

RONNY DIZ VYING FOR ROCKLAND COUNTY'S 2nd LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

BY: Keith S Shikowitz

Ronny Diz a native of NYC who He joined the regular army right out of high school. Once he left the military he attended St. Johns University where he majored in 20th Century American and Western European History with a minor in government and politics is running on the Republican line for the Rockland County 2nd Legislative District seat being vacated by three term Legislator Michael Grant.

In college he went into the ROTC program and became a 2nd Lieutenant in the United States Army Reserve and stayed in the Army Reserve for thirty years and he retired in 2015.

“I saw four real world deployments. Twice to Iraq. Once to Bosnia and once to East Africa.” During these deployments he saw a lot of combat.

“I did serve twenty-seven years in the NYC PD. I was on patrol in Manhattan. I did that for fourteen years. Then I was very fortunate to be transferred to the Counter – Terrorism division of the NYPD. I was promoted to 3rd gGade Detective and I stayed there for 11 years. Then I went to my last year in the NYPD with the intelligence bureau.

So this means you’ve got a wide range of tools to bring with you to the job of a legislator.

“Yes sir. In that respect, police department, law enforcement operational capabilities. Working with a team, management, leadership, command experience. In Iraq I was a company commander on my first tour. On my second tour I was the equivalent of a battalion commander. I was a deputy commander of the Saladin Province reconstruction team working with the US State Department and other US government agencies.”

<https://youtu.be/62SdIyljhw0>

Let’s talk about the area. The County, the Town, your district. What do you feel is the top major issue that the residents in your district are facing?

“The biggest issue that I face and everyone is facing is the economy. I know that Rockland County is doing very well based on the overall economic situation of NYS. Rockland County is doing very well and I want to continue it. However, if any of the residents or business people have any better ideas to better the economy, I’m all ears and I will listen to them.” Diz stated.

You say if anybody has any better ideas, what are some ideas you have to help the economy. Let’s say taxes for instance. Help the economy and the tax base for people?

According to Diz, the tax base goes hand in hand with bringing more businesses into the area. “We need a larger tax base in the 2nd District and in Haverstraw overall. Haverstraw is a good town. We just need more business people to give us more of their experience and expertise. We need to bring in more businesses. As far as I’m concerned, more manufacturing businesses within the 2nd District.”

Bringing businesses into an area is great for the town. It gives a lot of tax dollars to the town in the form of property and other taxes. The question is, what will that do for the people and their tax base?

Diz said, “More tax base, better economic output. Lower unemployment. Put people to work and put food on their tables. Most likely it would stay the same and not increase it. Once this taxbase comes in, initially it will stay the same. Once they come in and start hiring people, I can see working with other elected officials bringing down the tax base for the people of Haverstraw.”

There are a lot of empty storefronts throughout the county in strip malls. The old Grand Union Shopping Center in Airmont, is a ghost town. Haverstraw is not immune from this problem. If you go up and down the town of Haverstraw, both up and down 9W and on 202 a lot of places you see empty stores in the strip malls. Yet you see them building new strip malls all over the place. What are your ideas to fill these stores with these empty space since we’re not getting any taxes out of any of that.

“Of course I realize that. We really have to look at this and work hand in hand with all the other elected officials in Haverstraw and the Rockland County Legislature to get a better handle on this and find out the reason why certain businesses closed down especially during COVID 19. How can we bring them back and get more people to work within along 9W?”

“How are we going to fill them up right now is a daunting task because people left and they took their businesses with them elsewhere. Either in Rockland County or in the surrounding counties. I’ll speak to members of the Rotary Club, get their advice and also with the Chamber of Commerce in Rockland County. They can be a tremendous help. I want to bring everyone into the ballgame as they say. I want to know what their expertise is. I want to know their opinions, just like within the military. Get everybody together and get better solutions. I know we can do a lot better. We’ve done it before. This is a good town. It has a very good history on economic output, and I want to continue that.” Diz explained.

<https://youtu.be/gdy-TM5jo8o>

These days, working across party lines has not been an easy thing to accomplish. The political differences, at least on the state and national level, are so vast that working together is not something they seem to want to do. Does Diz feel he’ll be able to work with the Haverstraw town government and the village governments, being that vast that no one seems to want you are on opposite sides of the political spectrum?

“I’ll work with them. I don’t think it’s going to be any problems whatsoever. We live in the same town. We go to the same schools. We’re practically neighbors to each other. There’s no ill feeling towards anyone regardless of their political background and political affiliation. We live in the same town, pay the same taxes. I can work with anybody. I did it in Iraq. Come on. A year and a half. I can work anywhere, with anybody.”

