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Letters to the Editor

New York's Election Laws Finally Move into the 21st Century

Thank you, New York state legislators! Voting reform is happening in New York thanks to you. Both the Assembly and the Senate passed of a package of six voting reform bills on Jan. 14 and, which has been signed by the governor. Many thousands of New Yorkers will now be able to vote after they were kept from the polls by the requirements of their 21st century lives – travel for employment or tourism, needs of children or elderly/disabled in their care, students living away from home, etc.

Early voting is the key reform. New York joins many other states that offer it. But early voting needs to be part of a system of improved voter registration procedures and record keeping. These improvements include automatic voter registration, portability of registration records for those who move within New

York and secure electronic poll books. Establishing this system is not free.

State funding of early voting and related reforms is crucial. Early voting and the promise of involving more voters in our democracy could fail for lack of sufficient funding. County Boards of Elections, which must run elections – establish and staff polling places, create ballots, assure availability and security of voting machinery and certify the results – are already financially stretched to administer elections and cannot cover these additional costs. Especially in the first few years, until the system is established and running smoothly, the additional staff and equipment necessary must be funded by the state.

Governor Cuomo must stand by his many years of support for voting reform now that the legislature has passed the

bills by designating state monies to cover the costs. Your state legislators must insist that he do so. Tell your state legislators that dropping state money for voting reform during 2019 budget negotiations is unacceptable. This cannot wait.

By visiting <http://www.elections.ny.gov/district-map/district-map.html>, you can identify your state legislators. There are many groups advocating voting and election reform. Visit any of these websites to find opportunities to participate in bringing New York voting and elections into the 21st century. Three possibilities are letnyvote.org, fairelectionsny.org and citizensunion.org.

Catherine Ray
Ossining

Mt. Kisco Should Reject Project Labor Agreement for Firehouse Project

The critical project for renovations and additions to the Green Street firehouse will provide hundreds of construction jobs to the region. That's the good news.

The bad news? The Mount Kisco Village Board is making this taxpayer-funded project significantly more expensive by mandating a Project Labor Agreement (PLA).

A PLA is a requirement that contractors hire workers through union halls and follow old-fashioned construction work rules negotiated between government bureaucrats and union bosses. PLAs discriminate against local taxpaying construction workers and increase total construction cost. By signing onto a PLA, the Mount Kisco Village Board is throwing away hard-earned tax dollars.

There are a number of reasons why PLAs waste money. A typical PLA forces a contractor to hire three out of every four

workers from the union hall. Imagine if you owned a company and were told that in order to get a job you would have to tell three out of every four of your employees that they couldn't work on it. Not only wouldn't you do it because of loyalty to your employees, you also wouldn't do it because you have no experience working with these new employees that you've been forced to employ.

There's another reason why PLAs cost more: jurisdictional work rules. Unions collectively bargain work rules with contractors. So, masons can only do mason work. Carpenters can only do carpentry. Electricians can only do electrical work. The result is a very slow progressing construction job, which leads to cost overruns and more money out of your pockets.

If you have a worker that has expertise in masonry, carpentry and drywall, why

shouldn't her or she be able to use those skills across the project? It only makes sense. But under a PLA, that worker can only employ one of those three skills.

As a result, the diminished competition ensures that PLA projects cost up to 30 percent more than necessary. This is why the Kingston School District decided against attaching a PLA to its \$137.5 million renovation plan.

Taxpayers deserve to have their hard-earned tax dollars spent wisely and efficiently. The best way to avoid waste is to simply release the project documents and allow everyone to bid, letting the best contractor, union or non-union, win.

Tanner Schmidt
Government Affairs &
Communications Program Assistant,
Associated Builders and Contractors,
Empire State Chapter

Chordsmen's Free Singing Lessons are a Life-Changing Experience

Your article last week about the Westchester Chordsmen's free singing lessons (Westchester Chordsmen Chorus Offers Free Singing Lessons for Men) showcased just one of this local chorus' several community service programs, which includes its holiday season sing-outs at senior residents and medical facilities, its autumn a cappella youth music festival and its college singing scholarships.

As one who went through this free, no-obligation six-lesson Ready, Set, Sing

program last spring, I can tell you it was a life-changing experience. If nothing else, you'll sing better in the shower and at social events, but more than one-third of the students find the experience so rewarding that they wind up joining the choir.

The Westchester Chordsmen is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) performing arts organization, and while we perform for free a number of times a year as part of our community service programs, we have a few ticketed events, which help

defray rehearsal hall rental fees and other expenses. One such concert is at 7:30 p.m. this Thursday, Jan. 31 at the Emelin Theatre in Mamaroneck. The show features some of the beautiful, contemporary a cappella four-part harmony music we feature during our various community service concerts.

Al Schwartz
Pleasantville

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