

November 2020
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Town Hall Meetings: 22nd Congressional District Candidates Anthony Brindisi and Claudia Tenney

by Hailie Addison
Action Team Promotions intern

The Institute for Civic Engagement organized four election-related events between October 5 and November 2 for students and faculty.

Two were Town Halls with candidates for New York’s 22nd Congressional District.

In the days leading up to the general election, members of the SUNY Cortland student body had the chance to talk with Congressman Anthony Brindisi and his opponent, former Congresswoman Claudia Tenney.

On Tuesday, Oct. 27, students gathered virtually to ask Brindisi, a Democrat who is currently serving his first term in Congress, questions regarding his plans if reelected.

Born and raised in Utica, Brindisi began his public service career as a member of the city’s school board. Then, in 2012, he was elected to the state legislature, where he served in the assembly for six years.

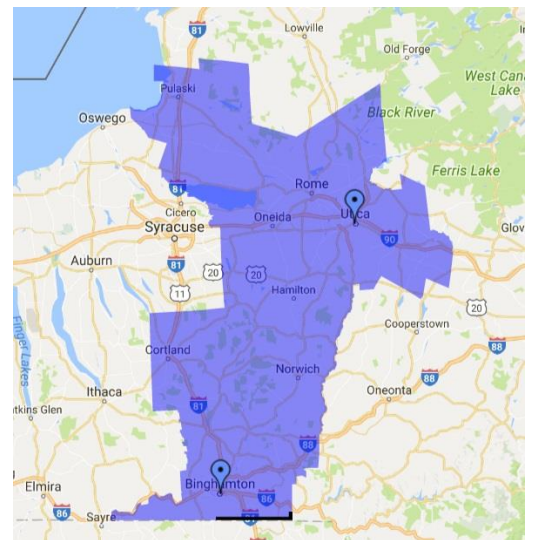
After the 2016 election, Brindisi decided to run for U.S. Congress. In 2018, he went on to defeat one-term incumbent Claudia Tenney to represent New York’s 22nd Congressional district, which encompasses Cortland and the central region of the state.



“I decided to run for Congress because like many of you I’ve become pretty disillusioned with politics over the years,” he said. “You see the same issues every couple years being talked about, not much progress being made on these big issues.”

During his first term in office, Brindisi introduced the Veteran Suicide Prevention Act and the Support Procurement of our Nation’s Stainless Steel (SPOONS) Act, both of which were passed and signed into law. The SPOONS Act, which requires the military to buy American-made eating utensils, offered an economic boost to Brindisi’s district.

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The NY 22nd Congressional District meanders more than 125 miles along Route 81 from Sandy Creek southward to Conklin.

Town Hall Meetings, continued from page 1

“The SPOONS Act created thousands of jobs in our area, which is very important for us college students who are soon to be college graduates looking for work,” added Gavin Teeter, Coordinator of SUNY Cortland students for Brindisi.

Participants raised many questions during the hour-long discussion on topics including climate change, anti-racism, United States Supreme Court reform, green infrastructure, policing, and minimum wage.

“Brindisi has followed through with many of his promises including visiting one county each month to make sure he stays in touch with his constituents, and he updates us on the progress he has made while fighting for us in Washington,” Teeter added.

On November 2nd, students had the chance to learn about Claudia Tenney and her platform.

A former Republican member of U.S. Congress and the New York State Assembly, Tenney is running to reclaim her seat lost to Brindisi in 2018.

A former attorney and publisher, Tenney began her political career in 2011, when she was elected as the first woman to represent the 101st Assembly District.

She ran for Congress twice during her six-year term with the assembly, and in 2016, won the seat she is now bidding for.

During the discussion, Tenney spoke on various topics including national defense, rebuilding the economy, supporting small businesses, the Education Freedom Scholarships and Opportunity Act, and charter schools.

Answering a student’s question about support for charter schools, she praised the quality of New York State’s public education system, including its colleges.

She supports charter schools, but does not want money siphoned from public schools to fund charter schools.

Tenney shared her connection to dairy farming to convey her support for local farmers.

