



Queens Civic Congress

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QUEENS CIVIC CONGRESS ON TERM LIMITS: *LET THE VOTERS DECIDE!*

**Testimony
to
the City Council Committee on Government Operations
by
Corey Bearak
President, Queens Civic Congress**

Thursday, October 16, 2008

Thank you Chairman Felder for this opportunity to address the City Council on this important issue of democracy and good governance. I am Corey Bearak, President of the borough-wide coalition of civic and condo, cooperative, tenant and other community organizations. Queens Civic Congress supports only a voter referendum when it comes to revisiting term limits.

We write laws not to reign in the good but to prevent bad acts and bad actors from hurting others and sometimes themselves and society in general. Sometimes good rules limit options, actions and opportunities for the “good folk”.

As someone who drafted more than his fair share of bylaws and constitutions for non-profit, community and other organizations, I recognized this imperative at an early age. I also recognize the importance of good, fair and open processes in deliberations of utmost public interest.

That makes it easy for me to stand before you and clearly share – if you have not already heard the message – the Queens Civic Congress recommendation that any decision on term limits must be left to the voters.

That's right: Let the voters decide.

The time exists.

Any change in city governance of that magnitude requires that path to avoid the tag of illegitimacy.

More and more new New Yorkers come to our boroughs, our communities, from lands where they left countries ruled by *juntas* and other regimes that govern with little if any legitimacy. These newer New Yorkers interact with longer time residents and other new New Yorkers from other parts of our great nation who would never seek to live under such dastardly rulers.

The proposed process to address term limits embraced by the west wing of City Hall and the leader of its East Wing approach that distasteful governance form.

It must be avoided at all costs.

Unlike the closed-door deliberations that resulted in pending City Council legislation to unilaterally extend the terms of all Council members, the five borough presidents, the public advocate, the controller and the mayor, QCC's adopted a resolution on the process to address term limits on September 15 that followed a summer's worth of discussion in the Queens civic movement.

Our member civics, in open discussion with media present, unanimously adopted a resolution that, "calls on ALL public officials and those who aspire to public office to commit to the use of referendum to attempt any change in the City Charter enacted in that matter, and state that position publicly."

Why? What makes this so important? As I stated in a Daily New Op-ed (Tuesday, October 14): "The public already voted consistently - two separate times - on this issue. First, voters opted to enact term limits. Second, voters rejected its repeal. As a matter of good public policy and basic democracy, any change in term limits, from its revocation to its extension or its reduction must only be enacted by the same process that led to its 1993 enactment - voter referendum."

What makes these times so different that 1996? That year a City Council, populated by office holders who would have kept their posts by legislative enactment, placed a referendum on the ballot in an attempt to repeal the 1993 imposition of term limits. Those Council members clearly recognized the need to "Let the voters decide."

This time around, the term limits discussion at City Hall developed so that the opportunity to place the issue before voters by next month lapsed. The mayor asserts a claim of not enough time to put this issue before the voters. He argues against voter involvement as a "luxury" we cannot afford. Simply not true. **Good government remains a necessity, never a luxury. I repeat: Good government remains a necessity, never a luxury.**

While the time has expired to place an initiative on this November's ballot, plenty of time remains to place a referendum before the voters in a special election following a [Charter Revision Commission](#) proposed by City Council legislation or by local law. Queens Civic Congress looks favorably on the pending legislation that follow that noble path of good public policy, of good government.

In conclusion and to reiterate: [Queens Civic Congress](#) opposes any plan to change term limits except through a public referendum. If City Hall and the City Council seek to repeal or modify terms limits, anything other than a voter referendum smacks of illegitimacy. Legitimacy and confidence in government depends on politicians recognizing the public will. Any failure to recognize two public referendums would reduce the city government to, in my predecessor's words, *junta*. Let the voters decide term limits.

Queens Civic Congress also urges New Yorkers to call 3-1-1 with this simple and direct message to City Hall, “Let the voters decide term limits.” Thank you.

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Queens Civic Congress Position on Term Limits Approved by the Membership, Monday, September 15, 2008

1. Queens Civic Congress – representing the civic movement in the borough of Queens – calls on ALL public officials and those who aspire to public office to commit to the use of referendum to attempt any change in the City Charter enacted in that matter, and state that position publicly.
2. The public voted two separate times, first to enact term limits and second to reject its repeal. Consistent with this position, any change in term limits, from revocation to extending or reducing the number of terms must only be enacted by the same process of voter referendum that enacted the two-term limits on municipal office holder.
3. Queens Civic Congress takes no position on the substance of term limits; some in the civic movement support term limits; some oppose it; others support it for some offices but not all. Queens Civic Congress says “let the voters decide.”
4. Simply put, Queens Civic Congress opposes any plan to change the term limit law as currently exists except through a public referendum.
5. If City Hall and the City Council seek to repeal or modify terms limits, anything other than a voter referendum smacks of illegitimacy.

