

Center for Judicial Accountability, Inc. (CJA)

From: Center for Judicial Accountability, Inc. (CJA) [elena@judgewatch.org]
Sent: Thursday, August 23, 2012 4:35 PM
To: 'lawrence.norden@nyu.edu'
Cc: 'Eric.Lane@hofstra.edu'
Subject: Predicating Electoral Endorsements on the Brennan Center's Recommended Legislative Rule Changes

Dear Mr. Norden,

This follows up my phone call to you yesterday in which I proposed that the Brennan Center immediately contact the editorial boards of this state's newspapers as they are doubtlessly already deciding on whether to endorse incumbent legislators seeking re-election or their challengers – and no candidate should be endorsed who is not committed to the democracy-essential legislative rule changes proposed by the Brennan Center's 2004 report, "The New York State Legislative Process: An Evaluation and Blueprint for Reform" – or who, as an incumbent legislator, failed to do everything in his/her power to see them implemented.

Of course, it is not only newspapers that sway the voting public by their endorsements -- organizations, associations, unions also do, as, likewise, public figures. My yesterday's proposal should, therefore, be expanded: the Brennan Center should immediately contact them, too.

Neither proposal is difficult for the Brennan Center. Indeed, the first paragraph of the Preface to the Brennan Center's 2006 update "Unfinished Business: New York State Legislative Reform" identifies that "Dozens of newspaper editorials endorsed [the] conclusions" of its 2004 report and that "A coalition of 83 organizations, including civic, business, religious and labor groups, formed to press for change." Surely, they would be receptive to ensuring that any re-elected incumbent or new legislator be committed to legislative rule change, without which dysfunction will remain the norm.

Time is of the essence. Please confirm that the Brennan Center will be following through with these two proposals – largely inspired by the closing paragraph of Eric Lane's 1997 article "*Albany's Travesty of Democracy*", itself the genesis of the Brennan Center's 2004 report:

"Lasting change will come about in Albany only when reform becomes a standard election issue, like taxes, criminal justice, and the schools. Voters will have to press candidates on their willingness to turn the Legislature into a true representative body. Editorial boards and interest groups will have to stake their endorsements on a commitment to openness and deliberation. Today, legislators' complicity in the Albany system costs them nothing. Tomorrow, it should cost them their jobs."

As each and every one of the Brennan Center's recommended legislative rule changes is so eminently sensible, incumbent legislators must be interrogated as to each and called to account for the proposed rule changes that were not enacted.

I assume that changing the Senate and Assembly rules is a matter of majority vote by the Senators and Assembly members. Is that correct? Or are the changes made by the Senate Majority Leader and Assembly Speaker, whose election is by a majority vote of the Senators and Assembly members of the majority party of each house? I don't see the specifics of how changes are made to the legislative

rule in either the 2004 report or the subsequent 2006 and 2008 updates. Maybe you, Professor Lane, or someone else at the Brennan Center will do an op-ed piece containing such particulars so that the voters can better understand the situation.

Please call me as soon as you are able, as I have several additional suggestions to discuss. You were unavailable when I called about 2 hours ago, leaving a message on your voice mail.

Thanks.

Elena Sassower, Director
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