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A SEASON IN HELL

(with Apologies to Arthur Rimbaud)



Maybe you remember the old short story by Kurt Vonnegut called “Harrison Bergeron”, wherein he offers the following critique of the future: “Everyone was finally equal.” In a sense, on one level, this election cycle feels dreadfully like that, handicapped to the point of lacking vitality and life: a season sapped of meaningful political competition. Collisions containing drama and yes, at their worst (or best!) tragedy – and some quaint measure of intelligence – seem like archeological relics from the past. Certainly, the cycle feels like the equivalent of what a bullfighter must experience when he seeks to convey passion and excitement to the crowd, and finds his antagonist, “el toro”, listless and unwilling to engage.

“I’m bored,” an operative confided to InsiderNJ as he sat in an unnamed headquarters in North Jersey, trying to figure out how to make politics feel exciting again, as if the contest mattered – like a ballgame with guys on base and the outcome perilously in the balance with every pitch.

But is it really that bad?

There’s truly nothing happening of consequence?

Well, it is bad.

Let's be honest.

Certainly, from the standpoint of everyday voters and their level of interest, we find little to celebrate. Collectively, we have allowed our political institutions to collapse under the amassed weight of transactionalism to the point where few people beyond the corrupt cocoon believe – or trust. “The best lack all conviction while the worst are filled with passionate intensity,” W.B. Yeats wrote, and it strikes a chord now, especially as we see Donald Trump preparing for another demonic run for the White House amid the tatters of a placating Republican Party.

But...

But...

There still may be some life left.

Even... just...a... little... life... left.

Let's find it.

Let us examine the landscape of this, our beloved dysfunctional state, and divine what politics remains, as expressed by this June 6th Primary cycle, contextualize the meaning, and draw some semblance of dignity from our meltdown.

America's two-party system has always imparted a pendulum swinging condition, and – short of war breaking through and creating a certain unified quality – produced an opportunity for the party out of office to regenerate from the paroxysms and dissatisfactions of power. The main energies in this, the lead up to the 2024 presidential election, therefore reside mostly among those stranded and wriggling elements in the GOP in search of a restored power source or surge. They produce a cer-

tain buoyancy of spirit that inordinately fails to correspond to reality as perhaps best exemplified by the following:

“In his latest communication with voters, we caught Pennacchio lying again to people about his efforts to stop the woke school sex-education curriculum that is infecting our state's schools and is totally inappropriate for our children.



“Mr. Pennacchio would have voters believe a fairy tale about him leading the charge against the leftist school curriculum when, in fact, he's done nothing to stop the new sex ed curriculum in our schools. Nothing.

“All Joe Pennacchio has done to protect our school children is to send out a press release. The liberal Democrat sex curriculum is going through, it is happening on his watch and Pennacchio has not done a thing to stop it and he never will. He failed.”

Those words flow from the pen of Morris County Commissioner Tom Mastrangelo, challenger in the Republican Primary to veteran incumbent state Senator Joe Pennacchio (R-26), a lifelong ardent conservative lawmaker.

More on that exhilarating contest below.

In the meantime...



A SOFT AND QUIET COLLISION OF TITANS

Maybe 20 years ago, even the thought of Dick Codey versus Nia Gill in a Democratic Primary would have prompted a battery of *New York Times* reporters to invade Essex County. Now, we're a few days away and this would-be battle of heavyweights feels like a bore snore. Conceiving a gladiatorial contest between two party players most removed from the inner sanctum of Essex County Democratic Committee Chairman LeRoy Jones, and therefore most eligible for elimination, the establishment in the immediate aftermath of redistricting prepared for a clanging, Essex County version of *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*. Instead, with

eighteen days remaining until Election Day, an InsiderNJ gut-check of District 27 revealed that Codey had done seven pieces of mail to Gill's two – all positive.

If Codey never endeared himself to Jones' Democratic Committee, Gill and Jones actually had a history of antagonism, which included the former beating the latter in 2003. That was the year a fight erupted in Essex County as Assemblyman Jones – the future county Democratic chairman – opposed Gill in the Party Primary as the newly minted senator attempted to secure a full, four-year term.

