



## Independence Party of Kings County

323 Putnam Avenue, #4 ~ Brooklyn, NY 11216

718-415-0571(p) ~ 718-504-3771(f)

www.ipnyc.org ~ bobconroy@ipnyc.org

TESTIMONY OF BOB CONROY  
TO THE NEW YORK CITY CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION  
TUESDAY, APRIL 20, 2010

Good afternoon Chairman Goldstein and members of the Commission. My name is Bob Conroy. I am the Brooklyn Chair of the Independence Party.

There are over 27,000 Independence Party members and another 250,000 non-affiliated voters here in Brooklyn. Currently, these independents are excluded from participating in the primary elections where almost all of our elected officials are chosen.

New York City is behind in the way it conducts its municipal elections. 41 of the country's 50 major cities already have Nonpartisan Municipal Elections(NPME)<sup>1</sup>. Nonpartisan elections were part of a package of reforms advocated by the Progressives in the early 1900's but New York City missed the boat then. Let's not miss it now. As Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia said seven decades ago "There is no Democratic or Republican way of cleaning the streets."

Some critics say nonpartisan elections weaken the party structure but there is no evidence of that. Take for example, Chicago. It switched to non-partisan elections for Mayoral contests in 1995 and the Democratic Party is alive and well there.

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the New York City Charter Revision Commission – September 3, 2002



Here in Brooklyn, in the 2009 election cycle, 82,211 Democrats voted for the city council candidates in Democratic Party primary. This is 8.4% of Democrats and only 6.1% of all voters in Kings County and this party primary determined the city council member. Because all winners of the Democratic primary won the General Election and not only did they win the General Election, it was not even close. The Democratic Party nominees won 82% of the vote (242,734 votes out of a total of 295,274 votes.)<sup>2</sup>. The closest contest had a margin of victory of 22%. The General Election is when independents get their opportunity to vote but these elections are not competitive.

This current system leaves out tens of thousands of voters from being engaged and cultivated into the political process and produces uncompetitive elections.

The partisan primaries system is not fair. It creates two classes of voters. The first class is prime Democratic Party voters (6.1%) who determine the city council member. And the second class of voters – everyone else

Independents see the only way for progress is to make our elections fairer. Now is the time to have an election structure where all the voters can participate equally. I would urge the commission to take up the issue of nonpartisan municipal elections.

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<sup>2</sup> Board of Elections in the City of New York Statement of Returns for Council Districts 33 to 34