

CAMBRIDGE DEMOCRATIC COMMITTEE- Election Commissioner Candidacy

FOREWORD: I hope that Committee members will visit the May 12, 2017 CAMBRIDGE DAY website article by writers John Hawkinson and Marc Levy on the Election Commission's most recent Budget Hearing before the City Council. Never before scrutinized, the no-show jobs and poor performance of our four Commissioners finally came to light. Since that time our Commissioners have blatantly censored public critique and comment, forged signatures on official election documents, suppressed media requests for information, and even blackballed a citizen from participation in elections as petty revenge for impertinence.

The Boston Globe finally investigated the Cambridge License Commission's performance; an Election Commission review is equally warranted. I'm proud to be the instigator of that Council fracas and promise to continue to act as a taxpayer watchdog.

My name is Gary Mello. I'm a lifelong Cambridge resident living at 324 Franklin Street, and decades long employee at a respected Cambridge small business. I'm a small landlord with an indisputable long commitment to affordable housing. This is my second attempt to become a Cambridge Election Commissioner.

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PERSONAL

I've been a City Council candidate myself three times, and obviously a rabid Democrat. Nobody has attended more Cambridge Election Commission meetings than me in the last three years. I'm a regular at City Council meetings for the last seven years or so and speak publicly occasionally. I know how the City works. Approaching five decades now of delivery service, I know Cambridge geography as well as anyone- an important skill for Election Commissioners.

I am a commissioned Notary Public in Massachusetts and consider this a prerequisite for such a highly paid position. Commissioners Cobb and Ward's illegal behavior is problematic.

Most importantly for Democratic Committee members, I have conducted extensive research into the operation of Election Commissions in Massachusetts. Through examination of more than forty city and town internet sites and conversations with municipal officers, communication with the Secretary of State's office and official publications I've become very highly informed on Voting Rights and procedures. Should anyone else ever perform such studies, they'll also conclude that Cambridge Election Commissioners are indisputably the highest compensated in the state at as much as fifty times their peers with the lightest workload of all. Their performance is arguably the worst in the state and business-as-usual begs for attention.

It would sure be nice if I could describe my experience as a pollworker. Unfortunately, with both our Democratic Commissioners hiring family members and ignoring my applications to work Election Day they can keep competition down. I get even by visiting more precincts than they do themselves on election day and getting the dirt.

MOTIVATION

I won't deny that the first attraction of this appointment was the fulltime pay and benefits for a no-show job- I've known about this racket for many years. Any current officeholder who denies the same is fibbing. Nobody ever looks!

As time passes I become even more consumed by the election process- locally and overall as well. What I offer is *initiative* and my desire to do what's best- not passing work on to anybody else as our four Commissioners prioritize.

I will, perhaps for the first time ever, enforce the City's Ethics Ordinance as charged. This important Commission function is pretty much forgotten.

Totally informed as I am, I can assure the Committee that no personal scheduling conflicts will interfere with my duties unlike other members.

VOTER PARTICIPATION

Look elsewhere for highfalutin' conceptual schemes I can easily regurgitate. As I've complained for years, they *still* don't offer- or even have- voter registration forms at the Traffic & Parking windows where a new resident buys a parking sticker. This is the City's primary portal to snag new voters. What's so tough about carrying some forms two hundred feet?

Access to polls is becoming more of an issue. While our city does an exemplary job with the low socioeconomic demographic, the newest Cambridge residents paying astronomic housing costs have a real challenge voting. East Cambridge Northpoint is effectively severed from voting; Alewife tenants and condo owners nearly so. Some of the existing precinct locations really aren't that good, are they?

As your Commissioner, my first priority will be to even up the Ward 1 polling locations. We have to consider polling places such as temporary storefront or single day restaurant use as other communities do. Restricting ourselves to municipal buildings hamstring our outreach.