Jones ran on the line with Essex County Freeholder Sheila Oliver of East Orange, and Peter C. Eagler of Clifton. Financed in part by state Senator Ray Lesniak (D-20), Gill beat Jones by 1,000 votes, but it was a split ticket outcome, as both Oliver and Eagler (who replaced Willis Edwards) also won their assembly seats.

In 2005, Assemblyman Tom Giblin (D-34) of Montclair supplanted Eagler as Essex dominated the 34th District.

In other words, this is a feud with 20-year roots, at least when it comes to Jones v. Gill.

But Codey has his own fractious history with the organization now led by Jones, including two decades of headbutting with Essex County Executive Joe DiVincenzo.

If Codey v. Gill ever actually broke into a donnybrook, it's hard to picture DiVincenzo getting his hair mussed for either party. You'd probably find him as far from the action as possible, which may be part of the reason this contest feels fatigued. Neither Codey nor Gill can apparently summon the vitriol Gill might heap on Jones in a mano-a-

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mano or that Codey would fling at DiVincenzo if the two men ever found themselves nose-to-nose in a campaign bar brawl. All the tiptoeing around by supposed circus strongmen and strong women finally produced this utterly meaningless showdown between two independent brand names, apparently unwilling to give their county tormentors knock-down, drag out fisticuffs.

It's as if Codey and Gill are standing there like Maximus in "Gladiator", without a single punch thrown, let alone any heads hacked, together shouting up at decadent onlookers, "Are you not entertained?"

We're not.

Behind the scenes, insiders blandly cite Codey's presence on the line, and his money (closing campaign balance of \$839,523 as of May 8th, \$42K in expenditures, 95K raised and \$12K spent; compared to \$26K in the bank for Gill), and his name ID (he is, after all, a former governor) in the district as all the reasons why he can't lose. Allies cite health concerns of their champion, however, and note Gill's history of putting up a fight, using her victory over Jones as exhibit A in that argument. Maybe she's hitting the district hard on the ground, if not by air. If so, "stealthy" might be the best description of her efforts. Both candidates experienced some choppy running mate weather early, as the county party hit the eject button on Codey running mate Assemblyman Tom Giblin and Gill lost Frank Kasper for "personal reasons." Insiders say the replacement on Codey's ticket of Giblin by Alixon Collazos created more internal pushing and shoving (fears of a rapid ascent by Collazos' husband, Essex County Commissioner Brendan Gill, a significant ally of Governor Phil Murphy) and temper tantrums giggled at by Nia Gill's camp. Her



ability to take advantage of those mild demonstrations of cannibalizing seems significantly impaired by her lack of money.

But if Mastrangelo's challenge of Pennacchio contains all the worst elements of a dumbed down GOP, Codey v. Gill seems governed by that most eternally banal of NJ Democratic Party dynamics: the party line.



THE ARRIVAL OF SENATOR BRITNEE TIMBERLAKE



As Codey and Gill drearily clank away like medieval knights, Essex Democrats want to try to stay upbeat, midly energetic, future-thinking, relevant, youthfully vibrant, and (Insert your favorite positive adjective HERE).

They think they have that opportunity in their LD-34 senate candidate.

At the outset of her county party career, “Britnee Timberlake” surfaced on paper almost like an advertising gimmick, the brainchild of some glazed-over publicist intent on building a political brand name by exploiting pop iconography. If she inevitably evoked Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake to the millennial generation, an earlier era might have concocted Tina Hendrix or Janis McCartney as a way of manufacturing associative power. Yet even as those pop creations flickered and faded into yesteryear, New Jersey’s Timberlake to date fashioned – of all things – a substantive legislative record.

Perhaps more surprisingly, in a political culture that routinely only rewards subservience to establishment power, Timberlake undertook work on tough issues and secured gains for – stunning concept coming up – *real people*.

Significantly, she served as a prime sponsor on the \$15 minimum wage bill signed into law by Governor Phil Murphy, successfully championed full restoration of funding in the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, and sponsored legislation that provided financial relief to landlords and tenants in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, she shepherded a law prohibiting landlords from requiring tenants to pay rent and other related charges through electronic funds.

