

Democrat critical of Staten Island Democratic leader wants to run for Congress



Democratic Chairman John Gulino will not give Lawrence Gilder an interview regarding candidacy for the open seat in Congress. (Advance file photo)

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- A week after saying he would interview all candidates interested in running for the open seat in Congress, Staten Island Democratic Chairman John Gulino has had a change of heart, thanks to the entrance of a man who has made it his mission to challenge the chairman.

Gulino said last week that between five and seven people had **expressed interest in the seat**

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Once there have been official declarations of candidacy, there will be a party convention to choose the candidate, he said.

"I'm old fashioned in a lot of ways, that people who are interested you must interview them and see what they have to say," he

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said then.

Enter Lawrence Gilder.

He created the **Democratic Committee of Richmond County, Inc.** [<http://www.richmondcountydems.com>] a few months ago.

The LLC is "a group of people getting together and learning the process of the Democratic Party, trying to help and strengthen each other on what it really means to be a Democrat," he said.

Asked whether he named it the same as the **actual Democratic Committee of Richmond County** [<http://www.sidemocrats.com>] to trick or confuse people into getting involved, he said, "It's not made to confuse no one. I just have chosen that name."

He named himself chairman of the group and often sends Gulino letters, attacking the chairman and the committee, saying it is not inclusive, doesn't have enough candidates of color and doesn't represent the desires and needs of Democrats.

Gilder believes Gulino should be removed as chairman and makes no bones about it when writing the committee leader.

His most recent letter to the chairman expressed his interest in running for Congress against Republican DA Daniel Donovan.

"I want to open up the democratic process so that the people have a fair and balanced opportunity for our community to vote for a qualified candidate," he said of his interest in the seat. "Not a hand-picked candidate."

Gilder works as a process server for a law firm and never ran for public office. He said he's also considering running for district attorney, but thinks Congress better suits him.

Gilder has a bit of a storied background, having been arrested in 2013 for drug possession and gun ammunition possession. He has been charged with two felonies -- one of which was dismissed -- and three misdemeanors. His next court appearance is scheduled for February.

"I was a tenant in my nephew's house and I didn't know what was going on," he said. "I'm against drugs. I just want you to understand that, I'm not for it."

He said he feels that the arrests were a result of a "society that targets minorities."

The Democrat didn't want to talk about any of his policy stances on federal issues but responded to a question about his support on gun rights. He has filmed a short YouTube video on the importance of the 2nd Amendment and gun ownership.

"It's not the guns that kill, people kill," he said.

He criticized Gulino for not attracting successful candidates.

"We have no Democrats right now who can possibly win against Donovan," Gilder said. "I don't think I can win against Donovan but I think I can give a better showing than the last candidate."

But it seems he won't have a chance, as Gulino has ruled out interviewing the man.

Tom Feeney Jr., executive director of Democratic Committee of Richmond County, said, "It's unrealistic for the chairman to meet with everyone who has expressed interest in this race, and there have been quite a few. He interviews the persons who have the potential to be serious candidates."

And that doesn't include Gilder.

Feeney fought the notion that the committee is not inclusive and doesn't seek out candidates of color to run for elected office.

"We seek and encourage people of all race, sex, and religious creed to run for office and to be active members in our party," he said. "Our executive board has just shy of 40 members, and we are proud of its diversity. Every single member contributes

positively to what we try to accomplish as a party, and the same holds true of our county committee.

As for the would-be candidate's contention that there are no Democrats who could win against Donovan in an election, Feeney said, "All of our elected Democratic officials are qualified candidates. We believe this race is very winnable and we are treating it that way."

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