

Daily News Endorsement of Robert Morgenthau

by Gotham Gazette Staff
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Daily News Editorial

ROBERT MORGENTHAU FOR MANHATTAN DA

There are few public officials who merit being described as distinguished and fewer still who deserve the distinction for decades of service. Robert Morgenthau is one who does. Seeking reelection after 30 years as Manhattan district attorney, Morgenthau leads a prosecutor's office that is the national gold standard. His record on bringing criminals to justice, whether they be street thugs, corrupt politicians or thieving corporate chieftains, is superb. The borough's Democrats must serve the public good by voting to return Morgenthau to office in the Sept. 13 primary.

Years 26 through 30 have been remarkably productive for Morgenthau. His assistants brought far more accused felons to trial than did their peers in the other boroughs, had the highest trial conviction rate and sent by far the highest percentage to prison after guilty verdicts and pleas.

By themselves, those batting averages call for extending Morgenthau's tenure. But the statistics are all the more impressive when you consider his ambitious range of prosecutions. Thousands of murderers, robbers and rapists were packed off to prison while the DA's office also brought the high and mighty to justice. Morgenthau's newly minted convicted felons include former Tyco chief executive Dennis Kozlowski, former state Sen. Guy Velella, former Assemblywoman Gloria Davis and the leadership of the roofers' union, to name a few.

Along the way, Morgenthau also took on the role of Wall Street cop, prosecuting corrupt bankers, stockbrokers and money launderers and recouping \$50 million for the state and city from JPMorgan Chase and Citigroup for their roles in the Enron fraud. And his office is deeply involved now in probing the UN oil-for-food scandal.

Morgenthau's opponent, Leslie Crocker Snyder, served for 20 years as a justice in Manhattan Supreme Court, earning a reputation for meting out tough sentences that provoked death threats from drug gangs. Before her judgeship, Snyder, 63, worked as a Manhattan assistant

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DA for nine years, during which she became the first woman in the history of the office to try homicides. Snyder, in other words, has a fine résumé. What she lacks is a rationale for dumping Morgenthau.

The central tenet of Snyder's campaign is that the DA's office has "grown stale and out of touch." Her accusation is a transparent reference to Morgenthau's age, 86, and is meant to suggest that everyone would be better off if the coot retired to pick apples. Some may agree. Among them we'd count contractor Phillip Minucci, who got 10 years after Morgenthau slammed him with innovative manslaughter charges stemming from the deaths of five \$7-an-hour immigrant masonry workers.

Snyder's proposals for the DA's office range from a sensible focus on domestic violence to a wrongheaded retreat from Morgenthau's white-collar prosecutions. She says, for example, that she would have let other authorities pursue Tyco, forgetting that millions of small shareholders need a watchdog over corporate honesty. She also overlooks that Morgenthau's white-collar cases are a profit center for the city and state, recouping millions of dollars a year in fines, forfeitures and unpaid taxes.

Our occasional differences with Morgenthau - for example, he refused to apply the state's now-defunct death penalty law - pale in comparison to the sweep of his accomplishments. He has prosecuted without fear or favor, pursuing crime in the suites as well as in the streets, and he still has his fastball. The Daily News gives Robert Morgenthau its unqualified, wholehearted endorsement.

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