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Now, after five years in the Assembly, Timberlake, in the aftermath of legislative redistricting, has undertaken the opportunity of a promotion with a move to the state Senate.

Finally, the work – and Timberlake’s commitment to it – remain the same.

“The senate offers a larger platform to create change and to reverse a lot of socio-economic issues that have been in place for a long time,” said the Assemblywoman, on the ballot as the leader of the Essex Democrats’ LD-34 ticket. “I’m a systems changer and I work with people who similarly seek systems equality.”

As she looks back on her half decade thus far in Trenton, “I reflect fondly on the good trouble to represent the voice of the people,” Timberlake told InsiderNJ. “I work for the voter, not a boss and not power. Yes, it’s true, nobody filed to run against me, but I’m in a race to continuously serve the voters, to serve the people and to never take their vote for granted. I am here to serve the people who vote for me and didn’t vote for me.”

Her key issues include homeowner insurance reform, in order to relieve unfair and inequitable burdens on urban homeowners, who pay two to three times what their suburban counterparts pay.

“It’s red lining, and it must end,” Timberlake said. “It’s keeping people out of their own communities and widening wealth gaps. I see a major issue there and I want to amplify it in the senate. Also, I see the need for universal daycare.” As it stands now, many families confront the horror of trying to pay inordinate daycare costs for multiple children. Additionally, “Climate and environmental justice are of great importance. Every leader in every sector should be talking about this and acting on the so-

lutions. Climate is the number one pressing issue in the world, and I look forward to working on more commonsense policy to reduce our carbon footprint in this state and will continue protecting our already overburdened communities because clean air and water is a human right.”

An impassioned advocate for higher minimum wage, Timberlake – who once worked in a bakery – sees deeper issues of greed as a cause for societal inequity and wants to examine public subsidy caps for corporations that do not adequately pay their employees and raise the price of goods.

Surely, the public interest focus of her work suggests more than pop star foundations. Indeed, Timberlake hails from a military family. Her father was a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne. Her mother worked with mentally and physically challenged citizens.

“If we have power and we do not spend our time alleviating those burdens on the powerless, what does that say about us?” asked Timberlake, who on the June 6th Democratic Primary ballot in LD-34, as part of an political climb upward to the senate, insists only on working to create greater opportunity and equity for those she serves.





MASTRANGELO AND PENNACCHIO



Perhaps in some past Morris County conflagration, a Republican Primary promised a certain rigor lacking in those Democratic Party enclaves of strictly machine politics, where rigid lines produced – or for the most part, continue to produce – rigidly uninteresting contests (see Codey v. Gill, above).

Alas, in this era of social media hobgoblinization, state Senator Joe Pennacchio (R-26) versus Morris County Commissioner Tom Mastrangelo for Pennacchio’s senate seat has all the markings of societal decay – not dual suburban eagle finery on display.

A veteran GOP lawmaker who served as the co-chair of Donald Trump’s Presidential Campaign in New Jersey, Pennacchio hardly comes across as a poster child for the woke generation. But in Mastrangelo’s version of reality, “Jersey Joe” might as well be taking on walk on the late Lou Reed’s wild side.

Baffled, Pennacchio runs on his record.

“Up until recently I thought I was a conservative legislator,” the state senator told InsiderNJ. “All of a sudden, I’m ‘woke’. How do you defeat a lie? Hopefully, with the truth.”

A 22-year Trenton veteran, Pennacchio has served in the minority during two decades of Democratic Party rule, a shambles of leftist propaganda rammed into the genteel living rooms of New Jersey’s middle class, by Mastrangelo’s reckoning, all of it aided and abetted by Pennacchio and those other enslaved members of the minority party.

Mastrangelo’s had enough and wants voters to mer-

cifully pull the plug on Morris County's senior senator. Pennacchio, for his part, argues that it's preposterous to pin the tail on anyone but the donkeys running the state and resents having to campaign for himself districtwide when he could occupy the wider universe of real New Jersey battlegrounds, recruiting new Republicans to displace that genuine blight on the landscape: Trenton Democrats.

