, 2026

- **State Assembly District 36 – Western Queens** (vacated by Zohran Mamdani, who was elected Mayor of New York City)
- **State Assembly District 74 – Manhattan's East Side** (vacated by Harvey Epstein, who was elected to the New York City Council)
- **State Senate District 47 – Manhattan's West Side** (vacated by Brad Hoylman-Sigal, who was elected Manhattan Borough President)
- **State Senate District 61 – Downtown Buffalo** (vacated by Sean Ryan, who was elected Mayor of Buffalo)



How Party Nominees Were Chosen

Candidates in state legislative special elections may run as nominees of a political party or as independents (if they collect the required number of signatures).

Unlike general elections, however, there are no party primaries. Instead, a committee made up of a small group of party officials chooses who gets to run on the party line. The composition of that committee varies based on the internal rules of every party in each county; they are commonly controlled or heavily influenced by party leaders, including the chair of the county party.

For the February 2 special elections:

- In **Queens**, Democratic County Chair Gregory Meeks and four district leaders representing Assembly District 36—a total of five individuals—selected Diana Moreno as the Democratic nominee. Two candidates who ran for other seats before, Rana Abdelhamid and Mary Jobaida, collected signatures to appear on the ballot as independents.
- In **Buffalo**, the Erie County Democratic Executive Committee, chaired by Jeremy Zellner, selected Zellner himself as the Democratic nominee for Senate District 61. Until announcing his candidacy, Zellner also served as the county's elections commissioner. Other interested candidates, including Assembly Member Jonathan Rivera, were effectively blocked from the ballot.
- In **Manhattan**, Democratic County Committee members residing in the relevant districts voted on nominees. In Senate District 47, Erik Bottcher was selected unanimously by 130 committee members to run on as the Democratic candidate. In Assembly District 74, Keith Powers received 60% support in a meeting of 168 committee members to secure the Democratic nomination. Manhattan is an outlier among county parties for operating a comparatively open process within the party-controlled system, yet it still only involved a minuscule fraction of the voters in the district. In practice, about 0.0007% of enrolled democratic voters in Senate District 47 and 0.002% in Assembly District 74 decided who would be the nominee and therefore be all-but-assured a win in the special election.
- Local leaders of the Republican, Conservative, and Working Family parties also selected their candidates for these seats, in an even less transparent process (Dan Gagliardo in Senate District 61, Charlotte Friedman in Senate District 47, and Joseph Foley in Assembly District 74; the WFP placed Bottcher on their line).

State Special Elections: Party Patronage and Low Turnout

This system means that nearly everywhere in New York, the outcome of state special elections is effectively predetermined, having been set behind closed doors by party insiders



weeks before ballots are cast. Candidates seeking office only need to convince a handful of party leaders – or at best, dozens.

Special Elections for State Legislative Districts in New York City in the Last Decade

| Date | Office | Turnout |
|--------------------|------------------------|---------|
| May 23, 2017 | 30th Senate District | 4.4% |
| April 24, 2018 | 39th Assembly District | 2.0% |
| April 24, 2018 | 74th Assembly District | 6.2% |
| April 24, 2018 | 32nd Senate District | 5.4% |
| April 24, 2018 | 80th Assembly District | 1.2% |
| January 18, 2022 | 68th Assembly District | 1.8% |
| February 15, 2022 | 60th Assembly District | 3.7% |
| February 15, 2022 | 72nd Assembly District | 3.1% |
| March 22, 2022 | 43rd Assembly District | 4.3% |
| May 24, 2022 | 58th Assembly District | 3.4% |
| September 12, 2023 | 27th Assembly District | 7.4% |
| February 13, 2024 | 77th Assembly District | 2.5% |
| May 20, 2025 | 22nd Senate District | 8.6% |

Campaigns are then truncated to a few short weeks, and challengers are locked out before the public ever hears their names. Candidates who receive party backing in one-party districts face little incentive to introduce themselves to voters, articulate policy platforms, or conduct robust outreach.

Standalone special elections already suffer from low turnout due to limited notice and reduced media coverage. The insider-controlled nomination process further suppresses participation. [Over the past decade, average voter turnout in New York City state legislative special elections has been approximately 4%, and in some races has fallen below 2%.](#)

Instead of energizing democracy, the current special election system actively promotes party patronage.

