

For Immediate Release  
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**CITIZENS UNION APPLAUDS MAYOR'S CAMPAIGN TO END  
PARTISAN ADMINISTRATION OF ELECTIONS IN NEW YORK**  
*Provides Background on Structure and Function of Board of Elections*  
Supports the Need for a Top to Bottom Review of City Government and Charter

**Statement by Dick Dadey, Executive Director**

Mayor Michael Bloomberg's announcement today in his state of the city address that he will work with Citizens Union in a campaign to end the patronage administration of our elections is welcome news. For far too long, the citizens of New York have not been well served by elections which are managed in a partisan way, resulting in administrative gridlock and a failure to conduct them effectively.

New Yorkers only have to look at how poorly the state has met the responsibilities and obligations of the new federal law, the Help American Vote Act, which was intended to modernize our voting systems and to make them more accessible to all citizens, including the disabled. New York State had to be sued in order to comply with the implementation of the federal law after failing to do so years from when it was required to do so, and its inability to decide upon and offer new safe and accessible machines.

New Yorkers only have to recall the frustrating chaos that often greets them when they go to vote on machines that are decades old and sometimes broken, and when they are helped by poll workers, some of whom are not well equipped to handle questions and address problems.

Citizens Union is eager to ratchet up the pressure to change this 19th century Boss Tweed like system and bring New York' elections into the 21st century.

We are also pleased to see the Mayor say that he will form a new charter revision commission to take a needed and serious look at how well city government has functioned twenty years after the historic structural changes that took place in 1989. New Yorkers now have the benefit of twenty years of experience to assess whether the changes have been effective in improving government's form and function in service to the citizens it represents. This commission's review is important and necessary, and we look forward to participating in such a comprehensive evaluation of the charter and analysis of city government.

## **Excerpts from Mayor Bloomberg's State of the City Address on the Board of Elections and Charter Revision**

"Modernizing City government also requires a comprehensive look at its structure and operations, something that hasn't happened since Mayor Koch appointed a Charter Revision Commission 20 years ago. Since then, a lot has changed, and we've come to see redundancies, antiquated regulations, and areas for cost-savings. It's time to apply those lessons in order to make government more open, accountable, and efficient - not just this year, but permanently. Today, I am pleased to announce that we will appoint a new Charter Revision Commission that will conduct a top-to-bottom review of City government over the next 18 months. We'll consider any proposal that will improve the life of New York and New Yorkers.

"Unfortunately, a Charter Revision Commission can't affect an area that desperately needs modernization: The Board of Elections, perhaps the only agency that still has the party bosses directly calling the shots. But this year, we will work with Citizens Union to build a nonpartisan coalition that unites the left and the right around a very basic idea: Hiring should be based on merit, not party ties. 2008 is the 130th anniversary of the death of Boss Tweed. Let's also make it the year we finally put to rest his style of politics."

### **BACKGROUND on STATE ELECTIONS and THE BOARD of ELECTIONS**

The New York State election administration system is fairly rare in the United States, with a requirement that election officers be bipartisan at every level, from the State Board of Elections (SBOE) down to the Local Board of Elections (LBOE) of each county and New York City. As mandated in the New York State Constitution and detailed in the New York State Election Law, the members of each BOE must be divided equally between the two major political parties. This requirement is the only remaining system of party patronage appointment in New York, and creates various difficulties in the operations and efficiency of state and local BOEs: partisan gridlock in major administrative decisions such as implementation of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), the dominance of the two-party system, and the shortage of poll workers.


Reform of election administration in the state faces one major challenge. The bipartisan requirement is derived from the New York State Constitution, and stipulates that all laws regulating boards or officers with the duties of qualifying voters, distributing ballots, or of receiving and counting ballots shall "secure equal representation" of the two major political parties. All subsequent and relevant election laws have been in accordance with the Constitution. In order to advance major reforms, a constitutional amendment will be needed. The process for passing a constitutional amendment has many steps, and will require a long-range campaign.

There are several models that can inform New York State's election administration structure and the scope of its activities. The majority of states designate the Secretary of State, often an elected position, as the Chief Election Officer. Many states also have several boards or bureaus that separately handle certain aspects of elections and regulation. International models often offer independent nonpartisan approaches, including South Africa and Canada. In Canada, all election officers are required to be politically neutral, and all election workers must take an oath to uphold voters' rights, the secrecy of the

vote, and to perform their duties without favoritism.

A nonpartisan approach in New York State is necessary to ensure that elections are administered fairly and efficiently, that poll workers and officers are not the recipients of partisan favors, and that the voters of New York State are not inadvertently disenfranchised. Citizens Union is committed to advancing a nonpartisan model, and will thoroughly examine the structure of the state and local boards of elections in order to propose a model that will achieve the goals of fair, transparent and accountable administration.

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Citizens Union of the City of New York, a nonpartisan force for good government for more than 100 years, works to inform and engage New Yorkers, to ensure local and state government values its citizens, addresses critical issues, and operates in a fair, open, and fiscally sound manner.

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