Finally, Pennacchio argues, he's interested in protecting not only taxpayers, but the interests of – interesting concept coming up - those most vulnerable among us – the young and the old. To that end, he teamed up with Diane Grossman to create Mallory's Law, to require school districts to pay attention to at-risk students. In addition, he led the charge against Governor Phil Murphy during the pandemic on the specific issue of nursing home deaths. "My issue with him is he's not challenging me on my record," Pennacchio said of his rival, a long-serving county commissioner, who last year fended off a challenge by Sarah Neibart by tying her to woke politics.

Yoke Pennacchio to "Woke," seems to be Mas-trangelo's winning formula.

Pennacchio trusts he will win.

It's just frustrating – and stupid, he says - having to negotiate a blizzard of misinformation. "I could be spending my money time and effort toward getting us into the majority," said the senator.

With that, aiming to prove indefensible Mas-trangelo's attempts to package him as a liberal loon and instead make Mastrangelo look loopy, the GOP senator unveiled a chest-thumping conservative endorsement by NJ Health Freedom and Parental Rights:

"Senator Joe Pennacchio is an unwavering champion when it comes to protecting health freedom in New Jersey. Time and time again, he has had the courage to step forward as an outspoken and proactive supporter of medical freedom, informed consent and parental rights. In December of 2019, Senator Pennacchio stood with parents to defend religious liberty and parental sovereignty. Then, in the darkest days of the pandemic, when others sought to impose the harshest and most scientifically illiterate pandemic mitigation measures upon our children, Joe fought to unmask the kids and return sanity (and education) to our schools.

"Recognizing the scientific validity of natural immunity, Senator Pennacchio championed groundbreaking legislation with his co-sponsored Covid-19 natural immunity bill. This bill acknowledges and protects the rights of individuals who have had Covid-19 and have built natural immunity. His persistence on this issue showcases his commitment to evidence-based decision-making. Senator Pennacchio has not forgotten and he will not forget the thousands of senior citizens who died due to negligent pandemic protocols. He continues to call for clarity and justice for our most vulnerable. These threats to our families and their health remain. It is imperative that we keep Senator Joe Pennacchio in office to continue the fight that must be won."

Somewhere, there's a general election battleground out there where people will make sense again. Actually, come to think of it, maybe there's a post-election atmosphere where we can again enjoy one another's company, as we continue to flounder toward Plato's aristocracy of minotaur headdresses invading the U.S. Capitol and philosopher-kings.



MUNICIPAL BUILDING



LD-14: ANOTHER CATASTROPHE AVOIDED



In the dreams of NJGOP Chairman Bob Hugin, Mercer County by now should look like the oozing puddle at the end of *The Wizard of Oz* formerly known as Margaret Hamilton. Certainly, Mercer County Executive Brian Hughes' exit from the stage would look more like a Lord Nelson last stand than a county convention beat down by Assemblyman Dan Benson.

But alas, Hugin's dream of Mercer County turning into a snake pit of Democratic Party Primary drama fell apart at the convention, as Benson annihilated Hughes, thereby setting himself up as the next county executive in the Democratic Party stronghold. Sooner than draw a saber and hurl himself from the crow's nest, Hughes raised a white flag.

That said, one of the departing executive's allies seeking reelection, Assemblyman Wayne DeAngelo (D-14) looked vulnerable, and endured a third place among voting county committee members, probably on the strength of his Building Trades cred and reluctance to throw his arms around every liberal teddy bear that walks in the room.

But DeAngelo, an electrical worker by trade and diehard labor guy first elected to the legislature in 2007, has a strong reputation as an accountable elected official. In the leadup to the primary, he refused to fashion himself as a spearpoint on behalf of South Jersey henchmen, who wanted to turn Mercer into a face-saving political warzone in the aftermath of Steve Sweeney's 2021 reelection implosion. DeAngelo was loyal to Sweeney (and Hughes), but he was also loyal to incumbent state Senator Linda Greenstein (D-14) and refused to run against her to satisfy political appetites larger than the 14th District.

