by Gotham Gazette Staff
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New York City Council Stated Meeting Report

Every two weeks the New York City Council meets for its Stated Meeting to introduce and pass legislation. As a regular feature, Searchlight covers these meetings and posts a summary of the bills passed.

STATED MEETING - October 27, 2004

Quote of the Day:
"This afternoon will live in good government infamy.... I will not participate in a campaign finance system changed in an election year. I say this as someone who has always been a participant. I will pass up all the matching funds that I would be entitled to and I won't touch a single, dirty dollar." - Brooklyn Councilmember Simcha Felder voting against changes in the city's campaign finance program.

Meeting Summary:

The City Council passed a package of bills that it promises will strengthen and improve the city's campaign finance program.

The measures (Intros 124-A , 371-A , and 466-A) increase the maximum amount of public matching funds to $6 for every $1 a candidate raises. The six-to-one matching funds apply to donations under $250 in mayoral races where candidates spend more than $17 million or in City Council races where a candidate spends more than $450,000.

Under the current law, candidates who agree to spending limits are eligible for $4 to $1 matching funds; in mayoral races where a candidate spends more than $2.8 million, candidates are eligible for $5 to $1.

The legislation would also require self-financed candidates who choose not to be part of the voluntary public financing system to abide by the same limits on contributions and spending as those who join the program. Candidates who are not part of the program would also have to

comply with disclosure requirements.

The legislation will aid opponents of billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who spent $74 million of his own money in 2001 and has said he is willing to spend more to get reelected in 2005. City Council Speaker Gifford Miller, who said that the bills would help "ensure free and fair elections," is considered a possible candidate in next year's mayoral race.

The council approved the legislation by a vote of 42 to 7.

Four Democrats - Simcha Felder, Tony Avella, Allan Jennings, and Madeline Provenzano - and three Republicans - James Oddo, Dennis Gallagher, and Andrew Lanza - voted against increasing the amount of matching funds.

"The six to one match is obscene," said Councilmember Madeline Provenzano. "The more money you hand out to people the less responsible they are for it."

Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who called the council's action "the ultimate backroom deal," has promised to veto the bills. The City Council has more than the two-thirds majority of votes needed to override his veto, but the portions that require all candidates to abide by spending limits will likely be challenged in court.

Good government groups like the New York Public Interest Research Group , Common Cause , and