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## NL voters could reshuffle City Council deck

### GOP sees opportunity as Democrats have squabbled

**New London** - If residents are not happy with the city councilors they elected two years ago, Nov. 3 will be a day of reckoning.

With seven Democrats, including four incumbents; six Republicans, including two incumbents; and one Green party candidate cross-endorsed by the Republicans; voters have a variety of choices.

Republicans Rob Pero, a special investigator with the state who is seeking his eighth term, and Adam Spreca, a mechanical engineer at Electric Boat, who is hoping for a second term, are joined by former Police Chief Bruce F. Rinehart; Martin T. Olsen, who is returning after a 20-year absence from city politics; Mark Battista, a 21-year-old New London High School graduate who is touting his young ideas; and Andrew Lockwood, a hotel owner. John Russell, a champion of the down-and-out who owns the Homeward Bound Treasures Thrift Shop, is running as a Green candidate and is cross-endorsed by the Republicans.

The Democratic incumbents are Wade A. Hyslop, a church pastor, John J. Maynard, an engineering plant manager at Foxwoods, and Michael Buscetto III, a developer, seeking second consecutive terms. Margaret Curtin, a retired state official and part-time taxi-cab driver, is a seasoned councilor and former mayor with seven terms since 1975. They are joined by Mark W. Matson, a pharmaceutical program director; Michael E. Passero, a New London firefighter and attorney; and Marie Friess-McSparran, a community organizer.

"I'm extremely optimistic," said Democratic Town Committee Chairman Anthony Basilica. "We have a very strong slate that will move the city forward nicely."

But the Democrats are also dealing with a nasty dispute within their ranks that surfaced several weeks ago when Buscetto locked Hyslop out of a strategy meeting at campaign headquarters on Jefferson Avenue. Although the space was called Democratic headquarters, Buscetto said he paid the rent and therefore could control who came in and out of the building. He said he kept Hyslop out of the meeting because Hyslop was going around town calling him a racist.

Hyslop immediately opened another headquarters on Bank Street and announced it was open to all members of the Democratic party. He denied calling Buscetto a racist but said he was critical of some off-color racial jokes Buscetto made at a fundraiser a year ago.

Basilica said a new headquarters, paid for with town committee funds, has opened at the former Campo's furniture store on Bank Street and all party members are welcome.

"People have their differences," he said. "There was a difference of opinion. Hopefully it all worked out and people are moving forward. We can't rehash and dwell on the past, we have to move on."

But how voters will view the dispute is yet to be determined. It may turn out to benefit Republicans, who have long been the minority party in the city.

Judging by political signs planted across the city, some residents are not pledging full allegiance to any one party. Signs for Hyslop, a Democrat, are side by side with signs for Lockwood, a Republican. Another yard features Olsen, a Republican, with Hyslop, a Democrat, and Russell, the lone Green Party candidate. Buscetto, the highest vote-getter in the 2007 election and a Democrat, is sharing front yard space with Rob Pero, a Republican and the highest vote-getter in the 2005 election.

"We've actually done a really good job this year," said Bill Vogel, chairman of the GOP town committee. "The feedback has been very positive for the Republicans. I think the split in the Democratic party has helped us a bit. It seems to me we have an excellent chance of winning a majority on both the City Council and the Board of Education."

With the election less than two weeks away, candidates from both parties are knocking on doors, putting their faces on the back of buses, printing up magnets, mailing out postcards, and even handing out tissues packets with their names on the wrapper.

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