

**BENJAMIN FRANKLIN REFORM DEMOCRATIC CLUB
GENERAL MEETING, Wednesday, September 28, 2022
Winston Churchill Co-operative Common Room**

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 pm by President Virginia Krompinger. She spoke about the desire of some for in-person meetings. The membership is asked to let her know their thoughts on this topic.

President Krompinger then moved to the first order of business, the election of new members to the Executive Committee. The candidates are:

- Randi Martos
- Bill Weitz
- Johanna Edmondson
- Ben Jackson

It was moved and seconded that the candidates be elected to the Executive Committee by acclamation.

President Krompinger announced that James Hendon, commissioner of veterans affairs, would speak later on in the meeting. Next, she introduced Vice President Ira Bigeleisen, who spoke on behalf of our endorsed candidate for governor, Kathy Hochul. Vice President Bigeleisen spoke about the seriousness of this race and reported that her opponent, Lee Zeldin, is leading upstate and urged members to take some palm cards and hand them out to friends and neighbors.

President Krompinger thanked our state senate candidate, Miguelina Camilo, for campaigning so vigorously and noted how very close she came against a 10-year incumbent. Ms. Camilo thanked the club for its support and stated that she planned to remain active in our community noting the restaurant week is coming up. She is now the counsel in the assembly speaker's office.

President Krompinger then introduced the evening's speaker, Commissioner Hendon of the Department of Veterans Services. He was CEO of Energy Economic Development Corp., a graduate of West Point, and a seven-year Army veteran.

Commissioner Hendon said he was happy to be in person post COVID and would take questions at the end of his remarks.

What is the mission of his agency? To help veterans and their families. The second largest government agency is the VA, but only 33.1% of veterans are served by them; in NYC the percentage is 24%. People don't know what services are available. State and city agencies also work on veterans issues. We must connect to these people and serve them; assist and inform them about educational, cultural, housing, and employment issues. We connect veterans to opportunities. Four main areas:

1. Help homeless veterans
2. Help veterans apply for benefits for service-connected illnesses; these are lifetime benefits
3. Burial benefits for indigent veterans who pass away
4. Take phone calls from veterans or their family members; reach his agency at (212) 416-5250 or connect@veterans.nyc.gov

Veterans benefits are not advertised enough. If the veteran is at 50% or greater disability, his/her spouse or child is eligible to get health care. Some veterans don't take their benefits because they think others need it more. We try to change that mindset. Commissioner Hendon pointed out that before he knew of veterans death benefits he and an aunt paid for the burial of a grandfather who had served in Korean.

The commissioner advised that often outreach to the veteran must be done several times before help is accepted. The key is for you to ask questions of the veteran and get them to connect to his agency. There are gaps that the city veterans agency tries to close. They will accept calls from caregivers, family members, and survivors. They will connect veterans to government agencies and philanthropic groups. Supportive housing must be specific to veterans issues and much more of it is needed. Commissioner Hendon then took audience questions.

State Democratic Party Executive Committee

Helen Morik noted her re-election to the state party executive committee. She has attended one meeting that was administrative in nature. In future she will report on their substantive meetings.

State Assembly Report

Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz noted some important changes and events in club history. He mentioned the \$30,000 we had been spending for a clubhouse we could not use because of COVID-19. He also spoke about the contentious January 29th meeting in which an alternate slate supported by Senators Rivera and Biaggi challenged the nominated slate of officers.

Assemblyman Dinowitz went on the praise Miguelina Camilo for the great job she did in the state senate race. He also thanked everyone for the work they did to bring him a win in the primary.

As for Congress, the assemblyman opined that the 3rd, 17th, and 18th districts need help. If we don't keep a Democratic majority, Republicans will pass an abortion ban. We have to work to promote Democrats. We also need to form a broad coalition to fight climate change.

Assemblyman Dinowitz then took a question about the cash bail situation. There are different statistics on crime and the cash bail connection. Bail reform law was passed in 2019 and then was modified in 2020. Some of the statistics on the impact of bail reform on crime conflict. We need to know the true statistics before we can do something about further bail reform. Crime has certainly increased, but mental illness brought on by the pandemic is the reason for a lot of the problems. He can't say that bail reform has been a success or a failure.

Helen Morik asked if the new bail law limits a judge's discretion. The assemblyman responded that judges need continuing legal education on how the bail laws are supposed to work. He also took a question on grand larceny and grand theft auto. He doesn't think car theft would have resulted in confinement before trial, so people being released before trial for car theft now under the new law doesn't make any difference. He also took a question about the club's endorsement in the state senate race. He responded that Gustavo Rivera is our endorsed candidate. Under club rules, the winner of the Democratic primary is the candidate endorsed by the club.

City Council Report

Councilman Eric Dinowitz spoke about asylum seekers. He reported that NYC is not getting federal support for these people. A shelter has opened for them in Wakefield. The councilman called the local school to let them know that a shelter that included families with children had opened in their catchment area. The Department of Education moved quickly to meet the needs of these children. Another shelter will be opening in Orchard Beach in two weeks.

He then moved on the redistricting issue. An independent commission was supposed to draw the maps. The commission then voted down their own maps. The city council is supposed to vote on this issue in October, however, they do not yet have the maps that are the subject of the vote.

He is putting forward a bill to allow the uploading of photos and videos as evidence of nuisance issues such as illegally parked cars or construction at illegal hours.

The councilman also discussed educational issues. He stated that IAPs, evaluations given to disabled students so that they receive accommodations for the disabilities, do not automatically follow students to CUNY if they want to keep them. He would like to see a system that would allow students to give permission for their IAPs to be sent to CUNY or even state colleges.

Finally, he spoke about ballot proposals that will be voted on in the November election. Three of them are from the city and one from the state. The city proposals are:

1. Amend the city charter to add a preamble to the statement of values that guide the government
2. Amend the city charter to add a racial equity office to set goals for challenging racial inequities
3. Set a true cost of living to possibly set eligibility standards for benefits

The councilman then responded to two questions about IAPs and making the transition to college or community college.

Announcements

Assemblyman Dinowitz reminded those in the audience who are members of the Bronx County Democratic Committee about the meeting on September 29th.

Michael Friedman audience members about the Making Strides Against Cancer event on October 16th. Anyone who would like to contribute can email him or speak to him after the meeting.

Club members were also reminded to silence their cell phones during meetings.

President Krompinger ended the meeting at 8:50 pm.

Minutes taken by Recording Secretary Nona Louise Dunbar