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## Opinion: What makes Sheila Oliver run?

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WHEN Governor Christie called a special election to fill the unexpired U.S. Senate term of the late Frank Lautenberg, New Jersey's political establishment quickly installed Newark Mayor Cory Booker as the overwhelming favorite to win the Democratic nomination and, when no Republican of statewide stature stepped forward, the party's nomination would fall to former Bogota mayor and two-time gubernatorial candidate Steve Lonegan.

Little has changed in the weeks since Christie's decision. With about two weeks left before the Aug. 13 primary, Booker has maintained a commanding lead over Reps. Frank Pallone and Rush Holt, and Lonegan will easily brush aside his unknown challenger, Dr. Alieta Eck.

Because the perceived foregone conclusion of the primary has denied the political cognoscenti their daily catnip of dissecting polls, examining alliances and predicting outcomes, they've turned to discussing Oliver.

Not surprisingly, theories abound.

One of the more popular is that her dislike of Booker is so intense that, even though she recognizes her chances of winning the primary are non-existent, she couldn't resist publicly smacking the mayor around for a few weeks, stripping some of the Teflon from him, and pulling enough votes in Newark and [Essex County](#) to demonstrate that he's not the superhero he's been made out to be.

Fulfilling that agenda in a campaign is more acceptable and will attract more media attention than using the speaker's office to take potshots periodically at him. In the latter context, her criticism would be construed as personal pique or envy.

Others contend it's a defense against a move underway to replace her as speaker in January and she's decided a high-profile exit serves her better than a perception that she's been unceremoniously dumped. A loss in a primary for a seat in the U.S. Senate is a more graceful and dignified leave-taking than being forced from office by a deal similar to the one that installed her there in the first instance.

### **Asserting independence**

Still others believe that her candidacy is a way to assert her independence, to demonstrate she's not merely a creature of DiVincenzo, available and willing to do his and the party establishment's bidding.

With the county executive's endorsement of Christie's reelection and his presumed support for the governor should he win a second term, policy and political conflicts between Oliver and Christie — and by indirection with DiVincenzo as well — would be inevitable and numerous.

Oliver could easily find herself in situations in which her beliefs and views collide with DiVincenzo's support for the governor's agenda. Her acquiescence, as seen in her change of



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