
THE BROADWAY DEMOCRATS

◆ District Leaders: Curtis Arluck, Paula Diamond Román ◆ President: Gretchen Borges ◆

CHARTER SCHOOLS: Pass or Fail?

David Golovner, Vice President for Policy Advocacy,
New York City Charter School Center

Cordell Cleare, Chief of Staff,
State Senator Bill Perkins' office

Moderator: Richard Siegel,
Broadway Democrat



Thursday, March 14, 2013

7:45pm Sign-in/Refreshments* 8:00pm Forum

Bank Street College (Auditorium)

610 West 112th Street (between Broadway and Riverside Drive)

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President's Corner

Gretchen Borges

The Most Representative Arm of Government?

In January, Steering Committee member Norm Levine expressed his profound disappointment with Senator Reid's handling of the filibuster reform. Somewhat belatedly, the Committee sent the letter excerpted below to Senator Reid:

We are a progressive Democratic club in New York State and represent a district that was one of President Obama's strongest in both elections. We are writing today because we are very disappointed in your recent attempt to amend the filibuster, an attempt which was clearly ineffective, as demonstrated by the hold-up of the Hagel nomination. The Republicans will not cease their obstruction of appointments and legislation until the filibuster is effectively weakened. The path to debates and the path to votes must be cleared. Make the President's second term count.

Unfortunately, the filibuster is not the only problem slowing down any progress in Washington. Amid cries of "Why doesn't the president do something?" it is clear to most observers that the real problem is in the House, the body that was designed to be the most responsive to the American people, serving two year terms.

In 2012, Democrats received 1.4 million more votes than Republicans, yet Republicans now control Congress by a 234 to 201 margin. Gerrymandering, which according to the Oxford English Dictionary, comes "from the name of Governor Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts + salamander, from the supposed similarity between a salamander and the shape of a new voting district on a map drawn when he was in office (1812), the creation of which was felt to favour his party; the map (with claws, wings, and fangs added) was published in the Boston Weekly Messenger, with the title The Gerry-Mander." The charm of the name belies the evil it has wrought.

The House is no longer representative. And since districts are redrawn only every ten years (after the census), this profound lack of representation is relatively long-lived. But the lack of representation, while egregious, is only part of the problem. A more challenging consequence of gerrymandering is extremism. In districts drawn to be safe, moderates are the least likely candidates to run, or to win. With the gerrymandered districts 2012, we elected a House of extremists. No one should be surprised that compromise has become an all but unheard word in the halls of Congress.



If the political parties retain control of districting we will undoubtedly have more of the same. As a solution, some have argued for the California model in which retired federal judges drew district lines. Others have favored non-partisan redistricting commissions, or a more clinical approach, using a computer algorithm. And to address the existing problems people have proposed a more robust judicial standard for clearly gerrymandered districts.

Benjamin Franklin when asked in 1787 as he left the Constitutional Congress what kind of government the United States was to have, said, "A republic, if you can keep it." And keeping it strong is what we should be doing.

DB

Leader's Report

Paula Diamond Román



I was less than two years old when this picture was taken, during the Third Selma Civil Rights March. The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. is surrounded by now-Congressman John Lewis of Georgia (one of my idols), an unidentified nun, Ralph Abernathy, Ralph Bunche, and two rabbis, including Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel who compared marching in Selma to praying with his feet. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 had been passed the previous year and, still, Dr. King and other civil rights activists needed to put their lives on the line to bring attention to continuing injustice. Less than three months later, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson.

The 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution, ratified in 1870, states that the “right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” This should have been sufficient to guarantee Black citizens living in the South access to the voting booth. However, some Southern localities responded by instituting discriminatory voting practices, such as poll tax laws, ostensibly to raise revenues for the government, literacy laws, and other bureaucratic stumbling blocks. The localities also failed to protect Black citizens from harassment, intimidation, economic reprisals, and physical violence when they went to register or to vote.