A Common Path to State Office

Today's special elections are not a rare occurrence.

[Nearly one in five current members of the New York State Legislature, about 19 percent \(including the ones elected today\), first entered office through this process.](#) Given the legislature's high incumbency rate, candidates who secure party nominations before special elections are often assured a lifetime position in the legislature, should they seek it.

The current cohort of state lawmakers includes eight members first elected to office through a special election over three decades ago.

How State Lawmakers Were First Elected?

| | Total Members | First Elected in Special Elections | As Share of Chamber |
|---------------------|---------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Senate | 63 | 11 | 17.5% |
| Assembly | 150 | 29 | 19.3% |
| Legislature - Total | 213 | 40 | 18.8% |

There Is a Better Model – in New York City

New York City offers a proven alternative to the party-controlled, competition-depressing state special election system.

When vacancies occur in New York City offices — including City Council, Borough President, and even citywide positions — the city holds non-partisan special elections. There are no primaries, candidates collect signatures, party labels are removed from the ballot, and all voters can participate in a single election.

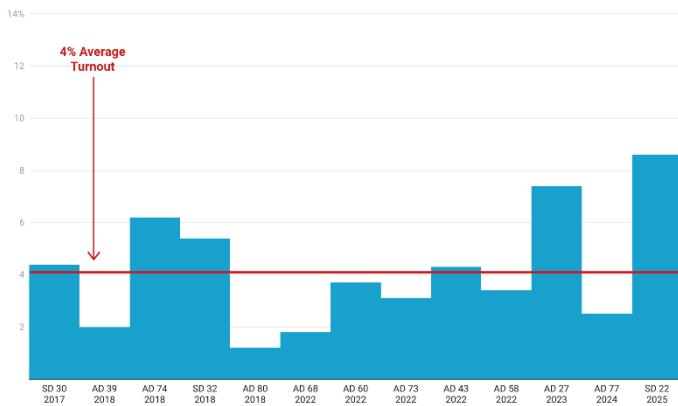


These non-partisan elections do not change the party composition in the City Council. Once candidates win, they join either the Democratic or the Republican conferences in the Council.

New York City adopted this model in 1988, and it has worked well for nearly four decades. Special elections for city offices see more competition, more campaigning, and far greater voter engagement than ones for state offices.

Voter Turnout in Special Elections for State Legislative Offices

All special elections for the State Senate or State Assembly districts in New York City from 2016 to 2025. In these special elections, party nominees are selected by party insiders behind closed doors, and the race is essentially predetermined.

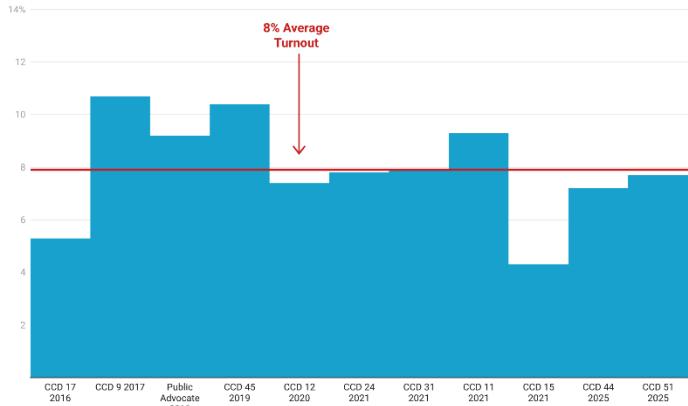


Special elections held on the same day as general elections were not included in this analysis

Source: New York City Board of Elections data • Created with Datawrapper

Voter Turnout in Special Elections for New York City Offices

All special elections for the New York City Council and other City officers from 2016 to 2025. These special elections are non-partisan, with multiple candidates running in a relatively competitive race.



Source: New York City Board of Elections data • Created with Datawrapper

The difference is striking. [Average turnout in New York City's non-partisan special elections in the last decade was roughly double that of state legislative special elections in the five boroughs held under the current insider-controlled system](#). Thousands more New Yorkers choose to participate in non-partisan special elections. That is not an accident. When multiple candidates — often several Democrats — compete for the same seat, they are forced to knock on doors, articulate positions, and energize supporters. Voters respond when their choices feel real.