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One of his conquerors at the convention, Tennille McKoy of Hamilton (not Margaret Hamilton), endorsed his reelection, along with the candidacy of Greenstein, as Greenstein-DeAngelo-McKoy became the bumper sticker to supplant Greenstein-DeAngelo-Benson.

Adam Elias, who bested DeAngelo at the convention, presented himself as an alternative.

But he looked like a longshot at penetrating a fairly fast re-coalescing team, especially considering the Hugin-Sweeney Battle of Dunkirk that might have transpired countywide out of the (very brief) Hughes v. Benson glove slap and submission.

DeAngelo looked like the same rugged action star of old, with McKoy showing up at his golf outing on a late May day with over 220 other golfers taking their swings on behalf of the working man (and woman). The Hamiltonian had more money in the bank than Speaker Craig Coughlin, and the same casual, no-big-deal attitude he started this state political game with some sixteen years ago.

“It’s not a walk in the park,” DeAngelo told InsiderNJ, in a modest, walk-in-the-park tone. “I’m just telling the voters what I’m doing and what I’ve done; supporting the union guy and helping people around the state, including John Burzichelli and Vin Gopal.”

Wait a minute.

“Helping people around the state??”

Didn’t Pennacchio mention how Mastrangelo challenging him prevents his statewide mobility on behalf of Republicans trying to flip power in Trenton? DeAngelo seemed confident enough in the per-

formance of his coffers to engage in “helping people around the state.”

He clarified.

“We don’t want to lose seats,” said the Democratic incumbent.

That doesn’t sound like the lingo of someone in a Democratic Primary Dogfight.

“There are people out here on the trail telling me ‘It’s good to see you’re alright,’” DeAngelo confessed. “But it’s just the progressive committee people. The rank-and-file Dems out there, the independents, the plurality – they like the way I work across the aisle. They like my plan for renewable energy in a sensible way not just mandating it and rushing it through.”

McKoy likes it, enough to stand with him as his running mate, and grab a golf club at his fundraiser.

“They work super hard,” the born-and-raised Hamiltonian said of Greenstein and DeAngelo. “This comes down to me doing a lot of door-knocking, a lot of community events.”

If this isn’t a dogfight or a cage match, can it, at least, be described as a Marquis of Queensbury conflict?

After all, Elias is out there, himself seeking votes. “The number one thing is our future is bright,” said McKoy, who discusses her priorities in terms of educational and environmental reforms and “making sure individuals understand the number one thing is families.”

They don’t sound like fighting words, as McKoy stepped up – on behalf of the entire LD-14 team – to take another swing – with a golf club.



REPUBLICANS SCRAP WITH ABANDON IN THE SUBURBS



In LD-24, the retirement of state Senator Steve Oroho created contests of a sort absent in Democratic Primary country (LD-14 for example, see above).

We'll get to the main event in a minute, but in the meantime, we turn to that august veteran columnist and reporter to elucidate the Republican Primary here, none other than InsiderNJ's own Fred Snowflack:

Dawn Fantasia is a Sussex County Commissioner running for state Assembly in LD-24.

But to her two opponents in the June 6 Republican primary, she's "Gas Tax Dawn."

No, that's not a compliment.

This moniker – and Fantasia's response – surfaced Thursday night during a debate among the four main candidates for two Assembly nominations in perhaps the most conservative district in the state. It covers all of Sussex and parts of Morris and Warren counties.

Fantasia is teamed up with Mike Inganamort, the mayor of Chester Township.

They are being challenged by the team of Jason Sarnoski, a Warren County Commissioner, and Josh Aikens, the school board president in Lafayette. The issue at hand had to do with New Jersey raising the gas tax by about 23 cents per gallon during the governorship of Chris Christie.

One of the key lawmakers who pushed it through was Republican Steve Oroho, of Sussex County, who is now retiring from the Senate.

This was totally a bipartisan deal as you can see from the involvement of Christie and Oroho.

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In a heated campaign, however, such subtleties – of course, it really isn't a subtlety – don't matter.

Sarnoski noted that Fantasia actually did a radio ad and a robocall in favor of the increase.

