

WHY TUESDAY?

FIXING OUR VOTING SYSTEM, ONE QUESTION AT A TIME

Wednesday, October 8, 2014

The Honorable Herb J. Wesson, Jr.
The Los Angeles City Council Rules, Elections & Intergovernmental Relations Committee
The City Ethics Commission
200 North Spring Street City Hall, Van Nuys Council Chambers
Los Angeles, California 90012

Dear Committee Members,

First and foremost, we would like to applaud LA Council President Herb J. Wesson, Jr., the Rules, Elections, & Intergovernmental Relations Committee, the City Ethics Commission, and the City of Los Angeles for having this vital conversation. With the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 fast approaching, nationwide we are experiencing a deafening silence on the deplorable state of our most essential right. We are so very pleased to see that this is not the case in your fine City.

By initiating this discussion, Los Angeles is taking the first step in ending the cycle of apathy that is eroding the foundation of our democracy. The everyday citizen will only actively engage with their government, when they feel that their government is committed to actively engaging with them. The voter lottery proposal that currently sits before you is a great first step. Although civic engagement is its own reward, a monetary prize reminds us that we shouldn't vote simply out of obligation. It is in our own self-interest to take an active role in shaping our communities and evaluating the performance of our elected representatives.

We do sincerely wish though, that this proposal is only the beginning of an ongoing conversation about how to make voting as accessible as possible to every citizen.

The United States of America, the world's most iconic democracy, currently ranks 138th out of 172 democracies in the world in terms of voter turnout, and dead last among G7 nations. Despite the billions of dollars that will be spent in this year's election, American voter participation will likely remain so low that we rank in the bottom twenty percent of all countries in voter turnout.

Why? Census data reveals the number one reason Americans don't vote isn't laziness or apathy -- it's convenience. For too many Americans, it's too hard to take time out of a busy workday and make it to the polls. For some, voting is at worst a minor inconvenience, but for those who commute long distances, work multiple jobs, or don't have access to transportation, it can become almost impossible.

Simply put: our voting system is broken. But we can fix it.

Should the country follow the example of North Dakota, and get rid of voter registration? Washington, Oregon, and Colorado have transitioned to a primarily vote-by-mail system, should the rest of the country follow suit? In an age where everybody gets their cash from a computer, isn't it time to start looking at voting, or at least registering to vote, online? And when are we finally going to move Election Day to the weekend so that we can start to relish voting instead of squeezing it in on a busy workday?

By asking these questions and engaging with your citizens in this conversation, the City of Los Angeles is demonstrating a firm commitment to strengthening our democracy. It is our sincerest wish that you and your City will continue to set an example that the rest of the nation will follow.

Sincerely,

William Wachtel
Co-founder, Why Tuesday?

Jacob Soboroff
Member, Board of Directors, Why Tuesday?



We Grow Hope and Harvest Change

October 8, 2014

Honorable City Council
c/o Office of the City Clerk
Los Angeles City Hall
200 N. Spring St., Room 395
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Honorable City Council Members,

Community Harvest Foundation requests that the following Community Impact Statement be added to Council File 13-1364, regarding dates on which the City's regular municipal elections take place.

COMMUNITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Community Harvest Foundation supports the City of Los Angeles' Election Reform Commission recommendation to change the dates of the City's regular primary and general municipal elections from the current schedule of March and May of odd numbered years to a new schedule of June and November of even numbered years.

Community Harvest Foundation's leadership believes that this is the first logistical step in enhancing our city's voter engagement and turnout. We also recognize that this cannot be the only reform initiative and look forward to continuing this dialogue with the appropriate stakeholders and decision makers in our communities of interest.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Charletta Johnson".

Charletta Johnson
CEO



To provide community services & neighborhood
improvements to help boost the economic livelihood

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October 8, 2014

Honorable City Council
c/o Office of the City Clerk
Los Angeles City Hall
200 N. Spring St., Room 395
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Honorable City Council Members,

El Salvador Corridor of Los Angeles requests that the following Community Impact Statement be added to Council File 13-1364, regarding dates on which the City's regular municipal elections take place.

COMMUNITY IMPACT STATEMENT

El Salvador Corridor of Los Angeles support the City of Los Angeles' Election Reform Commission recommendation to change the dates of the City's regular primary and general municipal elections from the current schedule of March and May of odd numbered years to a new schedule of June and November of even numbered years.

This Community Impact Statement is based on the action taken by El Salvador Corridor of Los Angeles members with a vote of 6 yes, 0 no, 0 abstaining and directed that a Community Impact Statement be filed reflecting this position.

Motion "El Salvador Corridor of Los Angeles supports the City of Los Angeles' Election Reform Commission recommendation to move the dates of the City's regular and primary and general municipal elections from the current schedule of March and May of odd numbered years to a new schedule of June and November of even numbered years."


Oscar Dominguez
President



"Thomas" C. L. Thomas
Minister/Evangelist

Normandie Church of Christ

October 8, 2014

Honorable City Council
c/o Office of the City Clerk
Los Angeles City Hall
200 N. Spring St., Room 395
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Honorable City Council Members,

Normandie Church of Christ requests that the following Community Impact Statement be added to Council File 13-1364, regarding dates on which the City's regular municipal elections take place.

COMMUNITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Normandie Church of Christ supports the City of Los Angeles' Election Reform Commission recommendation to change the dates of the City's regular primary and general municipal elections from the current schedule of March and May of odd numbered years to a new schedule of June and November of even numbered years.