The 15th Amendment also states that the “Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.” Demonstrations, like the Selma Civil Rights marches, brought the flagrant

disregard of 15th Amendment rights to the attention of the public and the Congress. Since these Southern states were clearly unwilling to enforce equal access to the voting booth through appropriate legislation; Congress passed its own legislation to establish federal oversight in “covered jurisdictions” with a history of discriminatory voting practices. According to Section Five of the Act, “covered jurisdictions” had to get “preclearance” from the Department of Justice before making any changes in the laws governing voting practices in any of their localities. The States and localities covered under the Voting Rights Act were those which had used discriminatory voting practices to limit access to the voting booth and in which less than 50 percent of the citizenry was registered to vote the previous year.

Some people may be wondering why this is even an issue for discussion, except in a history class. Unfortunately, in one of those classic Congressional compromises, the Voting Rights Act has to be periodically renewed. In 2006, it was renewed for twenty-five years over the claims of conservative members of Congress that the Voting Rights Act was a victim of its own success, curing the discriminatory voting practices it was ratified to address, and was no longer necessary. (They also made a defense of states, with sizable Spanish-speaking communities, that didn’t want to have ballots available in Spanish and English).

Recently, the debate about the Voting Rights Act has become more complex. In light of some of the discriminatory voting practices implemented during the 2012 elections and proposed in the wake of President Obama’s re-election, there seems to be a strong case for expanding the Voting Rights Act. This would entail applying the “covered jurisdictions” criteria to more states, including a number of states not in the South. In recent days we have heard Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia accuse Congress of bowing to pressure and maintaining the “perpetuation of racial entitlement.” We have also heard Senate Minority Whip John Cornyn of Texas suggest that states shouldn’t be treated differently, as the Voting Rights Act currently does. Perhaps Senator Cornyn is right. The 2012 elections taught us that voter suppression can raise its ugly head in Florida, Virginia, Ohio, Texas, Kansas, Colorado, and, pillar of the Mid-Atlantic states, Pennsylvania. Perhaps the Voting Rights Act needs to be extended to more states, not fewer.

From the Steering Committee

Ed Sullivan

The Cause Makes the Hero

Two films, based on true events, and depicting heroic action by American operatives, were up for Academy Awards in Hollywood this week.

One of them presented a clever subterfuge for helping a group of Americans escape the anti-American terror that captured Tehran, Iran, in 1979. The other film showed the planning for the killing of Osama Bin Laden, and the execution of that plan.

In both cases heroism was called for, and the American operatives responded. But heroism must always have a cause, and whether the heroes are judged to be heroes often depends on the cause they were advancing.

The heroes of Tehran and Abattabad, Pakistan, each had separate causes. One was the rescue of Americans trapped in Tehran. The other was lethal punishment for the man who planned the murder of 3000 Americans on 9/11.

Who could quarrel with the cause of the former? The details of the killing of Bin Laden, on the other hand, have been less than unanimously accepted.

That distinction of acceptance is a lesson for those who direct and execute conflicts on behalf of our country in locales around the world. Although the actions of American soldiers are rarely if ever found less than brave, the validity of their cause, in the specific instance as well as in the general conflict, must constantly be made clear by the leaders of this country.

It cannot be simply that they are fighting for the preservation of American lives. There is nothing singularly American about that. The young braves of every country are willing to fight for the lives of their compatriots.

Nor can their ferocity be justified by feelings of revenge. Lord knows there is vengeance afoot on every continent. It is not exceptional.

But American soldiers have an additional burden to carry. They must act in defense of principles that have been announced and published by the greatest leaders in the history of the United States of America. Each American soldier has a duty to preserve and ennoble those principles as he

struggles heroically against forces who would mock those principles and grind them into the dust.

Those principles are what bind our country together. Unlike other nations, we are not a clan or a tribe, whose blood and genes are similar. We are all clans and all tribes. What we have in common are not our genes, but our beliefs. We are a community of believers.

Government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth;

All men are created equal;
E pluribus unum;

Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of the press or of speech;
To secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

Defending these principles is what American heroes do. It is why they risk their lives and often give their lives.

Let us examine another story of daring action, where one of the prominent players might have been judged a hero, but wasn't.

In 1943, as the Fascist regime in Italy was falling apart, Prime Minister Benito Mussolini was deposed by the Fascist Council of Italy, and then arrested. German Chancellor Adolf Hitler personally ordered one Otto Skorzeny, an officer in the SS, to rescue Benito Mussolini from his hotel prison near Rome, and to bring him back to German occupied Italy.

