

# Ulster County Legislature: Three-way race for District 2 in Saugerties

by [Jesse J. Smith/October 22, 2019/1 comment](#)

The race for the [Ulster County Legislature's second district](#) features three candidates vying to replace outgoing incumbent Joe Maloney. First time candidate Al Bruno will appear on the Republican and Conservative party lines. Current Town Board member John Schoonmaker will run on the Democratic Party line while former county lawmaker Chris Allen holds the Working Families and Independence party lines as well as his self-created "Nonpartisan party."



**Al Bruno**, 58 is an HVAC technician at Vassar Brother's Medical Center and a former instructor at Ulster BOCES. He currently serves as Chairman of Saugerties' Board of Assessment Review and ethics commission. He also serves on the town's transportation council and previously sat on the Climate Action Committee that helped Saugerties become just the second community in Ulster County earn recognition through the state's "Climate Smart Communities" program.

"I've got a lot of experience in how our local government is working," said Bruno of his decision to seek elected office. "And how it's not working."

Bruno said that he planned to take a pragmatic, bipartisan approach to issues like addressing the opioid crisis and ending the county's reliance on fossil fuels in a "Business friendly" way. Bruno added that he wanted to improve transparency in the legislative process and make it easier for county residents to understand what their lawmakers are doing.

"If [Legislation] stands on its own merits, then I'm for it no matter who proposed it," said Bruno. "And if it doesn't stand on its own merits I'm against it, no matter which party proposed it."

Bruno said that he also wanted to use his experience on the town ethics board to tighten up the county's ethics guidelines. Bruno pointed to the example of Maloney, who was sanctioned by the ethics board for voting on matters impacting the County Comptroller's office where his wife is employed. Bruno said that the ethics law needs clearer guidelines.

"There should not have been any ambiguity there," said Bruno. "Anytime you have a loophole, somebody will try to walk through it."



**John Schoonmaker**, 28, is one of a wave of young people who got involved in politics in 2016, first as a supporter of Senator Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign and later as a field organizer for congressional candidate Zephyr Teachout. Schoonmaker said that he emerged from the twin defeats of the 2016 campaign season with a determination to focus his efforts on local issues.

"I came to the realization that politics is not just about congress or the presidency," said Schoonmaker. "A lot of what happens, happens on the local level."

In 2017 Schoonmaker was elected to a four year term on the Saugerties Town Board. There, he worked on the town's climate smart certification and a partnership with RUPCO to provide no-interest loans to low income families for home repair. Schoonmaker said that his time on the Town Board also taught him patience and an appreciation for the nuances of the legislative process.

"You learn to work with different groups of people and that not everyone is going to agree with you on every issue," said Schoonmaker who works in animal care at Taconic Bioscience.

On the county level, Schoonmaker said he supports what he called "Trickle up legislation," forward thinking, innovative initiatives with the potential to spread to the state level and beyond. Schoonmaker said that he supports a countywide ban on new fossil fuel projects and an evidence based approach to dealing with the opioid crisis. Schoonmaker said that he would also seek a more well thought out county-level response to the issue of invasive species and would focus on diversifying the county's economy beyond the tourism sector.

"If you look at the history, tourism comes and goes in this area," said Schoonmaker. "We need to take a proactive approach and prepare for the worst."



**Chris Allen** held the district 2 seat for two terms from 2014 to 2018 before he was defeated by Maloney. The 51-year-old is a full time caregiver and does occasional work as a political consultant. Allen said that he's running on his record as a county lawmaker where he worked on complex issues like relocating the county's family court, renegotiating a sales tax sharing agreement and developing a Lyme Disease awareness policy.

"I'm the only candidate who has any kind of experience on this level," said Allen. "I'm the only candidate who has worked on a budget on this level."

If elected, Allen said, he would draw on his own experience caring for his aging parents to improve county-based services for seniors. Allen said that he would seek to add staff to the Ulster County Office for the Aging to help

seniors navigate health insurance claims. Allen said that he would also lobby New York City's Department of Environmental Protection to do more to combat invasive species which he said originate at the Ashokan reservoir and spread via the Esopus creek. Allen added that he wanted to work with the county's new economic development office and private developers to identify tracts of land close to major commuter routes that could be suitable for new housing. Allen also suggested creating network of alternative practitioners to treat opioid dependence with yoga and meditation rather than relying solely on medically assisted therapy like methadone and Suboxone.

"Otherwise, you're just replacing one highly addictive dangerous substance like heroin or pills with another highly addictive substance like methadone or Suboxone."