She explained herself by first saying she was a borough council member at the time, and had no vote on the increase.

Fantasia also pointed out the state's Transportation Trust Fund, which funds road work, was depleted and that relief was needed.

She also noted that the increase was accompanied by many things Republicans wanted, including tax relief for seniors and veterans and eliminating the state's estate tax, which the GOP likes to call a "death tax."

Sarnoski wasn't all that impressed, noting that he's glad Fantasia admits that she likes the tax increase.

She countered with the observation that Warren County – Sarnoski's home base – has been getting from \$4 million to \$5 million a year in gas tax revenue; money that Fantasia said helps the county stabilize taxes.

To which Sarnoski responded, he would have found the money another way to help the county budget if there was no gas tax revenue.

This segment ended with Fantasia saying that attacks against her over the gas tax are "histrionics" and "nonsense."

Looking to June 6, we must remember that Republican primary voters tend to be quite conservative and likely oppose raising taxes – even with tradeoffs. Do not expect this issue to go away.

Thank you again, Mr. Snowflack, for once again sup-

plying precisely that inimitable Zen-like zest for truth that reflects the jagged landscape of a Republican Primary in the western hinterlands as only one displaced from Hudson County can.

Consider, too, the neighboring, Morris County-based fight between Assemblyman Brian Bergen, redistricted from LD-25 into Ld26, and former Assemblywoman BettyLou DeCroce.

Remember, Republicans and Democrats agreed on a legislative map last year, and this one puts Bergen in a tough position, even as he attempts to parlay his presence on the Pennacchio ticket (not to mention his impressive service record and willingness to thumb his nose at the establishment) with Webber into a show of GOP Primary strength. But if DeCroce (strategically strongly LD-26-footed in Parsippany) couldn't beat Webber, maybe she stands a shot at taking down the less established Bergen.

Although he might have embodied DeCroce's first choice of a target given their rocky political history, Webber appears safe while DeCroce and Bergen duke it out.

"Jay is publicly staying above everything. It's all positive pictures with kids and attacks on Phil Murphy," Snowflack explains. "Brian is saying BettyLou did nothing when she was in Trenton, and highlighting her job as an administrator in Dover, making the case that Democrats gave her a job. Of course, she was the town clerk in Roxbury."

She had experience prior to serving in elected office

Countering Bergen, the come-backing former assemblywoman is hitting business owner Bergen for taking a COVID loan from the county then giving it back.

It sounds dramatic, in a way that LD-14 doesn't.



KEEP AN EYE ON SPADEA



Talk to Democrats off the record.

They're terrified of Jack Ciattarelli, whom they regard as the favorite to win the 2025 governor's race. And yet, the GOP can't help but convince itself that Ciattarelli's three-point margin of defeat added up to failure.

Thus, the emergence of Bill Spadea, 101.5 FM's far-right schlock jock, who throws in as an Ocean County GOP Chairman George Gilmore/Bill Stepien-Trump-affiliated Republican statewide specter.

Spadea's been leapfrogging the state, attaching himself to candidacies in the Republican Primary, as a way of trying to runaway a 2025 statewide candidacy. Watch for him to make a statement in LD-4, and in LD-24, where he will hope to parlay his backing of Aikens and Sarnoski into political significance.

LD-24, in short, amounts to not simply a western NJ statement, as it does a glimpse into the fast-developing GOP Primary between proven general election commodity Ciattarelli, and Spadea, who hopes to carve a Trump-associative candidacy out of this GOP chaotic primary season.



LD-27, I MEAN LD-28



The death of Ronald L. Rice created a few minutes of political tachycardia in the ranks of Essex Democrats, before Irvington Democrats resolved the situation with the advancement of Renee Burgess.

If the quest for the LD-28 senate seat came down to who had superior literary prowess, Newark Mayor Ras Baraka would no doubt smoke the competition.

But politics being politics, Baraka's knowledge of Wordsworth proved meaningless in this county committee knife fight that Irvington Mayor Tony Vauss and his minions game faced on their way to ramming Burgess into the seat.