He did so. The rescue, by a glider commando raid, was as daring and filled with peril as any Hollywood script could imagine. Skorzeny received the Iron Cross from Hitler for his feat. One might think that Skorzeny would have been considered a hero by the German people, a brave soldier doing his best.

But Skorzeny was no hero to the Germans. He had been a Nazi in Austria long before World War II even started, and he remained an active Nazi after the war, training right wing mercenaries, until he died in Spain in 1975.

He lived in exile mostly. The Germans had had their fill of Nazis and Nazism, and of their vile cause.

Cont.

Heroes are properly judged as such within the context of the causes they advance. And American heroes are properly accepted as such in that they do not abandon American principles, but advance them.



From the Steering Committee Ed Sullivan

A memorial service was held Saturday, March 2, at Riverside Church, for Ed and Lynn Kent.

Ed Kent was a teacher, and if the students whose lives he touched had been there, they would have filled the church several times over. But they were off around the world, changing it I'm sure for the better.

That's what teachers do. They teach their students to do good work, and Ed Kent was a teacher.

I knew Lynn better. In trying to come up with some things she said that would describe who she was, I thought of some things she never said.

She never said a project was too hard. She never said it was too complicated. She never said she didn't have time. She never said it wasn't important enough.

For Lynn, it was always important enough, she always had the time. It was never too hard or too complicated for her.

Her monuments are all around us in this beautiful community we love so much.

Rest in peace, Ed and Lynn.



Membership

In order to vote in club elections (endorsements, elections of officers, judicial convention, amendments), you must be an eligible, voting member of the Broadway Democrats. You must have attended at least one of the previous nine monthly public meetings, live in the 69th AD or an Ed that used to be in the 69th AD, and you must pay your dues. Dues partially defray the costs of presenting forums and putting out this newsletter. Dues are \$20; senior dues are \$5.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

Special Interests: _____



***** Announcement*****

Every twelve years is a **really busy** year for political activists. We have Mayoral, Public Advocate, and Comptroller candidates campaigning city-wide; and Borough President and District Attorney candidates campaigning throughout Manhattan. In addition, the Broadway Democrats have two city council races, District 6 and District 7, without incumbents and with **a lot** of candidates. We also have Civil Court judges and District Leader races, as well as Delegates and Alternates for the Supreme Court Judicial Convention. **End result? A lot of candidates.**

In response to this busy year, the Broadway Democrats are scheduling extra meetings and starting meetings earlier. Our first March meeting, on Charter Schools, is Thursday, March 14th, at our usual time; **our second March meeting, will present Mayor, Public Advocate, and Borough President candidates on Thursday, March 28th but we will start earlier at 7pm so don't be late.**

In addition, we're launching an experiment, based on what many other Democratic clubs do. In the past, we heard candidates speak and, then, immediately voted that night. **This year, we're instituting a discussion and voting session in May.** So, come on March 28th to hear Mayor, Public Advocate, and Borough President candidates and in April to hear the rest of the candidates; then, **come back in May to share your opinions and to vote.**

Remember, in order to be eligible to vote, you must have attended a previous meeting within nine meetings so come to hear the candidates speak and then come to tell us what you think!

THE BROADWAY DEMOCRATS ARE GOING GREEN!!!



Every three months of the newsletter is responsible for **one less tree** in the world. There are 47 days until **Earth Day** on April 22nd. We want to replace enough mailed newsletters with e-mailed newsletters to save **one whole tree** by Earth Day. PLEASE SWITCH TO ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTERS!

To make the change, just email your name to **president@broadwaydemocrats.org**.

The Broadway Democrats
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FIRST
CLASS

Assemblymember: Daniel O'Donnell
District Leaders: Curtis Arluck,
Paula Diamond Román
President: Gretchen Borges
Newsletter Editor: Gretchen Borges

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Charter Schools: Pass or Fail?

Thursday, March 14th **8pm**
Bank Street College
West 112th Street (bet. Broadway & Riverside)

Mayor, Public Advocate, & Borough President Candidates

Thursday, March 28th **7pm**
Bank Street College
West 112th Street (bet. Broadway & Riverside)