

WHO IS ARTHUR SCHWARTZ?

SOMEONE WHO BELIEVES THAT THE ONLY WAY TO CHANGE THINGS IS TO MAKE PEOPLE RESPECT YOU.



To the Members of the Downtown Independent Democrats:

I am writing this having just heard the CNN call of the Presidential election, so I am moved by jubilation.

At Monday's forum I will only have 5 minutes to define who I am before facing questions. That will be challenging since I have been an activist fighting for change for over 50 years, all 50 of which define who I am in these both exhilarating and challenging times. If there is any way that I can define that approach, since I participated in my first sit-in at the Bronx High School of Science in 1968 up to the lawsuit I will be filing on Monday to stop token booth closings, it's that I know that "going along to get along" doesn't win transformative change, transformative change which still calls out to us.

I grew up in the Bronx, child of two first generation Americans, inspired by a mother (now 98 years old) who was an activist leader, at times alongside Bobby Kennedy, in the fight to change the approach the government took to address the needs of "retarded" persons. (I had an older brother who was institutionalized at age 8.)

I first became an activist at the Bronx HS of Science, and then at Columbia University, organizing against the Vietnam War, and rebuilding a nationwide organized student movement. After college, I attended Hofstra University Law School where I first started working with labor union reformers. One month after the NY Bar Exam I was in court representing hundreds of Postal Workers who had been fired for striking. For the past 4 decades no one has litigated more union democracy cases than me. City Limits once dubbed me "the equalizer," and many of my clients went on to win union office, and many of their opponents wound up in prison. I went on to serve as counsel to many unions including the Utility Workers Union at Con Edison, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union, Professional Staff Congress at CUNY, and for the last 20 years, NYC's bus and subway worker's union, Transport Workers Union Local 100.

Not only did I litigate union democracy issues; I represented thousands of workers standing against discrimination, sexual harassment, wage theft, and unfair termination. I saw the power of organized workers in action-- in particular, I experienced, representing TWU during the 2005 Transit Strike, the impact that 35,000 workers could have on a city of millions, and how to negotiate a win out of what seemed to be an intractable dispute.

I did not work only as a labor/employment lawyer; I offered myself as counsel to social movements, counseling anti-nuclear groups, anti-Central America intervention groups, ACORN, NY Communities for Change, Make the Road NY, Occupy Wall Street, anti-gas pipeline activists, Black Lives Matter, and many others. In 2010 I founded Advocates for Justice, a non-profit legal foundation, whose work has included working with parents who sued Success Academy a dozen times for mistreating students, and encroaching on space needed for special education students; winning election and polling place reform (I was on a team which got the 2020 Democratic Presidential Primary restored); representing elderly tenants in eviction and landlord disputes, representing community groups fighting inappropriate development, CUNY students fighting for open Board meetings, and on and on. Until July (when I had to step aside because of FCC Rules), I hosted a weekly radio show on Mondays at 5 PM on WBAI; my guests included Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Samelys Lopez, Jamaal Bowman, Mondaire Jones, Tom DiNapoli, Nina Turner, Alessandra Biaggi, and Jumaane Williams, and leaders of environmental, tenants' rights, criminal justice reform groups and groups fighting systemic racism, like Black Lives Matter and Vocal NY. And, when WBAI was faced with closure in 2019, I successfully litigated in court to keep the nonprofit, listener-supported station on the air, and then became General Counsel to the entire nationwide network (the Pacifica Foundation) it was part of.

Politically, I have helped progressive activists grow and develop our movement. I coordinated Barack Obama's campaign in Manhattan in 2007-8 (working closely with Paul Newell) and was elected as a delegate to the Democratic Convention. In 2014 I was Treasurer for Zephyr Teachout's Davida vs. Goliath run for Governor. In 2016 I served as state-wide counsel to Bernie Sanders' first Presidential campaign and was again a delegate to the DNC. I was chosen by Bernie Sanders again in 2020. Out of the Sander's 2016 campaign I helped create and build the NY Progressive Action Network, a state-wide group which I serve as Political Director, Treasurer and Counsel. I have served as election counsel to Cynthia Nixon, Jumaane Williams, Mondaire Jones, and, in 2020, a whole slate of AOC-allied candidates which won 20 District Leader and State Committee seats, and some Assembly seats in Queens (including the first transgender District Leader ever, Emilia Decaudin, and 24 year old Assembly member elect Khaleel Anderson), and I count on them as friends.

In the Downtown community, I have been a leader for three decades. I was elected District Leader for the 66th AD Part A in 1995, and served until 2005, when I stepped aside for Brad Hoylman. I was elected to the State Committee in 2006 and served until 2013, when I was re-elected as District Leader in a three-way race. Additionally I served as Member of Community Board 2 from 1991 through 2014; while there I served over 17 years as either the Parks Committee Chair or the Waterfront Committee Chair, a period when Hudson River Park was built, the Rt 9a bikeway was created (I was the only yes vote on CB2) and Washington Square Park rebuilt. I also served as Chair or Vice Chair of the Hudson River Park Trust Advisory Council for a dozen years. And, despite my very dissident status in the Manhattan Democratic Party, I serve as Co-Law Chair, where I play a key role in judicial selection.

There is more! In 1992 I was the founder of the West Village Community Alliance for Parks and Playgrounds,

where I secured over \$2.5 million for local park and playground renovation; in 1998 I was a co-founder of Friends of Hudson River Park, following deep involvement in drafting the legislation which created the park and prevented development in the Park, and the successful settlement of a suit against Governor Pataki to block the rental of Pier 40 to a private parking lot operator, as the result of which the State built ballfields on the Pier.

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In my "spare time" I have litigated key suits, pro bono, for our community, suing to stop the closure of Beth Israel Hospital, stopping the development of a Costco on 14th Street and 6th Avenue, stopping the closure of token booths all over the City, winning elevators for local subway stops on 14th Street, challenging, under the NYC Human Rights Law, the elimination of bus stops in the 14th Street Busway, suing to force proper environmental review of that Busway, stopping the destruction of the stacks at the 42nd Street library, and litigating to save the newsstand at Astor Place (Jerry's Newsstand).

A NY Times' profile of me, published in February 1999, starts with this description: "Arthur Z. Schwartz loves to count the ways he has made people miserable." They were not referring to my neighbors.

I have lived in Greenwich Village for 40 years, and have raised four children there. I have been involved in successful local businesses (a bakery and a restaurant). I am married to a former leader of the Screen Actors' Guild, Kelly Craig.

With our City at its lowest point since the 1970s, we need leaders rooted in their communities that have proven track records of fighting for justice and winning. I am running for City Council because I am one of those leaders. I will hit the ground running and have what it takes to get to work for Soho, Greenwich

Village, Chelsea, and Hell's Kitchen.

I have an extensive, well-thought out platform, driven by a strong ethic addressed to racism and the need to eliminate economic inequality, addressed to affordable housing, free mass transit, NYPD reform, and educational funding, and a strengthening of the role of community boards in decision making. Please go to www.ArthurforNYC.com to read it.

Enough! I hope that if you got through this, you will see me as a rather unique candidate, and give me the support of your rather unique political club.

In Solidarity,

Arthur Schwartz