“Since my family is dairy farmers I’m really concerned about the loss of family farms—it is one of the biggest industries in our district right now,” she said.

“Our farmers produce food not just for our region but across the northeast, especially into New York City.”

She emphasized her support of rolling back “unnecessary regulations” to help the area’s farmers and small businesses.

“We did a great job beforehand giving 95% of this district a tax cut including the middle class,” she added.

“That was good—rolling back unnecessary regulations which is something I support, especially when dealing with small businesses and our family farms who are very much regulated and don’t compete effectively with other states.

When it comes to taxes and regulations we need to be reasonable and understand that this district is very unique to a large city district.”

Both discussions generated productive conversation among students and, overall, provided the opportunity to learn more about each candidate before heading to the polls on Election Day.

Immediately after the Town Hall ended, Claudia Tenney went to a meeting at which she would provide legal assistance to help save 600 jobs at the Remington factory in Ilion, NY.

Students Discussed the Vice Presidential Debate

by Hailie Addison

the Vice-Presidential Debate's issues of climate change, COVID-19, democracy, and appointing a new Supreme Court Justice sparked conversation among SUNY Cortland.

The virtual discussion on October 8 welcomed different perspectives from participants.

The event was hosted by Cortland Votes, a project established in 2017 that has since become part of the Institute for Civic Engagement's Action Team. The project aims to increase student's voter education and participation in voting.

To begin the discussion, the moderator, David Runge, an academic advisor at SUNY Cortland and member of the Cortland Votes committee, asked participants to summarize the debate in one word. The participants all agreed on the word "civil."

"We have lost the ability to civilly discuss different points of view in our country," said Dristin Hughes, a student at SUNY Cortland. "So it was really nice to see civil discourse from both sides last night."

The discussion then turned to which issues were most important to participants, and how the candidates covered those issues.

Hughes prompted more conversation when he brought up climate change being an important topic of the debate.

"The global warming back and forth was a big part and I don't think a lot of people learned anything from it or got one thing out of it," said Hughes. "It stands to be a confusing topic."

"I think Pence did a good job of clarifying that the administration believes in climate change and different policy views," responded George Brown, president of the Republican Club and member of Cortland Votes. "I thought this was very respectful and mature of him."



"A lot of conservatives in office do not necessarily outwardly state they believe in climate change," Daniel Reischer, a student at SUNY Cortland and vice president of the Young Democrats, replied. "I'm glad Pence did say something, I just don't think it was accurate. They run the government, they have access to the scientists that say there is manmade climate change."

For Kira Graves, a fellow student, the COVID crisis and its challenges was of note.

"What we've had to do to adapt to it in the past and what we're going to be doing moving forward was taken responsibly by Kamala Harris," she said.

A main topic of the debate that was brought up in the discussion was the controversy surrounding President Trump's decision to nominate a new U.S. Supreme Court Justice before the election.

"Pence asked Kamala if she would pack the courts and Kamala dodged the question," said Hughes. "That was huge."

"I think by not answering she helped the campaign more because if she answered it in a way such as, 'yes we are going to pack the courts,' that would've motivated the left – but if she said 'no we're not' that would've dissuaded the left," Reischer countered.

Following this, Reischer continued the discussion by asking what values do we hold in our society and how democracy promotes these values.

Vice Presidential Debate Discussion, *continued from page 3*

“We don’t know if actual true democracy is being upheld right now,” answered Brown. “I’m questioning the validity of the election. We honestly don’t know what’s going on with the election because there are so many ballots that are wrong, in swing states, and so many votes that are ending up in ditches.”

With the discussion coming to an end, Runge, the moderator, posed the question of what the participants hoped to see in the two upcoming presidential debates (which, at the time of this discussion, were still scheduled).

“In the first presidential debate I saw more emotional responses than factual responses,” said Hughes. “I hope to see both Trump and Biden reflect on more numbers and statistics.”

“If you actually listen to what Pence is saying versus what Trump is saying, all of their points align but Pence knows a way to say it to the public without actually being slanderous,” Becca Ann, a participant of the discussion, replied.