For more information call (718) 343-6779 or e-mail bearak@aol.com.

Queens Civic Congress Members

Association of Old Forest Hills ♦ Auburndale Improvement Association ♦ Bayside Civic Database ♦ Bayside Clear-Spring Council ♦ Bayside Hills Civic Association ♦ Bayswater Civic Association ♦ Bay Terrace Community Alliance, Inc. ♦ Bellaire-BellVill Civic Association ♦ Belle Harbor Property Owners Association ♦ Bellerose Commonwealth Civic Association ♦ Bellerose Hillside Civic Association ♦ Bell Park Manor Terrace Community Council ♦ Bowne Park Civic Association ♦ Briarwood Community Association ♦ Cambria Heights Civic Association ♦ Civic Association of Utopia Estates ♦ C.O.M.E.T. (Communities of Maspeth-Elmhurst Together) ♦ Concerned Citizens of Laurelton ♦ Cornucopia Society ♦ Creedmoor Civic Association ♦ Deerfield Area Association ♦ Doug-Bay Manor Civic Association ♦ Douglas Manor Association ♦ Douglaston Civic Association ♦ Dutch Kills Civic Assn. of Long Island City ♦ East Elmhurst Corona Civic Association ♦ East Flushing Civic Association ♦ Federated Block Associations of Laurelton ♦ Federation of Civic Associations of Southeast Queens ♦ Floral Park Community Council ♦ Flushing Heights Civic Association ♦ Flushing on the Hill Taxpayers Association ♦ Forest Hills Chamber of Commerce ♦ Forest Hills Crescents Association ♦ Forest Hills-Van Court Association ♦ Fresh Meadows Homeowners Association ♦ Georgetown Mews ♦ Glendale Civic Association of Queens ♦ Glen Oaks Village Owners, Inc. ♦ Greater Astoria Historical Society ♦ Greater Whitestone Taxpayers Civic Association ♦ Harding Heights Civic Association ♦ Hillcrest Estates Civic Association ♦ Hilltop Village Co-Op #1 ♦ Hilltop Village Co-Op #2 ♦ Hilltop Village Co-Op #3 ♦ Hilltop Village Co-Op #4 ♦ Hollis 11423 Block Association ♦ Hollis Hills Civic Association ♦ Holliswood Civic Association ♦ Hollis Park Gardens Civic Association ♦ Holly Civic Association ♦ Hyde Park Gardens Cooperative ♦ Jackson Heights Beautification Group ♦ Jamaica Estates Association ♦ Jamaica Hill Community Association ♦ Juniper Park Civic Association ♦ Kew Gardens Civic Association ♦ Kew Gardens Hills Homeowners Association ♦ Kew Gardens Improvement Association ♦ Kissena Park Civic Association ♦ Little Neck Bay Civic Association ♦ Little Neck Pines ♦ Long Island City Alliance ♦ Malba Civic Association ♦ Meadowlark Gardens Owners ♦ Middle Village Property Owners Association ♦ Mitchell Linden Civic Association ♦ Neponsit Property Owners Association ♦ Newtown Civic Association ♦ North Bellerose Civic Association ♦ North Flushing Civic Association ♦ North Hills Estates Civic Association ♦ Northwest Clearview Homeowners Association ♦ Norwood Civic Association ♦ Oakland Terrace/ Gardens Community Council ♦ Off Broadway Homeowners Association ♦ Our Neighborhood Improvement Association ♦ Our Neighbors Association of Ozone Park, Inc. ♦ Parkway Village Historical Society ♦ Queensboro Hill Neighborhood Association ♦ Queens Colony Civic Association ♦ Queens Community Civic Corp. ♦ Queens Preservation Council ♦ Queens Village Civic Association ♦ Ramblersville-Hawtree Civic Association ♦ Richmond Hill Historical Society ♦ Ridgewood Property Owners and Civic Association ♦ Rockaway Park Homeowners/ Residents ♦ Rocky Hill Civic Association ♦ Rosedale Civic Association ♦ Royal Ranch Association. ♦ Southeast Queens Concerned Neighbors ♦ South Ozone Park West Civic Association ♦ Springfield/Rosedale Community Action Association ♦ Station Road Civic Assoc. of Auburndale ♦ Sunnyside Gardens/Harrison Place Homeowners ♦ Surrey Estates Civic Association ♦ Union Turnpike Merchants Association ♦ United Forties Civic Association ♦ United Neighbors Civic Association ♦ Waldheim Neighborhood Association ♦ Wayanda Civic Association ♦ West Cunningham Park Civic Association ♦ Westmoreland Association ♦ Woodside Community Council