**State Committee Report**

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Now that the STATE primary is behind us (the FEDERAL primary was in June – New York is the only state in the country with two primaries, but that is for another column), we turn our attention to November. While the Blue Wave is building for Democrats across America to take back Congress, there are also three ballot proposals to be voted on by New York City residents on Election Day. Below is a listing of the three proposals (in *italics*) and then my analysis and suggestion of support or opposition.

*Ballot Proposal Question # 1: Campaign Finance This proposal would amend the City Charter to lower the amount a candidate for City elected office may accept from a contributor. It would also increase the public funding used to match a portion of the contributions received by a candidate who participates in the City’s public financing program. In addition, the proposal would make public matching funds available earlier in the election year to participating candidates who can demonstrate need for the funds. It would also ease a requirement that candidates for Mayor, Comptroller, or Public Advocate must meet to qualify for matching funds. The amendments would apply to participating candidates who choose to have the amendments apply to their campaigns beginning with the 2021 primary election, and would then apply to all candidates beginning in 2022. Shall this proposal be adopted?*

Vote YES on #1. Gotham Gazette among other sites state that this proposal would reduce contribution limits for participants from $5,100 to $2,000 for citywide candidates, from $3,950 to $1,500 for candidates for borough president, and from $2,850 to $1,000 for City Council seats. The proposed limits for those who choose not to opt in to the program are $3,500, $2,500 and $1,500 respectively. The proposal also increases the matching ratio to 8-to-1 for the first $250 raised by a citywide candidate and for the first $175 raised for all other seats. It would increase the cap on public funds disbursements from 55 percent to 75 percent of the spending limit for a seat, while also doling out the funds earlier in the election cycle. It lowers the barriers to entry for people interested in running for office, making what is essentially the best campaign finance program in the country even better.

*Question # 2: Civic Engagement Commission This proposal would amend the City Charter to: Create a Civic Engagement Commission that would implement, no later than the City Fiscal Year beginning July 1, 2020, a Citywide participatory budgeting program established by the Mayor to promote participation by City residents in making recommendations for projects in their communities; Require the Commission to partner with community based organizations and civic leaders, as well as other City agencies, to support and encourage civic engagement efforts; Require the Commission to establish a program to provide language interpreters at City poll sites, to be implemented for the general election in 2020; Permit the Mayor to assign relevant powers and duties of certain other City agencies to the Commission; Provide that the Civic Engagement Commission would have 15 members, with 8 members appointed by the Mayor, 2 members by the City Council Speaker and 1 member by each Borough President; and Provide for one of the Mayor’s appointees to be Commission Chair and for the Chair to employ and direct Commission staff. Shall this proposal be adopted?*

Vote NO on #2. I am all in favor of civic engagement, but this proposal is remarkably vague about what it intends the Mayor to do with these new powers, and regardless about how you feel about the current Mayor, unlimited powers in the name of something as ambiguous as “civic engagement” makes me nervous. The overall idea has merit, but let City Hall rewrite the proposal to be more specific about what they intend to do. I am unconvinced that we need to create a commission on civic engagement to get people civically engaged.

*Question #3: Community Boards This proposal would amend the City Charter to: Impose term limits of a maximum of four consecutive full two-year terms for community board members with certain exceptions for the initial transition to the new term limits system; Require Borough Presidents to seek out persons of diverse backgrounds in making appointments to community boards. The proposal would also add new application and reporting requirements related to these appointments; and If Question 2, “Civic Engagement Commission,” is approved, require the proposed Civic Engagement Commission to provide resources, assistance, and training related to land use and other matters to community boards. Shall this proposal be adopted?*

Vote NO on #3. I know, everyone loves term limits. But the Community Board (CB) may not be the best place for them. CBs cover every neighborhood in the city. The Upper West Side is split between CB7, which is south of 110th Street, and CB9, which is north of it. I have had the privilege of serving on both CB7 about a dozen years ago and serve on CB9 currently. The non-partisan boards are made up of 50 people each, unpaid volunteers, who are appointed by the Borough President in consultation with local City Council Members. CBs are advisory, but they do have a legally mandated influence over land use, the decisions regarding zoning and development in our neighborhoods. Term limits for CB members do not make sense because veteran board members have the institutional memory that, as Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer puts it, “are the secret weapon in negotiations with developers. Having new members with fresh perspectives is vital too, but when it comes time to sit across the table from developers who have armies of lawyers, you have to have members who are well versed in local issues and understand zoning -- who know where the bodies are buried.” Forcing the entire boards to turn over every 10 years would put the neighborhood at a disadvantage and give real estate developers even more leverage when asking for community support. With local news reporting contracting, there is even fewer resources for residents to turn to when questioning a development proposal. CBs are one of the few places where people pay attention, over time, and remember who, and what happened, back when. Term limiting CBs is essentially a giveaway to real estate developers who could exploit the potentially uninformed ignorance of newcomers without old-timers around to speak up with their historical knowledge.