



New York City Campaign Finance Board

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Testimony of Amy Loprest Executive Director New York City Campaign Finance Board

City Council Committees on Finance and Governmental Operations May 18, 2009

Good morning, Chairman Sears, Chairman Weprin, and Committee members. I am Amy Loprest, Executive Director of the New York City Campaign Finance Board (CFB). With me are Deputy Executive Director Shauna Tarshis Denkensohn and General Counsel Sue Ellen Dodell.

FY2010 Budget

Pursuant to the New York City Charter, Section 1052(c), the Board submitted its estimated budget for fiscal year 2010 to the Mayor in March. As is required by the Charter, this estimate has been included in the Mayor's Executive Budget. The budget request is attached to this testimony.

The Board's budget for fiscal year 2010 is consistent with previous citywide election years. The allocation for the campaign finance fund to provide matching payments to candidates is dramatically increased in a citywide election year. Our budget for fiscal year 2010 allocates \$50,800,000 for the fund. As in previous years, unused portions of the campaign finance fund will be returned to the City's General Fund after the elections are concluded.

The Board's request also includes funds for the citywide Voter Guide. As you know, the Board publishes and distributes the non-partisan Voter Guide to every New York City household with a registered voter. All candidates, whether or not they participate in the Campaign Finance Program, have an equal opportunity to make a statement in the Guide. The Board's allocation for the Voter Guide for this election year is approximately \$7.6 million. The Board anticipates mailing nearly 6.4 million guides: 2.7 million guides for the primary election and 3.6 million for the general election. After our appearance before the Committee on Governmental Operations on March 12, 2009, the Board submitted a letter to Chairman Sears which contains a more detailed breakdown of the costs associated with the Voter Guide.

These increased cost projections for the campaign finance fund and the Voter Guide are based on our experience from prior citywide elections. As a result, the Board's budget request for the coming year contains a significant increase beyond the current year's budget. Still, it is important to note that this request represents a decrease from the CFB's budget for the previous citywide election year in 2005. Where we are able to contain costs, we are doing so. Outside of the matching funds and the Voter Guide, our costs will decrease from the current fiscal year to the next by approximately \$650,000.

2009 Elections

The Board is busy with preparations for the 2009 elections. This past Friday, May 15 was the filing deadline for Disclosure Statement #8, covering funds raised and spent over the two months ending Monday, May 11, 2009. As of Friday, there are 263 active candidates registered with the Board.

The deadline for candidates to certify as participants in the Campaign Finance Program is June 10, 2009. 46 candidates have already filed their certifications. Local Law 34 of 2007 moved the certification deadline from June 1 to June 10, giving candidates more time to make their decision to enter the Program. June 10 is also the deadline for candidates to submit their information to be printed in the 2009 Voter Guide.

Candidate Outreach: The Board continues to offer its enhanced training program for candidates, with the CFB's Candidate Services Unit (CSU) certifying 230 campaigns as having completed the two-part training course to date. The Board is also helping make compliance easier for campaigns by focusing on early intervention. In addition to increasing the number of trainings we offer, we are scheduling compliance visits with campaigns earlier in the cycle, and we are working hard to utilize more plain language in our communications with campaigns.

Debate Program: Since the 1997 election, the Board has administered mandatory debates among participating candidates for mayor, public advocate, and comptroller. The Campaign Finance Act specifies two debates before the primary election and two before the general election for each office. Earlier this year, the Board solicited applications from groups interested in sponsoring the debates for the 2009 elections. After reviewing those applications and conducting a series of interviews, the Board has tentatively selected sponsor groups to host the debates, and plans to publicly announce the 2009 debate schedule at a press conference next month.

Doing Business: As amended by Local Law 34 of 2007, the Campaign Finance Act places low limits on contributions from those doing business with city government. The new law, in effect for the 2009 elections, gives New York City the most comprehensive limits on "pay-to-play" of any jurisdiction in the country. The Board completed its timely review of contributions filed in March as required by the law, and the review process for the May 15 filing has begun.

Other Innovations: The Board continues to improve our web-based informational gateway for candidates, called C-Access, which offers campaigns an instant and secure link to an array of useful information and services online.

Last week, the Board also unveiled an updated and improved online searchable database, which brings greater transparency to the City's political process and provides the public

with easier access to campaign finance records reported by candidates. The update offers new search capabilities and an improved, user-friendly interface.

Conclusion

As always, the CFB looks forward to continuing to work with the Council to make the Program more effective and efficient. Thank you for your time, and we look forward to answering any questions you may have.