The Solution

The case for reform is obvious. New York should adopt a non-partisan special election model for state legislative vacancies, like the one already used successfully in New York City. Such a system would open the field to more candidates, reduce the power of party gatekeepers, and give voters a genuine choice — without leaving districts unrepresented for a long time.

Governor Kathy Hochul publicly committed to reforming the special elections process last year, yet no changes were made. Now, in 2026, voters across the state are once again being asked to head to polls under this broken system.

At a moment when faith in democracy is fragile, the state should be doing everything possible to increase voter engagement — not running elections designed to minimize participation. If state leaders are serious about strengthening democracy, this is a reform they can no longer put off.

Appendix A: Voter Turnout in Special Elections in New York City, 2016-2025

| Date | Level | District | Eligible voters | Votes | Turnout |
|------------|-------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------|---------|
| 2/23/2016 | City | 17th Council District | 71,136 | 3,764 | 5.3% |
| 2/14/2017 | City | 9th Council District | 109,189 | 11,663 | 10.7% |
| 5/23/2017 | State | 30th Senate District | 201,809 | 8,938 | 4.4% |
| 4/24/2018 | State | 39th Assembly District | 43,699 | 856 | 2.0% |
| 4/24/2018 | State | 74th Assembly District | 75,233 | 4,642 | 6.2% |
| 4/24/2018 | State | 32nd Senate District | 191,299 | 3,650 | 5.4% |
| 4/24/2018 | State | 80th Assembly District (uncontested) | 67,235 | 2,447 | 1.2% |
| 2/26/2019 | City | Public Advocate | 4,650,188 | 427,355 | 9.2% |
| 5/14/2019 | City | 45th Council District | 94,157 | 9,750 | 10.4% |
| 12/22/2020 | City | 12th Council District | 101,482 | 7,521 | 7.4% |
| 2/2/2021 | City | 24th Council District | 87,664 | 6,853 | 7.8% |
| 2/23/2021 | City | 31st Council District | 94,857 | 7,451 | 7.9% |
| 3/23/2021 | City | 11th Council District | 102,617 | 9,555 | 9.3% |
| 3/23/2021 | City | 15th Council District | 93,211 | 3,976 | 4.3% |
| 1/18/2022 | State | 68th Assembly District | 81,018 | 1,436 | 1.8% |
| 2/15/2022 | State | 60th Assembly District | 82,105 | 3,017 | 3.7% |
| 2/15/2022 | State | 72nd Assembly District | 81,018 | 2,520 | 3.1% |
| 3/22/2022 | State | 43rd Assembly District | 78,405 | 3,344 | 4.3% |
| 5/24/2022 | State | 58th Assembly District | 74,064 | 2,504 | 3.4% |
| 9/12/2023 | State | 27th Assembly District | 62,976 | 4,632 | 7.4% |
| 2/13/2024 | State | 77th Assembly District | 60,482 | 1,533 | 2.5% |
| 3/25/2025 | City | 44th Council District | 78,527 | 5,656 | 7.2% |
| 4/29/2025 | City | 51st Council District | 123,913 | 9,591 | 7.7% |
| 5/20/2025 | State | 22nd Senate District | 155,468 | 13,382 | 8.6% |

Special elections held on the same day as general elections or presidential primaries were not included in this analysis (4/19/2016: 59th, 62nd, 65th Assembly Districts; 11/2/2021: 30th Senate, 86th Assembly Districts)