“He knows to communicate by getting a response from his party and the other party, whereas Trump acts on emotion.”

Many participants hoped that the upcoming presidential debates would be mature and held to a higher standard.

“I hope the next presidential debate brings more maturity, prosperity, and more of an aspect of what we should see out of two candidates who want to be the next U.S. President,” added Hughes. “I think they both want to be, but we need to see another level of good-will in the way they approach it and the way they speak to each other.”

“They both need to be held to the same standard and we need to hold them to a standard of someone who is going to lead our country,” Ann agreed.

Cortland Votes will sponsor Voter Education events throughout the 2020-2021 academic year. To participate or for more information, contact John Suarez at john.suarez@cortland.edu.

Virtual PAWS for Stress Relief

For SUNY Cortland students, petting dogs belonging to faculty and staff members during the first two days of final exams in Corey Union has become a well-known and anticipated event to help relieve stress.

To continue this campus tradition during the pandemic, Action Team interns Jessica Falco and Chloe Mango teamed up with the PAWS for Stress Relief Committee and Memorial Library to reimagine PAWS for Stress Relief.

During the virtual “event,” students can submit a photo and name of their pet, along with a short bio, to the Instagram page, [@cortlandpaws](https://www.instagram.com/cortlandpaws) or email Health.promotion@cortland.edu.

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The poster features a large black paw print graphic with the text "VIRTUAL PAWS FOR STRESS RELIEF" inside it. To the left is a photo of a dog's face. Below the paw print, there is a contest announcement: "A CONTEST! SEND US YOUR PETS FOR A CHANCE TO WIN A 30-MINUTE MASSAGE WITH RECREATIONAL SPORTS CERTIFIED MESSAGE THERAPIST, HANNAH POLANKO-BAKER! **ALL PETS ARE WELCOME!** TO ENTER, SEND @CORTLANDPAWS: • A PHOTO AND THE NAME OF YOUR PET • A SHORT BIO ABOUT YOUR PET WINNER WILL BE RANDOMLY SELECTED ENTER BY DECEMBER 4TH". At the bottom, it says "BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE MEMORIAL LIBRARY, INSTITUTE FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND PAWS FOR STRESS RELIEF COMMITTEE".

“Our Vote Counts, Too:” A Moving and Powerful Discussion Panel

by Hailie Addison

The disenfranchisement and voter suppression faced by African-Americans was the topic of discussion on October 5, as members of the SUNY Cortland community gathered to discuss the importance of fair and equitable voting.

A virtual event that featured multiple panelists, “Our Vote Counts, Too,” was a part of a broader effort to pique student engagement in democracy as the election was approaching.

“As citizens of this country we have the inalienable right to vote,” said Simmelkjaer. “But as we know, not every citizen has had access to voting because of the barriers, disenfranchisement, voter suppression.”

The conversation also highlighted voter suppression efforts in states such as Texas, where officials have recently closed most polling sites in predominantly Black and Latinx communities. When speaking about

“There’s something very powerful about seeing people come together because of injustice.”

The event was hosted by Shaneya Simmelkjaer, a senior at SUNY Cortland who is both a Newman Civic Fellow and an intern with Cortland Votes. Also a discussion panelist, Simmelkjaer has devoted her academic career to anti-racist efforts and currently serves as president of SUNY Cortland’s Black Student Union.

“Given the current socio-political climate of the United States, it is essential to examine how racism manifests in various forms and institutions, including through our voting system,” Simmelkjaer noted in a preview of the event.

The other panelists were Dr. Erik Bitterbaum, the President of SUNY Cortland; Melisa Kiser, one of the lead coordinators for Black Lives Matter Cortland; Dr. Mecke Nagel, a SUNY Cortland professor in Philosophy, Africana Studies, Gender, and Intercultural Studies, and Dr. Seth Asumah, a SUNY Cortland professor of Political Science and Chairperson of the Africana Studies Department.

The discussion began with a presentation about the disenfranchisement and voter suppression that African-Americans have historically faced and continue to face in this country.

this issue, President Bitterbaum mentioned the story of a man who would have to travel nearly three hours roundtrip simply to reach a polling location.