Having a well educated and informed electorate is a very important thing to the success of our Republic. When it comes to educating the young of the district, the school board has basic control over what happens in the schools. What do you see as the job of the educators in the North Rockland School District?

“First let me say that North Rockland has some outstanding schools and very good teachers. They always had outstanding schools and very good teachers and let’s continue it. Getting more to the nitty gritty. Let’s concentrate more on the sciences, mathematics, computer skills, even classes on artificial intelligence which is going to be a big indicator going forward throughout the rest of the decade. I would like to also bring more history in, government, economics, basic economics back into the school system. We can go from there and it will definitely help the students out when they graduate and go into the business world or the military or into business for themselves. We need to find out what exactly is out there as per the business opportunities and gear our education towards starting a career once you graduate.”

Science, math, computers, history. What about extra curricula stuff, like ROTC which North Rockland has. What other types of extra activities that might be educational and even fun you can talk to the school board about. Do you have any ideas to help the students to have a little bit of a broader view of things?

Diz's broader view of education is that education should not only be done in the classroom but by having more school trips throughout the area. One place he feels that students would get the lower Hudson Valley area to look at the construction projects. Look at the parks, work with the county government to see how the entire county runs.

“Hopefully tailor their experience with the county and these field trips in order to broaden their horizons to see what business opportunities are out there. I would also like to bring in more internships within local businesses and even government for students to go into for after school activities. ROTC is great. I went through ROTC. Let's bring more internships into the county and have more students taking up the ideas of big business and industry. Maybe even help out in social work. That's why I say we can do a lot better and continue on the success of the North Rockland School District.”

There are a lot of different organizations in the county and people are involved in a lot of different things. You said you've been involved in the military. Diz is involved in many different organizations in the community. These include being a member of the Rockland County planning board for a number of years now, the American Legion here in Haverstraw. the VFW, Disabled American Veterans of the United States.

“I'm also a member of the Elks Club in Haverstraw. The Knights of Columbus in Haverstraw. I'm also a member of the 1013 association of retired and active NYPD police officers. Rockland County Shields and FOP lodge 188 also within the Lower Hudson Valley Region.”

There are only twenty – four hours in a day and with all of this activity when does Diz find time to sleep? He responded, “Whenever I can.”

ME: How is being a member of all of these affiliations going to help him as a legislator, to understand the problems in the community to help fix whatever problems there are?

Diz explained, “Since I know a lot of these people in these organizations, especially working with the county government, I plan to work with everyone of these entities to help better our community. My American Legion Post commander is the commander all of Rockland County American Legion. I know him personally and I've worked with him on many post projects. Being a member of the Rockland County Planning Board, I know the issues that face many of the communities within Rockland County. Obviously, when I get elected, I'll have to step down from many of these organizations based on responsibilities. But as we go forward, I plan to work with ALL of Rockland County government, all of the Haverstraw government and Pomona government to better ourselves within our region. Especially District number 2 of the County legislature.”

<https://youtu.be/586DocinKJU>

Over the summer we had major rain in which the area from Exit 15 on the Palisades Pkwy North was flooded and basically turned into a lake. To the point where you had the Palisades Pkwy closed for a few days and there's an entrance off of Rte. 210, an extra entrance by Exit 15 that's still closed. The Bear Mountain Bridge suffered damage. Bear Mountain State Park was closed for the better part of a month. What would you do to help with the infrastructure? What infrastructure do you think needs to be dealt with plus what we have to do there?

“Well as we know Rockland County has major road arteries. Part of the New York State Thruway, Palisades Parkway and Route 9W just to name a few. All of these highways pass underneath or on top of bridges. Let’s take what happened to the Bear Mountain Bridge in the last storm. It did suffer damage. It was opened back up again by the state.

His idea on how to prevent these things from happening again or at least minimizing any damage that might happen is to take the mitigating studies conducted by the counties and the state government on how to strengthen the infrastructure of our buildings, bridges and even railways to better withstand the effects of a rain storm and the effects of a typhoon that hit New York City years ago and the Lower Hudson Valley.

“Those studies are out there. They’re available from the state and federal governments. We need to work with all these entities to get all these mitigating studies in our hands. Look at them. Get the experts and see what we can do better to harden these structures to better withstand mother nature’s wrath upon us within the county. I also want to bring up the fact that Bear Mountain Park is still closed for good reasons (As of this interview in August). A lot of damage. We’re going to work with the state, Rockland County and Orange County and the towns of Fort Montgomery and Highland Falls, to get together to see what we can do to mitigate the effects of these snowstorms and rainstorms that we have within the counties to better protect the infrastructure of North Rockland.”