VOTER LISTS

I'm not greatly concerned about registered voter access on election day because the Provisional Ballot does as intended and we are very liberal in offering to any individual. The office staff does a great job resolving questions and it all comes out in the wash. Be careful- Commissioners have a negligible to zero role in this process just as they'd have you believe that they perform other important duties they're wrongly credited for.

COMMISSION STAFF

Continuing from the previous paragraph, the reader must fully appreciate that the Cambridge Election Commission professional staff, not the *Commissioners*, perform all but *very few* of the tasks associated with elections, census, statements of financial interests, voter registration, validation of nomination papers and the like. The suggestion that our four Commissioners are supervising or even aware of department activity insults those employees who are doing a pretty good job.

An Executive Director, Assistant Executive Director, full time office staff and temps run the Elections Department. Give them a call sometime and ask for Etheridge, Polly, Larry, or Charlie.

As an election approaches, Commissioners do indeed have a number of small but important tasks to perform though never on a full time basis. Pick up a copy of Commission meeting minutes and you'll see just how little time is required- *and they have the very same obligations that every other Election Commissioner in the Commonwealth* has. So just what are we paying these guys for?

BUDGET

What jumps off the page- every page- in our City's Elections budget compared with others is the \$200,000 or so in pay and benefits we pay four Commissioners while every other

Commissioner / Registrar in the state gets a token stipend at best for more work. Worcester, second largest city in the Commonwealth, is *probably* going to pop for a combined \$6000.

The Executive Director draws up our annual budget. Commissioners are totally uninvolved.

Elections aren't cheap anywhere. New unfunded mandates such as early voting and presumed same day registration won't happen in other towns struggling for cash. Fortunately, we have the money to deal with these expenses, but consistent with every other department in our city, economy is never considered. That's what got me to run for City Council!

ELECTION COMMISSION OPERATIONS

My personal experience as a City Council candidate and voter leads to compliments for the Elections *Department*. Conversely, as one of the few to ever review our four *Commissioners'* performance, there's plenty to be fixed. It's quite difficult to criticize a quartet that has so little to do in the first place; nonetheless our Commissioners poor judgement, lack of knowledge, and perhaps incompetence are impossible to ignore. While the office staff is forthcoming and helpful, Commissioner Cobb refuses to accept written public comment for the record and edits down spoken testimony at meetings- even when an employee's good work is praised. The whole gang steadfastly refused to answer a journalist's simple inquiries and appeals about November's election and forced legal action for disclosure. It's a case of arrogance and entitlement.

Can you find another town whose Commissioners performed worse than Cambridge's in the Presidential election of 2016? Commissioners, City Councillors, and the City Manager circled the wagons and hope you never ask embarrassing questions.

Including the four Commissioners, Cambridge Elections has a full time staff of nine. That number was bumped up- a new full time position- two years ago to accommodate an increasing Department workload while the Commissioners themselves stay clear of the office.

Seven weeks after their previous "meeting", Commissioners first met in 2017 on January 18. Through the first of June they met six times for a total three and a half hours in session. There's nothing to discuss! I won't try to fool the public contending that these brief appearances constitute a real job. Springfield's Commissioners meet quarterly, handle far more precincts, and organize elections better than we do for less compensation per year than we pay weekly. We've got to start looking at others to improve our own performance.

There's a CCTV video out there "Election Worker Training". You'll properly view the contractor, not the Commissioners, doing the training. Additionally, the Assistant Executive Director publishes a Training Manual and PowerPoint slideshow. Commissioners simply read the projector screen and if something goes wrong she fixes it. Total "training session" time can be as little as three hours annually for each Commissioner. I propose to end this sham training by Commissioners and turn everything over to the staff who ultimately deal with the aftermath.

If we cheat and register our people for Worcester's online course it might help.

I agree, of course, that local Pollworkers are preferred. Wardens, Clerks and inspectors take two unpaid meals breaks but for many it's impossible to vote themselves. The Commissioners' chauffeurs may be able to resolve this problem.