“What I find most sad about the Texas situation is that they’re trying to only have one polling place in every single county,”

He added, “the state of Texas is making it very difficult. You can see who is going to be most affected. If you have to use public transportation or you can’t get there, it’s a terrible situation.”

John Suarez, director of SUNY Cortland’s Institute for Civic Engagement, who moderated the event, also questioned if the Fifteenth Amendment truly gives every citizen the right to vote, especially given the ways African-Americans have been historically suppressed by methods such as terror, violence, poll taxes, literacy tests.

Dr. Nagel echoed this point, saying that “Congress can make laws to enforce these amendments and what we learned, of course, is that states somehow forgot to

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“Our Vote Counts, Too:” continued from page 5

enforce these laws, they give sanctions to white supremacists who terrorized Black folks.”

She added, “So it was very much what I call ‘an outlaw culture’ that sustains its momentum to date when we look at voter suppression.”

The discussion then turned to the question of what role disenfranchisement and voter suppression plays in reinforcing the prevailing systems of institutional racism that have historically oppressed African-Americans.

“Voting should be fair, but because it is not, the most democratic country in the world is pretty undemocratic when it comes to voting,” said Dr. Asumah. “They want you to vote but will not allow you to play in politics.”

The panelists also brought up how the voting process is very difficult to understand and it is something that the education system has failed to teach us.

Kiser noticed that this year, Black people have been more interested in voting than years before. However, the problem becomes the lack of voter education that has been taught to citizens.

A SUNY Cortland student added to the discussion by sharing her own challenges with voting.

“As a Black youth just not knowing about voting, it wasn’t until this year that I really wanted to get into it,” she said.

“I learned, the day I went to go vote in the primaries, that because I wasn’t under the Republican or Democratic party, I couldn’t vote technically for people in my district.

And now I can’t even participate when I really wanted to because of a loophole they don’t tell you about until the day before.”

Overall, the two-hour virtual event stirred meaningful conversation and fostered an sense of connection for those in attendance.

“There’s something very powerful about feeling a combined community’s pain that reaches everyone from the youngest members of society to the oldest members of the society,” Kiser said, adding that “there’s something very powerful about seeing people come together because of injustice.”

*Virtual PAWS for Stress Relief
continued from page 4*

Pets will be showcased on the account and one pet owner – a student – will be randomly selected to win a 30-minute massage from The Student Life Center.

Submissions are open to all students’, faculty members’ and staff members’ pets, whether furry, finned, feathered, or flaked (scaled).

Submissions should be sent by December 4

The real winners will be the students, faculty, and staff who get to meet a menagerie of mutts, mews, and maybe newts!

The Virtual PAWS for Stress Relief is sponsored by the PAWS for Stress Relief Committee, by Memorial Library, and by the Institute for Civic Engagement.

The group’s members are Marie Blanden, Meredith Chase, Connor Cumisky, Jessica Falco, Andrea Hart, Jennifer Kronenbitter, Chloe Mango, Katrina Marshall, Eve Mascoli, Christina Matthews, Jenifer Phelan, Amy Russell, Lauren Scagnelli, and John Suarez.

Building Resilience in the Cortland Community

by Hailie Addison

On October 13, students and members of the greater Cortland community gathered virtually to learn about the causes and effects of a major problem, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's) – trauma.

The event, *Introduction to Resilience: The Biology of Stress & the Science of Hope in Adverse Childhood Experiences*, was hosted by the Cortland County Community Action Program (CAPCO).

The two-hour long event kicked off with the showing of the film, "Resilience," which described childhood traumas and their effects.

Following the film, Glennon moderated a discussion that highlighted key points of the film.

These points included memory's role in processing experiences, the importance of resilience, and ways in which adults can help children overcome trauma, by, for example, asking *what happened* to them, rather than what's wrong with them.

Glennon also sponsored the October 20th follow-up event at which Karen Dudgeon, LCSW, explained the effects of ACE's on children's development, even at the neurological level.