Appendix B: How Current State Lawmakers Were First Elected to Office

| New York State Senate | | | | |
|-----------------------|------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| District | First Name | Last Name | Type of First Election to Office | Year First Elected |
| 1 | Anthony | Palumbo | General | 2020 |
| 2 | Mario | Mattera | General | 2020 |
| 3 | Dean | Murray | General | 2022 |
| 4 | Monica | Martinez | General | 2022 |
| 5 | Steven | Rhoads | General | 2022 |
| 6 | Siela | Bynoe | General | 2024 |
| 7 | Jack | Martins | General | 2022 |
| 8 | Alexis | Weik | General | 2020 |
| 9 | Patricia | Canzoneri-Fitzpatrick | General | 2022 |
| 10 | James | Sanders Jr. | General | 2012 |
| 11 | Toby Ann | Stavisky | Special | 1999 |
| 12 | Michael | Gianaris | General | 2010 |
| 13 | Jessica | Ramos | General | 2018 |
| 14 | Leroy | Comrie | General | 2014 |
| 15 | Joseph | Addabbo, Jr. | General | 2008 |
| 16 | John | Liu | General | 2018 |
| 17 | Steve | Chan | General | 2024 |
| 18 | Julia | Salazar | General | 2018 |
| 19 | Roxanne | Persaud | Special | 2015 |
| 20 | Zellnor | Myrie | General | 2018 |
| 21 | Kevin | Parker | General | 2002 |
| 22 | Sam | Sutton | Special | 2025 |
| 23 | Jessica | Scarcella-Spanton | General | 2022 |
| 24 | Andrew | Lanza | General | 2006 |
| 25 | Jabari | Brisport | General | 2020 |
| 26 | Andrew | Gounardes | General | 2018 |
| 27 | Brian | Kavanagh | Special | 2017 |
| 28 | Liz | Krueger | Special | 2002 |

| | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|-----------------|---------|------|
| 29 | Jose | M. Serrano | General | 2004 |
| 30 | Cordell | Cleare | Special | 2021 |
| 31 | Robert | Jackson | General | 2018 |
| 32 | Luis | Sepulveda | Special | 2018 |
| 33 | J. Gustavo | Rivera | General | 2010 |
| 34 | Nathalia | Fernandez | General | 2022 |
| 35 | Andrea | Stewart-Cousins | General | 2006 |
| 36 | Jamaal | Bailey | General | 2016 |
| 37 | Shelley | Mayer | Special | 2018 |
| 38 | William | Weber Jr. | General | 2022 |
| 39 | Robert | Rolison | General | 2022 |
| 40 | Peter | Harckham | General | 2018 |
| 41 | Michelle | Hinchey | General | 2020 |
| 42 | James | Skoufis | General | 2018 |
| 43 | Jacob | Ashby | General | 2022 |
| 44 | James | Tedisco | General | 2016 |
| 45 | Daniel | Stec | General | 2020 |
| 46 | Patricia | Fahy | General | 2024 |
| 47 | Vacant - will be elected on Feb 2 | | Special | 2026 |
| 48 | Rachel | May | General | 2018 |
| 49 | Mark | Walczky | General | 2022 |
| 50 | Christopher | J. Ryan | General | 2024 |
| 51 | Peter | Oberacker | General | 2020 |
| 52 | Lea | Webb | General | 2022 |
| 53 | Joseph | Griffo | General | 2006 |
| 54 | Pamela | Helming | General | 2016 |
| 55 | Samra G. | Brouk | General | 2020 |
| 56 | Jeremy A. | Cooney | General | 2020 |
| 57 | George M. | Borrello | Special | 2019 |
| 58 | Thomas | O'Mara | General | 2010 |
| 59 | Kristen | Gonzalez | General | 2022 |
| 60 | Patrick | Gallivan | General | 2010 |
| 61 | Vacant - will be elected on Feb 2 | | Special | 2026 |
| 62 | Robert | Ortt | General | 2014 |
| 63 | April | Baskin | General | 2024 |