ELECTION DAY

The biggest problems at the polls emerge at closing time. That's when people who last did closeout duties a whole two years earlier. can get tripped up. It's all about training- a forty minute slideshow session just doesn't cut it! As I stated earlier, the office staff cleans up problems and workers will be better prepared if the training is performed by professionals. A mock election day and closeout is worth an extra hour's pay.

New tabulating machines to be introduced in 2018 will be a gamechanger. Extra training and vigilance has to be considered.

Everything was going great on Election Day 2017 till a technical glitch stopped everything- no fault of anyone. The Commissioners' behavior in the days that followed remains an absolute disgrace. If they refuse to serve the public they're unsuited for the job. Call the lawyers!

RECOUNTS

The 2013 recount employed sixty people over five days and proved that this whole PR thing is becoming a lost art. Personally, I would need plenty of study to oversee this event.

More recent and relevant, the state ordered an audit (not a recount) of two of our precinct results in 2016. We scheduled two dozen people to work three days .After organizing they did the job in about the same couple of hours as other towns where a handful of ballot counters did everything.without a fuss. You've got to look at how the neighbors do things...

VOTING RIGHTS

NON-CITIZEN VOTING: Despite some confusion, green card holders and even illegals from Norway can vote back in Oslo. Voting is for full citizens and I encourage them all to join us.

VOTING AGE: Eighteen works for me unless my competition insists on 17. Then mark me at 16.

SAME DAY REGISTRATION: I'm on the losing side on this one and I know it. What's so difficult about timely registration? Recent cracks in the Secretary of State's position mean that same day registration is in for 2019. This could be a calamity for some Election Departments since the state won't foot the extra costs they're suggesting for more personnel and gadgets like e-books. I insist that many such ballots must be treated as Provisionals. Lookout Quincy House!

ID REQUIRED: Inactive voters already have to supply ID and an affirmation. The same day registrants need to be vetted as well.

AUTOMATIC REGISTRATION: What's that you say? *Compulsory* registration? ACLU?

CHANGES IN ELECTION LAW

2016 brought in Early Voting, a huge improvement I'm wildly in favor of. Additionally (see above), same day registration is coming soon. I'll confine my enthusiasm for Early Voting for now with just a few comments:

The Good: 1) It really facilitates voting for a large number of residents.

2) Early Voting is how we Democrats can defeat Charlie Baker.

The Bad: 1) It really didn't work that well in Cambridge. Compared to 2012, total votes cast didn't increase as much as hoped for.

2) Predictably and characteristically, your four Commissioners tried to weasel out of any additional work and nearly succeeded.

3) Location, location, location!

MISCELLANEOUS

Let's be clear and honest about everything: the job of Election Commissioners/ Registrars is as dumbed down and simple as it can get. That's the truth about a whole elections process meant to be handled by civilians on a casual basis. There are absolutely no qualifications for the

job other than Party membership. Most municipalities operate elections as a subset of their Clerk's Office and typically run more elections than Cambridge unremarkably.

Here we have a full time professional staff running an Elections Department which costs the same kind of money as the City Clerk. Over the last century, Cambridge's four Commissioners' duties shrank from full time workers to extreme casuals with negligible time obligations.. Experience and interest in elections, politics, etc. sure helps, but the fundamental task-bipartisan overview and protection of voting privileges is what it's really all about.

I won't be assuming an entitled attitude about that responsibility. I intend to work for my money. As I've already started, I'll continue to examine and justify the status quo or make for change when warranted.

As your Commissioner I will emphasize, not restrict public inputs and requests. The present Commissioners' cavalier behavior towards important document authentication gets fixed. I'll continue to monitor city government in enforcement of the Ethics Ordinance.

Pollworker training and satisfaction will be front burner priorities. *Our whole elections process works as well as it does because we have a large, long serving cadre of Inspectors, Clerks and Wardens.* Give them the credit they deserve for hanging in there.

The City Manager's selection of a new Election Commissioner is effectively a lifetime appointment. Choose carefully based on past performance as well as future promises.

(signed)