

Final Five voting aids NYC unions: More choices for all New Yorkers

Feb 27, 2023 at 5:00 am

As a retiree, I continue to pay dues to my labor union after spending 11 years as a public school teacher. As a former NYC councilmember I compiled a strong labor friendly record.

Labor unions have been major contributors to creating a strong middle class in America and New York City is, and will continue to be, a union town. Politicians of all stripes will seek their endorsement under the present (and poor) electoral system or under the Open Primaries and Final Five system I am proposing. The difference is that my reform will result in a better governed city. Good governance is important to all New Yorkers and especially for organized labor as the city is experiencing a myriad of problems.

New York is hemorrhaging wealthy taxpayers who pay a significant amount of taxes. Commercial real estate in Manhattan is being hammered, resulting in less revenue for city coffers. In addition, federal largesse due to the pandemic is drying up. Many middle and working class civil

servant retirees fed up with quality of life, high real estate taxes and rents are moving down South. I am watching the exodus in my home borough of Staten Island and my former Council District in South Brooklyn.



There is a better way. (Richard Drew/AP)

The municipal active and retiree workforce is already facing higher health care costs, including copays and conflicts over who will cover their benefits in retirement. This issue will become more pronounced as baby boomers are retiring in large numbers and are living longer.

Then there is the defined benefit pensions that are so important to maintaining a decent quality of life in the golden

years. The NYC pension plans are adequately funded presently and for the near future, thanks partially to the city's contributions. However, there are danger signs ahead because of demographics I listed above and poor stock market performance. These dynamics will result in the city having to increase its contributions to maintain the viability of the pension system.

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Private sector unions in construction, etc. face some of the same headwinds because they depend on a fiscally stable and well-run government. Finally, the fiscal health of the city has a lot to do with unions negotiating contracts that at least keep pace with inflation. Indicators seem to point to the workforce (some of whom are working under expired contracts) not receiving agreements that will keep up with the cost of living.

Political leadership is essential to a livable and financially healthy city. New Yorkers have been burdened by poor leadership and unless that changes soon this great

metropolis will continue its downward spiral. One of the main obstacles to good leadership is an outdated and broken political system that benefits political insiders at the expense of the majority of residents.

Our electoral process, driven by closed party primaries, is an exercise in low turnout elections dominated by extreme partisans on the left and right. More than one million and growing unaffiliated voters are excluded from participating in the city's most important election, the primary. The winner, especially in citywide elections, is a lock to win the office because general elections are not competitive. The lack of a competitive general contest and being elected by a small slice of the city's population is terrible.

I am proposing an overhaul of our electoral system to let all registered voters cast their ballot in an open primary and allow candidates to run under traditional party lines, smaller party banners or no labels. The top five vote getters will then move on to the general election where Ranked Choice Voting is utilized, guaranteeing not only badly needed competition but that the winner will have to garner more than 50% of the vote.

Therefore, the mayor and other officials will be significantly incentivized to govern on behalf of the majority of voters rather than a small slice of mainly hard core partisan primary participants. The open primary and final five system will also

minimize polarization and motivate elected officials to focus on solving problems because they will have to appeal to a broader constituency instead of a tiny percentage of voters to be reelected.

Labor unions, and indeed all residents, will have much to lose if the city is not well governed. I am a strong believer that the open primary and final five concept will lead to a better governed New York and plan to make my case to labor leaders. The city is a labor town and unions will continue to play a key role in electing its leadership under any political scheme. However, I am urging them to help reform our politics because it's in the interest of their members and the city as a whole.

Albanese is chairman of [Final Five Voting NYC](#).