New York State Assembly

| District | First Name | Last Name | Type of First Election to Office | Year First Elected |
|----------|------------|---------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Thomas | Schiavoni | General | 2024 |
| 2 | Jodi | Giglio | General | 2020 |
| 3 | Joseph | DeStefano | General | 2018 |
| 4 | Rebecca | Kassay | General | 2024 |
| 5 | Doug | Smith | Special | 2018 |
| 6 | Philip | Ramos | General | 2002 |
| 7 | Jarett C. | Gandolfo | General | 2020 |
| 8 | Michael | Fitzpatrick | General | 2002 |
| 9 | Michael A. | Durso | General | 2020 |
| 10 | Steven H. | Stern | Special | 2018 |
| 11 | Kwani | O'Pharrow | General | 2024 |
| 12 | Keith | Brown | General | 2020 |
| 13 | Charles | Lavine | General | 2004 |
| 14 | David | McDonough | Special | 2002 |
| 15 | Jake | Blumencranz | General | 2022 |
| 16 | Daniel | Norber | General | 2024 |
| 17 | John K. | Mikulin | Special | 2018 |
| 18 | Noah | Burroughs | General | 2024 |
| 19 | Edward | Ra | General | 2010 |
| 20 | Eric Ari | Brown | Special | 2022 |
| 21 | Judy A. | Griffin | General | 2024 |
| 22 | Michaelle | Solages | General | 2012 |
| 23 | Stacey G. | Pheffer Amato | General | 2016 |
| 24 | David | Weprin | Special | 2010 |
| 25 | Nily | Rozic | General | 2012 |
| 26 | Edward | Braunstein | General | 2010 |
| 27 | Sam | Berger | Special | 2023 |
| 28 | Andrew | Hevesi | Special | 2005 |
| 29 | Alicia | Hyndman | Special | 2015 |

| | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|-------------------|---------|------|
| 30 | Steven | Raga | General | 2022 |
| 31 | Khaleel | Anderson | General | 2020 |
| 32 | Vivian | Cook | General | 1990 |
| 33 | Clyde | Vanel | General | 2016 |
| 34 | Jessica | Gonzalez-Rojas | General | 2020 |
| 35 | Larinda | Hooks | General | 2024 |
| 36 | Vacant - will be elected on Feb 2 | | Special | 2026 |
| 37 | Claire | Valdez | General | 2024 |
| 38 | Jenifer | Rajkumar | General | 2020 |
| 39 | Catalina | Cruz | General | 2018 |
| 40 | Ron | Kim | General | 2012 |
| 41 | Kalman | Yeger | General | 2024 |
| 42 | Rodneyse | Bichotte Hermelyn | General | 2014 |
| 43 | Brian | Cunningham | Special | 2022 |
| 44 | Robert C. | Carroll | General | 2016 |
| 45 | Michael | Novakhov | General | 2022 |
| 46 | Alec | Brook-Krasny | General | 2022 |
| 47 | William | Colton | General | 1996 |
| 48 | Simcha | Eichenstein | General | 2018 |
| 49 | Lester | Chang | General | 2022 |
| 50 | Emily | Gallagher | General | 2020 |
| 51 | Marcela | Mitaynes | General | 2020 |
| 52 | Jo Anne | Simon | General | 2014 |
| 53 | Maritza | Davila | Special | 2013 |
| 54 | Erik | Dilan | General | 2014 |
| 55 | Latrice | Walker | General | 2014 |
| 56 | Stefani L. | Zinerman | General | 2020 |
| 57 | Phara | Souffrant Forrest | General | 2020 |
| 58 | Monique | Chandler-Waterman | Special | 2022 |
| 59 | Jaime | Williams | Special | 2016 |
| 60 | Nikki | Lucas | Special | 2022 |
| 61 | Charles D. | Fall | General | 2018 |
| 62 | Michael | Reilly | General | 2018 |
| 63 | Samuel | Pirozzolo | General | 2022 |
| 64 | Michael | Tannousis | General | 2020 |

| | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|---------------|---------|------|
| 65 | Grace | Lee | General | 2022 |
| 66 | Deborah | Glick | General | 1990 |
| 67 | Linda | Rosenthal | Special | 2006 |
| 68 | Eddie | Gibbs | Special | 2022 |
| 69 | Micah | Lasher | General | 2024 |
| 70 | Jordan | Wright | General | 2024 |
| 71 | Alfred | Taylor | Special | 2017 |
| 72 | Manny | De Los Santos | Special | 2022 |
| 73 | Alex | Bores | General | 2022 |
| 74 | Vacant - will be elected on Feb 2 | | Special | 2026 |
| 75 | Tony | Simone | General | 2022 |
| 76 | Rebecca | Seawright | General | 2014 |
| 77 | Landon | Dais | Special | 2024 |
| 78 | George | Alvarez | General | 2022 |
| 79 | Chantel | Jackson | General | 2020 |
| 80 | John | Zaccaro Jr. | General | 2022 |
| 81 | Jeffrey | Dinowitz | Special | 1994 |
| 82 | Michael | Benedetto | General | 2004 |
| 83 | Carl | Heastie | General | 2000 |
| 84 | Amanda N. | Septimo | General | 2020 |
| 85 | Emerita | Torres | General | 2024 |
| 86 | Yudelka | Tapia | Special | 2021 |
| 87 | Karines | Reyes | General | 2018 |
| 88 | Amy | Paulin | General | 2000 |
| 89 | J. Gary | Pretlow | General | 1992 |
| 90 | Nader J. | Sayegh | General | 2018 |
| 91 | Steven | Otis | General | 2012 |
| 92 | Maryjane | Shimsky | General | 2022 |
| 93 | Chris | Burdick | General | 2020 |
| 94 | Matthew | Slater | General | 2022 |
| 95 | Dana | Levenberg | General | 2022 |
| 96 | Patrick | Carroll | General | 2024 |
| 97 | Aron | Wieder | General | 2024 |
| 98 | Karl | Brabenec | General | 2014 |
| 99 | Christopher | Eachus | General | 2022 |

| | | | | |
|-----|-------------|--------------|---------|------|
| 100 | Paula | Kay | General | 2024 |
| 101 | Brian | Maher | General | 2022 |
| 102 | Christopher | Tague | Special | 2018 |
| 103 | Sarahana | Shrestha | General | 2022 |
| 104 | Jonathan G. | Jacobson | General | 2018 |
| 105 | Anil | Beephan Jr. | General | 2022 |
| 106 | Didi | Barrett | Special | 2012 |
| 107 | Scott | H. Bendett | General | 2022 |
| 108 | John T. | McDonald III | General | 2012 |
| 109 | Gabriella | Romero | General | 2024 |
| 110 | Phil | Steck | General | 2012 |
| 111 | Angelo | Santabarbara | General | 2012 |
| 112 | Mary Beth | Walsh | General | 2016 |
| 113 | Carrie | Woerner | General | 2014 |
| 114 | Matthew J. | Simpson | General | 2020 |
| 115 | Michael | Cashman | Special | 2025 |
| 116 | Scott | Gray | General | 2022 |
| 117 | Kenneth | Blankenbush | General | 2010 |
| 118 | Robert J. | Smullen | General | 2018 |
| 119 | Marianne | Buttenschon | General | 2018 |
| 120 | William | Barclay | General | 2002 |
| 121 | Joe | Angelino | General | 2020 |
| 122 | Brian | Miller | General | 2016 |
| 123 | Donna | Lupardo | General | 2004 |
| 124 | Christoper | Friend | General | 2010 |
| 125 | Anna | Kelles | General | 2020 |
| 126 | John | Lemondes Jr | General | 2020 |
| 127 | Al | Stirpe | General | 2012 |
| 128 | Pamela | Hunter | Special | 2015 |
| 129 | William | Magnarelli | Special | 1998 |
| 130 | Brian D. | Manktelow | General | 2018 |
| 131 | Jeff L. | Gallahan | General | 2020 |
| 132 | Philip | Palmesano | General | 2010 |
| 133 | Andrea | K.Bailey | General | 2024 |
| 134 | Josh | Jensen | General | 2020 |

| | | | | |
|-----|------------|----------------|---------|------|
| 135 | Jennifer | Lunsford | General | 2020 |
| 136 | Sarah | Clark | General | 2020 |
| 137 | Demond L | Meeks | General | 2020 |
| 138 | Harry | Bronson | General | 2010 |
| 139 | Stephen | Hawley | Special | 2006 |
| 140 | William C | Conrad | General | 2020 |
| 141 | Crystal | Peoples-Stokes | General | 2002 |
| 142 | Patrick B. | Burke | General | 2018 |
| 143 | Patrick | Chludzinski | General | 2024 |
| 144 | Paul | Bologna | General | 2024 |
| 145 | Angelo | J. Morinello | General | 2016 |
| 146 | Karen M. | McMahon | General | 2018 |
| 147 | David | DiPietro | General | 2012 |
| 148 | Joe | Sempolinski | General | 2024 |
| 149 | Jonathan | Rivera | General | 2020 |
| 150 | Andrew | Molitor | General | 2024 |