She shared statistics that showed the resulting physical and emotional harm that ACE's can cause children as children become adults.

Action Team interns Jessica Falco, Chloe Mango, and Jade O'Reilly began partnering with Glennon during summer 2020, helping, for example, to create promotional messages.

To find more helpful information on building resilience and CAPCO, visit www.capco.org.

Glennon ended the event by adding, "Hopefully this is something you can take back to your community and make your community a better place."

Sophia's Garden: A New Approach to Teaching

by Hailie Addison

In 2016, SUNY Cortland welcomed a new program of teaching that allows students to gain knowledge and to experience teaching local children philosophy and critical thinking through the examination and discussion of picture books.

The unique and effective program, Sophia's Garden, is offered through SUNY Cortland's Philosophy Department.

Throughout the semester, students travel to various Cortland locations such as the public library, the YWCA, GEMS (Girls: Empowered, Motivated, Successful), and elementary and alternative schools to engage with children.



Pre-COVID Sophia's Garden outing.

"When we look at children's books, many of them have deeply hidden philosophical meanings," said Dr. Mecke Nagel, the coordinator of Sophia's Garden and Philosophy professor at SUNY Cortland.

"It's up to our college students to find these meanings and ask philosophical questions to the children."

Sophia's Garden aims to eliminate the self-censorship that is taught by traditional schooling and instead encourage the open-ended exploration of education as a liberatory practice.

Sophia's Garden *continued from page 7*

Contact Information

John Suarez, Director
(607) 753-4391 or
John.Suarez@cortland.edu

Laura Dunbar,
Assistant Director
(607) 753-2481
Laura.dunbar@cortland.edu

Cynthia Guy, Community
Outreach Coordinator
(607) 753-2481 or
Cynthia.Guy@cortland.edu

Hailie Addison
Action Team Promotions
Intern

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"Philosophizing is an innate trait in children," said Dr. Nagel. "They're genius level at age 6 and have incredible, creative, and divergent thinking skills. [Yet] the more schooling they get, the more silent they become."

Dr. Nagel offers several courses at SUNY Cortland with the low stress requirement of participating in Sophia's Garden.

Once a week for a half an hour, three or four college students meet with children at their chosen location. One student reads, one is asking the questions, and one is looking at the guiding questions to keep the group focused.

"What is amazing to college students is that the little students have very quick answers to everything, all issues of life," Dr. Nagel added.

"The point is here that the teaching is in reverse. We might ask open ended questions but all the wisdom is coming from the children."

The program offers credits to college students, but also allows for students to demonstrate responsibility, professionalism, and gain great experience.

Although there are many benefits of the program, Dr. Nagel noted college students' mental health tends to improve by being around children and creating a precious bond.

"It's a very beautiful partnership and it works very well for everyone involved," she added.

The philosophy department chair, Dr. Andrew Fitz-Gibbon, and Dr. Nagel are in the works of proposing a 4+1 program.

The program would include four years of a philosophy major, plus one year added for an accelerated masters of teaching.

"It's amazing how Sophia's Garden opens your perspective and your world," said Dr. Nagel. "I think we're creating really beautiful, wide eyed, and enthusiastic teachers for the future."

For more information and updates on Sophia's Garden contact Dr. Nagel at mecke.nagel@cortland.edu or the program's Facebook page: facebook.com/Sophias-Garden-101144081511002/.

Coming Events

November 4, 12:30 to 1:30pm

A Political Science Department Sandwich Seminar on the November 3rd election.
<https://sunycortland.webex.com/sunycortland/j.php?MTID=m901cab78b7e568ab1fb352c17da97905>

November 5, 8pm.

Young Democrats: Post-Election Reflection. [WebEx](#)

November 5, noon to 1pm

The Institute for Civic Engagement Action Team's "I Learned by Doing" Sandwich Seminar. Click on <https://sunycortland.webex.com/sunycortland/j.php?MTID=m70d6bf5092c54e855aec4ba4e2d25647>

November 18, 12:30 to 1:30pm

A Political Science Department Sandwich Seminar to follow-up on the November 3rd election.