During his campaigning, Diz has been going around the area talking to people not just in his district but all over the county. What effect has the closing of Bear Mountain had on people?

He replied, “People, including myself, have had friends and relatives coming into the region and one of the main topics of their visits is that they want to go to Bear Mountain. Obviously, they can’t go to Bear Mountain and local eateries cannot make business because everybody wants to get something to eat. Once Bear Mountain is opened up they can come back, enjoy the view, enjoy the historical perspectives of the area and really just better the economy with their spending in the area.”

Putting aside the recent storm, the roads in many areas of the Northeast are not always in the best of shape. Let’s look at the roads in general Let’s look at 9W in Haverstraw and 202 in Pomona and 9W into Stony Point. How do you feel the roads are there and how much work needs to be done on those roads?

“Like I said before I want to bring civil engineers into this and work with them. Obviously, I’m not a civil engineer. I highly take their professionalism and hold it in high regard. I’ve worked with civil engineers overseas. One of my former commanders was a civil engineer. Being part of civil affairs which I was when I finished up my military career, we had civil engineers assigned to our unit. As to the road system, I would like to say we have a very good road system here in Northern Rockland County. However, we’re still subject to the effects of major snowstorms and rainstorms in the area and that’s where the mitigating studies must come forth in order to prepare our infrastructure to take these sledgehammer assaults on us. As to the road system, we have a good road system. Let’s improve on it. We have good people working on our road system. We have good bosses and I want to work with them. I just want to get their expertise on how to go forward.”

<https://youtu.be/yt4NYvr-oSc>

We have a situation that there are a number of buildings like I said earlier about businesses that are empty, but buildings that shouldn’t be up anymore. What do you plan to do about that? They’re eyesores in places. Buildings that have suffered fire damage, buildings that are vandalized, evacuated, neglected, people just leaving them and letting them fall to pieces. It basically comes down to the quality of life on that part of the infrastructure. How will you work with the people that own those properties to fix them up or at least do something with them?

“First of all I’m going to have the landlords of the properties held responsible for this. They have the ownership. They have the leases for these properties. They’re eyesores and face the facts, they’re dangerous, very dangerous., Rockland County does have an enforcer of codes. A very good guy. I’m going to speak to him. I’ve spoken with him before on a couple of issues. I’m going to get him up here and his team and enforce the codes. They’re very active and they’re very good. So, that’s one aspect.”

He plans on talking to the landlords and make them see that what they’re doing is ridiculous. “It’s not just an eyesore. It’s a danger. I know there’s codes and county ordinances which prohibit this act and frankly it’s criminal. I’m going to hold them and let them know they can be charged and locked up if need be. That’s the way it’s going to be. I also want to work with even the state to come down here and look at these abandoned buildings because if there’s any law out there that can legally seize property, let’s do it. Take the property away from the landlords, the property managers whoever they are for their neglect. You take them away. If we’re going to bulldoze them, we’ll do it. We’ll bulldoze them down. If they lose money, so what, that’s what they get. We’ve had enough!” Diz exclaimed.

On television shows, all the time you see kids going into these haunted houses, abandoned buildings. Do you see that as a problem?

“I see that as a problem. I hear it too. I hear it from friends of mine who are in police departments. They see it when they drive around the area. They see kids going into these buildings. The landlords, if the property is owned by the city, let’s talk to the town leadership and see what we can do to board them up or more police patrols in the area. If these kids are found, just let the parents know what’s going on. That’s the way to stop this before somebody gets hurt, crippled, blind. It’s got to stop.”

One of the issues in education is parental rights. This is a hot bed issue in the Federal and State levels. On the Federal level they are trying to label parents who debate or argue against school board policies as domestic terrorists. How do you feel on the idea of parental rights and what do you feel we have to have for our students to succeed?

Diz believes we should have what is actually needed to become a successful adult when you go on through graduation. Whether it’s computers, artificial intelligence, math, history, or economics. Parental rights has always been in the forefront of what he believes is to be a better educated individual in the United States of America. Not just in Rockland but throughout the whole country.

