

December 15, 2005

Mr. Herman D. Farrell, Jr.
New York Democratic County Committee
60 Madison Avenue, 18th Floor
New York, NY 10010

Mr. Sheldon Silver
Speaker of the State Assembly
250 Broadway, Suite 2300
New York, NY 10007

Re: Judicial Nominating Convention

Dear Messrs. Farrell and Silver:

The members of the Chelsea Reform Democratic Club were shocked and dismayed by the perversion of the Democratic process that resulted in the election of our party's nominee for the only open seat for a New York State Supreme Court Justice in Manhattan.

Our judicial delegates worked hard to be elected both in our club and in the primary election, and the process is one taken very seriously by the Chelsea Reform Democratic Club (CRDC) membership. Our delegates and alternates invested considerable time meeting the individual candidates and examining their records and even met on several occasions to discuss the relative merits of each candidate.

Our commitment to our elected positions, the time and effort we invested in the selection process, and the trust that CRDC and its membership had in us, meant nothing on the night of September 15th, 2005.

At the Judicial Convention, it became evident that certain leaders of the Democratic Party had predetermined the candidate. Then, to the delegates' consternation and frustration, each of the judicial candidates in turn, except the eventual nominee, refused to accept a nomination from the floor, simply stating: "this is not my year."

Additionally, when the chairman asked if anyone was opposed, a large number of the judicial delegates screamed their opposition. What happened next? Inexplicably, the chairman he heard no objections, closed nominations and proclaimed the nominee.

This intervention into the judicial selection process by Democratic Party leaders in New York County rendered the votes of the judicial delegates moot and further disenfranchised all the voters of Manhattan, turning the convention into a sham. We feel we have the right to expect an open democratic process in the selection of our justices.



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Home club of: State Senator Tom Duane, Assemblymember Richard Gottfried, City Councilmember Christine Quinn
State Committeewoman: Doris Corrigan; District Leaders: Mary Dorman and Tom Schuler
Club President: Steven Skyles-Mulligan
Vice Presidents: Marvin Kohl and Luke McAuliffe; Secretaries: Carla Nordstrom, Linda Longstreet and Dan Gettelman
Treasurer: Paul J. Groncki

The conduct was offensive on multiple levels:

1. It made clear that what matters most is who you know, rather than individual merit, if you want to be elected to public office or a judgeship in Manhattan.
2. Confidence in Democratic Party procedure was severely damaged as the elected officials of the party manipulated the process. This resulted in furthering the existing apathy of the electorate at large.
3. The role of elected judicial delegates was summarily reduced to that of a rubber stamp.

However, in Manhattan – unlike Brooklyn – an independent screening panel has been set up by the County Executive Committee. Judicial delegates elected in the September primary are able to meet and interview all of the candidates. In theory, the judicial delegates get to vote, by roll call, for their choice of who to present to voters in the general election. With this process, we could at least say that Manhattan had selected the best of the best based on their judicial qualifications. Unfortunately, with actions like we encountered at the Judicial Convention on September 15th this year, we cannot help but wonder if Manhattan's system is really any better than Brooklyn's? How is the public supposed to respect a democratic process if its elected leaders do not?

We know that you offer members of our party – including our judicial delegates – years of experience and often wise council. Furthermore we understand your commitment to creating a diversified bench. While we agree this is a laudable goal, we also believe that all delegates' voices should be heard equally.

We look forward to discussing this matter – with all of its implications – with you when you visit CRDC on January 19, 2006. We hope for a frank and honest discussion in which we can exchange our views and concerns.

Sincerely,

FOR THE CHELSEA REFORM DEMOCRATIC CLUB

Linda Longstreet
Acting Recording Secretary

Adopted by the Membership October 20, 2005
Approved by the Executive Committee November 3, 2005
Sent as directed by the Executive Committee December 1, 2005