

Environment is a key topic in Suffolk County executive race

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Republican Ed Romaine and Democrat Dave Calone are running for Suffolk County executive. Credit: James Escher

By The Editorial Board July 12, 2023

Along with inevitable talk of crime and taxes, the upcoming campaign for Suffolk County executive provides a unique opportunity to examine a vital issue for our future that is too often ignored in such contests — the environment.

Democrat Dave Calone and Republican Edward P. Romaine will be addressing several pressing concerns about climate change, water quality, sewers and septic systems, and a looming garbage crisis (among others) at a forum Monday at 6 p.m. at Stony Brook University.

Both candidates, in their own way, have shown a strong interest in environmental matters. Calone, 49, of East Setauket, is a private attorney and former state and federal prosecutor who has worked with environmental groups as previous chair of the Suffolk County Planning Commission.

Romaine, 76, of East Moriches, the Brookhaven Town supervisor and former county legislator, has been an innovative and practical leader in seeking solutions for environmental problems — from embracing offshore wind farms as a renewable form of energy to supporting homeowners impacted by 2012's Superstorm Sandy.

Voters this November should keep in mind that the next county executive — replacing term-limited Democrat Steve Bellone — will confront many pressing environmental issues including:

- **Garbage crisis.** The same county that gave the world the infamous wandering garbage barge in 1987 is facing a new solid waste crisis. With the imminent closure of the Brookhaven landfill, several towns that deposit incinerator ash there — including Huntington and Islip — will be looking for a replacement. Suffolk’s top leader should pave the way for a multi-town solution to this complex dilemma.
- **Water quality.** The decline in water quality in Suffolk affects everyone and is a major concern for public health. “Forever chemicals” — perfluorinated compounds that are human-made and can cause cancer and other illness — and other contaminants have been found in hundreds of wells in Suffolk.
- **Sewers.** Ever since the 1970s Southwest Sewer District scandal, this political hot potato has been avoided by many candidates. Even with recent progress, there is more to do on expanding sewer coverage and replacing old septic systems beneath homeowners’ lawns, and on reducing storm runoff on streets and pavement that pollutes nearby waterways.
- **Climate change.** Romaine says climate change is his number one environmental issue, and Calone underlines its importance as well. Throughout the county’s many shorelines and low-lying areas, homes and businesses face the prospect of devastating future hurricanes like Superstorm Sandy that caused millions in damages.

Monday’s forum with the two candidates is sponsored by Citizens Campaign for the Environment and the New York League of Conservation Voters Environmental Fund. Hopefully, Suffolk residents will get some answers and insights on what could be the most challenging issues they face.

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