“I believe parents should have more say in what their children are taught and what they are spoken to about by the teachers in the classroom. Parents need to be involved, see the curriculum, and see more parent teacher meetings throughout the school year. I believe we should have a top-class education system. We have a very good education system here in North Rockland County and in Haverstraw. We can do a lot better. I want to work with the educators and administrators to make that happen.”

<https://youtu.be/3qKBWnDV8hI>

“We also need programs that enforce, not go against family values and morals that are taught by their overall education by their parents back into the school system which makes out for a better rounded out American citizen as they go forward into the workforce or wherever they’d like to go after they graduate high school. Bringing back ethics and teaching ethics in school and the value of the family is paramount to a great education in high school.”

The foundation of any society is the nuclear family this is where children learn the ideas of right and wrong, general morals and their basic religious beliefs. What does Diz feel about this?

“I agree with that. I wholeheartedly agree with that. It’s all around us. There’s families all around us. Nuclear families are all around us. I’m part of a nuclear family. It is the life function of a well society. It brings ultimate value to Western Civilization which we live in. It’s a continuation of it. We’re not going to degrade it. We’re not going to make fun of it. We’re not going to step on it and we’re not going to kick it when it’s down. I don’t believe it is down. I know there’s people who want to destroy it to damn bad for them. It’s not. We should go ahead and have more parents involved in this and like I said, don’t denigrate our values. It’s not going to get you anywhere.”

<https://youtu.be/-hrJOeB4uR4>

We’ve spoken about a number of issues that affect the district you are running to represent. Do you feel that not running against an incumbent levels the playing field for you and your opponent?

“I believe that this gives the voters the opportunity to see two different candidates from the get go. We’ve never held office before. I’ve never held office before. It’s going to be a quite interesting election actually to see both sides from a fresh perspective.”

Add in the fact that his opponent doesn’t have the power that an incumbent has which is what they call the power of the incumbency. Working with two people for an open spot, there’s no power of the incumbency for him to fight against. Having said that, you’re both starting from scratch, with no power of the incumbency, why should people vote for you over your opponent. You two are on the same level here. No governmental elected governmental experience. What sets you apart from him based on that.

“I have worked for the Rockland County Planning Board and it has really impacted ALL of Rockland County. I have spoken with people who have actually done governmental service here in Rockland County and it doesn’t matter what their political background is. We share opinions on how to make this county better. Like I said, I have been involved in the Elks Club here in Haverstraw. The Knights of Columbus. The Rotary Club. I belong to three veterans organizations within Rockland County. Four police organizations within Rockland. I’m still a union member with the Detective’s Endowment Association. I listen to both the workers’ side of the house, me, management side of the house as well. I’m not going to exclude anybody. I’m going to work hand in hand with people which I have done many times over, both in the police and the military and I had to work with fellow students when I was going for my master’s degree. It’s getting to know people. Knowing the area. Getting out and walking the area, which I’ve done. November 7 is coming up and let’s just keep moving forward with this. Like I said, I plan to keep working with everybody. I’m going to be a team member and help anybody out. I do have leadership and command structure in my background as well.

Having military leadership is one thing because there the people under you have to listen or face disciplinary action. How do you feel your leadership experience will help you here?

“My take on leadership is that it is a 24 hour a day job. You may think you’re at a park just taking it easy but your mind’s racing to get things done. You’re also thinking about the people who are working for you as well. It’s always been a challenge to be a leader, whether it’s back here stateside or a veteran’s organization. I was a former commander of the American Legion Post in New York City or over in Afghanistan or East Africa. I have worked with people. My last assignment in the military was being assigned to the US Embassy in Ethiopia that was nine months. I’m working with various US government organizations different peoples and I’m working with the Ethiopian government and the town officials of Addis Ababa. Which is the Ethiopian capital.

That’s a lot. With all that experience, how do you boil that down to here?

“It’s quite simple. That experience working with people, organizations, management and the administrative side of the house and also the leadership side of the house. It stays inside of you. You’re part of it. That’s what I’ve got to bring here to the 2nd legislative district here in Haverstraw. It’s not just Haverstraw. The district also covers Garnerville, Thiells, Mount Ivy and also Pomona. Everyone knows the district is going to be impacted by what we bring to the plate and county government. Those people cannot be excluded no matter what their background is and no matter what their political ideology is or their experience. They’re well-traveled. If they speak a foreign language, fantastic. More the better. That’s what I bring into it. That’s what I want to continue. It’s a continuation of service. It’s not just me. It’s a continuation of service. I want to still serve the United States of America. I want to raise my hand and say “So help me God to the United States Constitution.”

<https://youtu.be/moLCraFIRtY>