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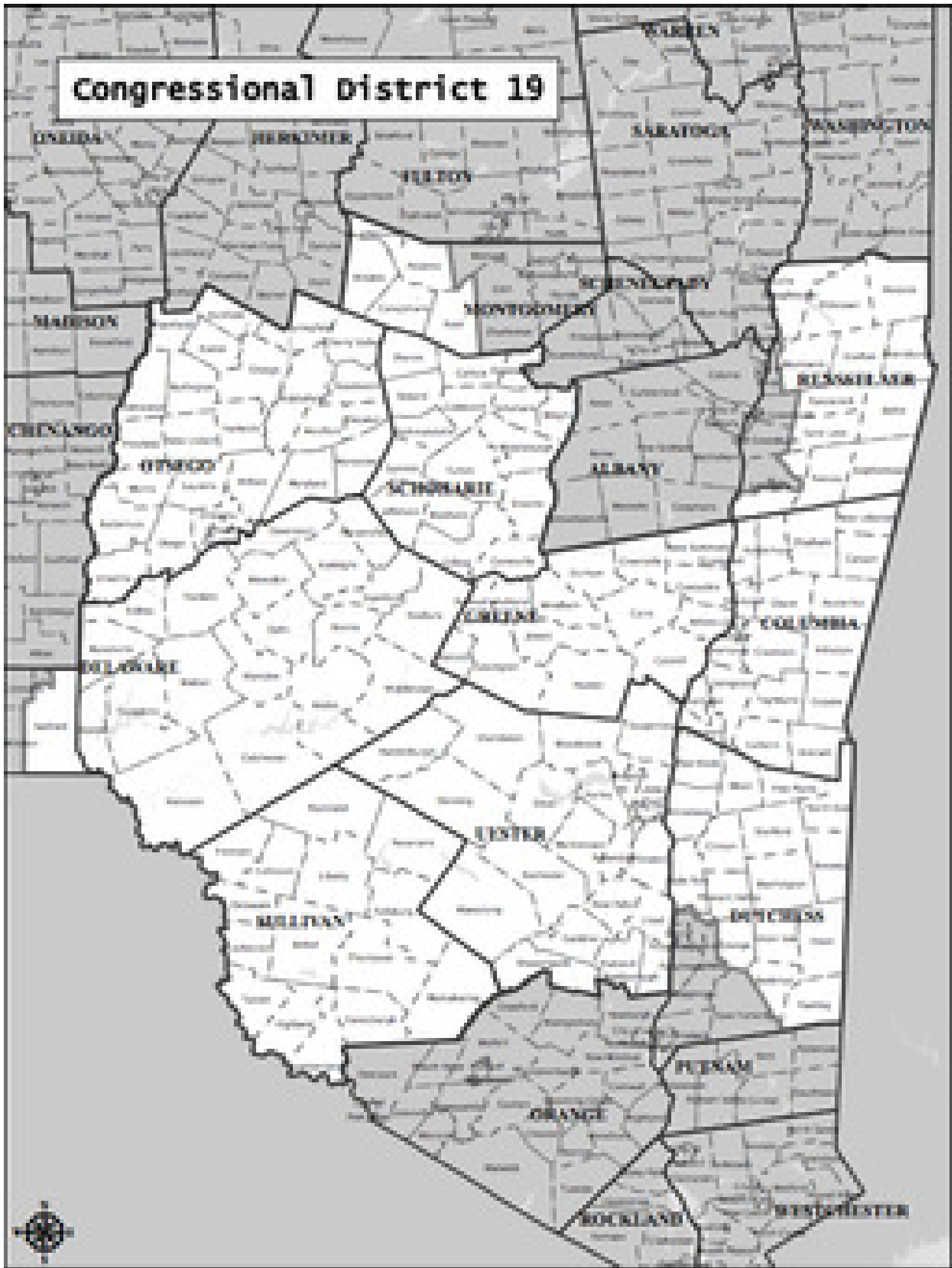
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NY's 19th Congressional District Race Includes Lesser Known Names

By ALLISON DUNNE • JAN 26, 2016

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With familiar names now on both sides in the race for New York's 19th congressional district seat,

WAMC's Hudson Valley Bureau Chief Allison Dunne has a look at perhaps the not-so-familiar ones.

Zephyr Teachout, the Democratic gubernatorial primary candidate who challenged Governor Andrew Cuomo in 2014, announced Monday she is running for the seat held by retiring Republican Chris Gibson. On the Republican side, former state assemblyman John Faso, who ran against Eliot Spitzer for governor in 2006, is looking to succeed his Kinderhook neighbor, Gibson. Republican Andrew Heaney, a small business owner from Millbrook, was the first to announce a run. Political Scientist Dr. Gerald Benjamin says the race already is interesting given it looks as if there will be primaries on both sides.

"Additionally, the district is designed to be competitive. It's one of the most competitive districts in the country, I think, so it will shape up to be a very serious race, especially if Teachout is nominated," says Benjamin.

Also in the Republican field is Delaware County farmer Bob Bishop, who welcomes Teachout to the race.

"It differentiates the philosophies between the two camps," Bishop says. "I'm a conservative Republican. Zephyr Teachout is to the left of Bernie Sanders."

Bishop, who lives in the Town of Hamden and runs a hay farm, says he is an outsider businessman new to politics.

"I've run a business. I haven't been building a political career. I've been building a business and I've been creating jobs," Bishop says. "And my family has lived in this area since the 1700s. I was born and raised here."

With "outsiders," that is, non-career politicians in the race, there is the question of whether voters will be willing to forego experience for newer, outside perspectives. Again, Benjamin.

"This idea of devaluing experience is kind of interesting and important. I think John Faso had quite a distinguished career and a spotless record, yet this question comes about the value of experience," says Benjamin. "My view is that it takes very special skills to be successful in a legislative environment and those are valuable skills and experience is important."

Bishop says a ruling class of career politicians needs to fall.

"We have a ruling class who feel entitled to be career politicians and that's just got to stop," Bishop says. "It's got us where we are, and we are not going to right this ship unless we put on a new crew."

On the Democratic side, there is also Livingston Deputy Town Supervisor and family farmer from Columbia County Will Yandik. Yandik did not return requests for comment. Another Democrat who considered a run is Ulster County Comptroller Elliott Auerbach. Auerbach says he decided over the weekend to suspend his efforts and that Teachout's announcement Monday did not impact his decision.

"Zephyr and I have had a conversation back and forth over the course of the last month. I highly respect

her. I appreciate especially her position on public campaign financing and understand the caliber and quality of candidate that she will make,” says Auerbach. “And we really initially discussed primarying one another.”

Auerbach says his decision to stay out of the race was personal, that he wanted to remain in Ulster County full-time. He says he does not support either Teachout or Yandik – yet.

“At this stage, I would have to say that I am totally neutral,” says Auerbach.

Here’s Benjamin, who also is the Benjamin Center Director and Associate Vice President for Regional Engagement at the State University of New York at New Paltz.

“I look forward to this election,” Benjamin says. “It’s going to be a real election And we need real elections to hold government accountable and to make democracy work.”

For more reporting on this race, including interviews with Teachout, Faso and Heaney, visit wamc.org.

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