Redistricting and the subsequent retirement of Assemblywoman Mila Jasey of South Orange, created the barest beam of reelection drama here in the district long owned by the late and legendary Rice.

Essex Democratic Committee Chair Jones picked Garnet Hall to replace Jasey, on a ticket with Burgess and incumbent Assemblywoman Cleopatra Tucker.

So far, so good.

But former Maplewood Mayor Frank McGehee also craves the seat, and looked like a very serious contender each time he tried to give voters an al-

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ternative to Tucker – and Essex County Deputy Clerk Garnet Hall, also of Maplewood, the establishment’s choice for the seat.

SOMA Action supplied voters a debate forum among the contenders, a substantive forum that, given the power of the party line in these parts, might have made news only by the fact that in a virtually illiterate age, Hall quoted an actual literary figure in the form of T.S. Eliot.

Eliot once wrote:

“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.”



Forget for a moment the lack of political expediency in a quote by Eliot, Hall secured a Baraka level of literary largesse by invoking the brainchild of *The Wasteland*.

Still, McGehee refused to accept the role of LD-28 footnote.

“I was mayor in 2020, at the onset of the global pandemic,” he said, before lurching into an all-encompassing plank that included affordability, closing the wealth gap, stopping gun violence, and environmental sustainability, all while applauding First Lady Tammy Murphy.

Tucker tried to stare down the insurrection.

“When I first started. I won off the line,” she said. It was the equivalent of the late Queen Elizabeth II saying she won off the line.

Well, that’s a bit of an overstatement.

But not by much.

“It’s not a big issue, as far as I’m concerned,” said Tucker. “Being on the line is an asset in some cases, but I don’t think you should change anything right now.”

Hall took a crack at McGehee.

“I have been a candidate and worked on many leaders’ campaigns since 2005,” she said, countering his attempt to brand the line as little more than the instrumentation of power. “The line is just a group of people who believe in you. It’s ok for Frank to work on the line, but the third time he didn’t get the line and said three black women running are anointed.” McGehee refused to lose stride.

“The process,” he said, in refence to the Essex Democrats’ choice of Hall, “wasn’t democratic. It occurred among a small group of individuals.”

Impeccable McGehee impressed.

But this wasn’t about being impeccable.

And it wasn’t about impressing.

Irvington secured the senate candidacy of Burgess with superior organization, and superior organization primary prioritized around the advantage of Burgess all but assured the establishment advantage of Tucker and Hall.

McGehee could win all of Maplewood and South Orange and still lose, on the strength of Irvington and Newark.

“We have to understand,” an insider told InsiderNJ, “Newark doesn’t have to have a strong showing.”

Even Irvington can somewhat underperform (and it won’t, with Burgess on the top of the county party ticket).

McGehee, for all his integrity, insiders insist, can’t penetrate this machine.





CONCLUDING UNSCIENTIFIC POSTSCRIPT

(with Apologies to Kierkegaard)



Trying to ensnare Steve Oroho's senate seat in LD-24, Former Bogota Mayor Steve Lonegan has run for every office except dog catcher.

His 2009 gubernatorial loss to Chris Christie notwithstanding (yes, Lonegan's effort contained strains of nobility), the Bergen County diehard looks overmatched by Assemblyman Parker Space.

Only the owner of Space Farms Zoo and Museum has the rightward authority – along with his

affiliation to the late Stonewall Jackson, a groundhog at the zoo, to appropriately override movement conservative Lonegan's efforts to occupy badass territory in western, mountain man territory New Jersey.

Look for Spade to manhandle Lonegan over there.

Look, too, for state Senator Brian P. Stack (D-33), building on momentum secured in the May non-partisan election, to catapult himself within the political stratosphere of Hudson County, in the lead-up to the 2025 gubernatorial election. If sitting Governor Murphy occupies a mostly lame duck position here, others will continue to try to gain an edge with each successive election.

We've tried to cover most of the angles here.

Keep in mind that one election each season always defies the dimensions of anticipation.

What it might be this time?

To paraphrase T.S. Eliot (thank you, Garnet Hall), might we catch it on the flipside of June 6th, and know it for the first time...