

Smith says his varied career would be an asset

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Jeffrey Bessen/Herald

David Louis Boldt Smith, Democratic candidate for the County Legislature, discussed his campaign and his priorities for the 15th District.

David Louis Boldt Smith has had more careers than most political candidates can fit on a resume. He has been a pastor, a teacher, an educator, a nursing school administrator, a jail guard, a restaurant maître d', a bar owner and an actor. Now Smith wants to add Nassau County legislator to the list.

Smith, 66, is challenging Republican incumbent Kayla L. Knight for the 15th District seat.

Smith says his varied career has shaped the way he approaches government. As a young pastor in rural Kentucky, he said, he married and buried people and baptized members of his congregation. Later, as a jail guard, he worked with law enforcement and young inmates, and occasionally testified in court.

Smith also worked as a New York City Teaching Fellow, teaching third and fifth grades, earned a master's degree in education and eventually moved into school administration. He later became president of a nursing school. Those

experiences, he said, taught him to listen to people — something he emphasized repeatedly when discussing why he is running.

Smith's decision to enter politics grew out of his reaction to national political events, he said, including Donald Trump's 2015 presidential campaign and the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

The anger he felt, he said, pushed him to look for a way to get involved in government. After filling out an online form, he got a call asking whether he wanted to run for office. Local government, he said, seemed the natural fit. His campaign is focused heavily on affordability and government accountability.

Smith said he is particularly concerned about water costs for residents served by Liberty Utilities, or New York Water. Wantagh, Seaford and Levittown are among communities in Liberty's Merrick service area, and the state Public Service Commission is currently

overseeing a major rate proceeding involving the Utility. Smith said he would push for greater attention to the issue and potentially pursue legal action.

He also wants Nassau County to establish a 311 system for non-emergency calls. A proposal was introduced by Democratic legislators in February, with supporters saying it could reduce pressure on the county's 911 system.

Another priority for Smith is housing. With young families and working people increasingly struggling to afford to live in Nassau County, he argued that unused or underused property, including areas near railroad tracks, could host middle-income housing.

As well, Smith wants to expand access to preschool, saying that families shouldn't have to leave Nassau County because they can't afford child care.

On the topic of public safety, Smith said that keeping Nassau safe should remain a central responsibility of county

government. But he criticized the county's provisional deputy sheriff program, which critics have referred to as an "armed militia." The county says the program consists of provisional emergency special deputy sheriffs who can be activated during an emergency and otherwise have no police powers.

Smith said he would redirect resources toward traditional public-safety personnel.

Throughout an interview with the Herald, Smith repeatedly returned to one theme: constituent access. "I will hear you," he said, describing a legislator's job as listening more than speaking.

For Smith, his campaign is ultimately an attempt to bring an unconventional résumé and a promise of accessibility to a Legislature he said many residents know little about.