Normandie Church of Christ's leadership believes that this is the first logistical step in enhancing our city's voter engagement and turnout. We also recognize that this cannot be the only reform initiative and look forward to continuing this dialogue with the appropriate stakeholders and decision makers in our communities of interest.

"Thomas" C. L. Thomas

Sunday Worship Schedule

Worship - 8:00 am, Bible Class - 10:15 am, Worship - 11:30 am and Worship - 5:00 pm

6306 S. Normandie Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90044 * Phone 323.750.3212 * Fax 323.750.5180



East Area Progressive Democrats

*Values-Driven Politics for
Community-Driven Governance*

October 8, 2014

Contact:
ph 323-669-9999
eapd.la@gmail.com

Mailing address:
2350 Hidalgo Ave.
Los Angeles, CA 90039

Dear L.A. City Councilmember:

We write to express our club's unanimous support for increasing voter turnout in city elections and thus our **opposition to any scheme to move election dates**.

We support the current schedule of odd-year city elections and oppose any effort to shift election dates to even years.

We believe that the **integrity** of our long-term investment in city elections that are **more accessible** to well-qualified candidates motivated by public service while drawing on a broad base of community support *and* that are **less dominated** by deep-pocketed special interests with a stake in government decisions—namely through matching funds in city elections—to **be in danger by any move forcing city and state elections to coincide**.

Moving election dates actually risks driving down voter turnout in city elections, particularly among people of color constituencies, rather than galvanizing public attention for and participation in city elections.

In 2013, for instance, voter turnout in the city's March primary election was 20 percent, and turnout in the May runoff election was 22 percent. While these are unsatisfactory numbers in themselves, they loom significantly larger than the meager 16 percent of city voters who bothered to cast ballots in the even-year June 2014 statewide primary election.

Turnout in the city in the 2014 primary, in comparison with the city's 2013 elections, actually **fell by 20 percent** from the odd-year city primary and **fell by 28 percent** from the odd-year city runoff election.

Moreover, moving election dates to even years alongside state elections represents a **backward and regressive step** away from our long-term investment in matching funds. It would mark a **deviation from our progress** toward a "stage for multiple voices in the City's elections" and toward providing qualified candidates a capacity "to raise funds without having to rely on large campaign contributions and on excessive fundraising and expenditures." These are not quotes from an academic manifesto, but rather from L.A. City Ethics Commission's current candidate guide about the purpose of the matching-funds program.¹

It is a crucial matter of context to note that moving city elections to even years to coincide with state elections **relegates city campaigns to a campaign fundraising and spending environment dominated by corporate donations**. While direct corporate donations to federal candidates are outlawed and subject to

(continued)

www.EAPD.LA
@EAPDLA

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strict low caps of \$700 and \$1,200 for city candidates, they are entirely legal in state campaigns in California up to \$8,200 per election cycle for state legislative candidates and much higher thresholds for statewide candidates. Indeed, for many candidates for state office—all running amid the din and scramble of even-year state elections—corporate donations from deep-pocketed interests are the lion’s share of their campaign cash.

To maintain the vision and purpose of the city’s matching-funds program for qualified candidates, if city elections were to be conjoined with state elections, the budget for the city’s matching funds program would have to undergo a massive expansion, not an incremental but an exponential cost increase to the city. This increase in cost to the city would exceed, likely by a large margin, any projected cost savings from holding coincidental even-year municipal and state elections within the city.

This issue is distinct from the separate but concomitant hazard of dropoff in voting for city offices if city elections are thrown onto the same ballot as state elections. In one notable instance in 2009 when state and city elections were on the same ballot, dropoff from state to the highest-turnout city election was 11 percent and to other municipal elections was 24 percent.²

Finally, it is worth looking carefully at data for the most recent odd-year and even-year primary election turnout levels. Doing so sheds light on participation by city voters in people of color communities. **From the March 2013 and May 2013 city elections, Los Angeles saw reductions in voter turnout by Asian American, African American, and Latino voters in significant margins to the June 2014 state primary election.**

For African American voters, the drops were 16 and 24 percent. For Asian American voters, the drops were 14 and 23 percent. For Latino voters, drops in turnout to the even-year primary election in 2014 were particularly striking: 36 percent and 47 percent decreases. Any move to even-year primaries heightens these risks.

As voters, we relish the opportunity to meet, research, encourage, recruit, educate, interview, donate to, endorse, evaluate, campaign for, and vote on candidates for L.A. city offices in a deliberative manner.

Unless proponents of moving city election dates to even years are prepared to make major investments in and show promising results from an effort to remove corporate money from state candidate campaigns that dominate the fundraising and spending environments of state elections in even years, any scheme to consign city elections to unfolding in that context is particularly irresponsible.

For these reasons we unanimously support the current schedule of city elections and increasing turnout in them. And we unanimously oppose any move to even years, especially any scheme to force them into coinciding with state elections.

We appreciate your attention to this issue and are ready to answer questions or speak with you or your staff.

Sincerely,



Hans Johnson, *EAPD President*

on behalf of the officers and members of East Area Progressive Democrats

Notes

1. L.A. City Ethics Commission, “City Candidate Guide: 2015 Regular Elections,” April 2014, page 9, at <http://ethics.lacity.org/PDF/publications/candguides/pub_CityCandGuide2015.pdf>.

2. L.A. City Municipal Election Reform Commission, “In Opposition to the Recommendation to Move Los Angeles City Elections to June/November of Even-Numbered Years,” June 2014, p. 1, at: <http://ens.lacity.org/cla/mec_importdoc/clamec_importdoc334788141_06052014.pdf>