

Four Freedoms Democratic Club
April General Membership Meeting
April 16, 2020
6:45-8:45pm
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Minutes

1. Introduction (5 minutes)
 - a. President Jerry Ferguson called the meeting to order and thanked everyone for so quickly adapting to the new virtual format
 - b. The members held a round of applause as a tribute to the heroes risking their lives working in healthcare and other essential services

2. Guest Speaker – City Council Member Mark Levine (30 minutes)
 - a. City Council member Mark Levine of 7th District, Chair of the Committee on Health, spoke to the club about the work needed to rebuild New York City following the pandemic
 - i. To reopen, we will need adequate testing, contact tracing, and supplies to ensure no overwhelming of the healthcare system in the event of a further spike in cases
 1. We will need a new healthcare infrastructure, including thousands of new workers to manage testing & tracing, and new forms of transport for at-risk persons
 - b. Q&A:
 - i. Esther Yang – are the USNS Comfort and the Javitz Center now accepting coronavirus victims?
 1. Both facilities originally took *no* coronavirus patients, but are now taking some; however, neither is anywhere near the capacity they should be, while hospitals are overflowing
 - ii. District Leader Kim Moscaritolo – what are some of the health and hospital policies we can put in place to protect against the next pandemic?
 1. We will need to invest in hospital resources, nursing staffing, and health equity
 - a. In the wake of 9/11, we poured trillions into anti-terrorism efforts; hopefully, we will now see pandemic prevention as an equivalent threat, and invest heavily in our preparedness
 - iii. Julianne Ballington – what is the plan for at-risk and people with disabilities to be able to return to work?
 1. If we can ensure that our workplaces are corona-free, via mass testing and contact tracing, we can start to return to the workplace, *but* we will have to maintain social distancing protocols, wear facemasks, and take other steps to reduce the risk of transmission for some time

- iv. District Leader Ben Wetzler – is there a consensus among experts on whether there will be a second outbreak, and what steps is the City taking to prepare?
 - 1. We have already seen second surges in other countries, and that is a big risk here, which will not truly subside until we have an effective and widely-available vaccine
 - v. Erica Vladimer – with the federal government failing to provide needed support, what are the city and state’s options to make up for the shortfall?
 - 1. We are working on producing some personal protective equipment (PPE); however, we will not have enough testing kits absent federal support
 - c. How can the club help?
 - i. The most important variable right now is the federal response, and thus the club can push federal officials to ramp up relief
3. State Committee Update (10 minutes)
 - a. State Committee Member Lauren Trapanotto gave the club an update on the efforts at the State party level to advocate for rent relief legislation, and what the Club to do to support such efforts
 - i. The club’s new economic justice working group has passed a resolution in support of rent relief bills, and SCM Lauren is focused on pushing our elected officials to pass some version of the bill
 - 1. There is precedent for rent relief – e.g., after 9/11
 - b. SCM Lauren invited anyone who is interested in getting involved to email her at lauren@votelauren.nyc
4. Guest Speaker – David Hershey-Webb (25 minutes)
 - a. Tenants’ advocate David Hershey-Webb returned to the club to speak about efforts to advocate for rent relief and other tenants’ rights during this public health & economic crisis
 - i. Upwards of 30% of NYC tenants have trouble paying rent
 - ii. The state has an eviction moratorium in place until June 20th, but the question remains: what then?
 - 1. If tenants immediately owe back rent, many will not be able to pay
 - iii. Without relief, housing courts will be overwhelmed by the resulting flood of eviction cases
 - b. The stet legislature is currently debating several bills, including ones that would:
 - i. Extend the eviction moratorium to 6 months after the stay-at-home order ends
 - 1. However, rent would still be due during this time, and the owner could still sue the renter in civil court for a monetary judgment
 - ii. Cancel rent entirely

1. The argument in favor of such a measure is that landlords are in a much better position to absorb losses than tenants, especially given the mortgage relief measures already in place
 2. There has been strong pushback from real estate groups, and others argue that any bill would have to distinguish between big and small landlords
 - iii. Provide funding to cover all or part of rent
 - iv. Allow tenants to break their leases without penalty
 - c. Q&A:
 - i. Ben – many tenants’ rights organizations have advocated for a rent strike in May; is this a good idea?
 1. Any intentional non-payment of rent is risky, as it can count against the tenant against in a future proceeding and leave them open to legal action (including eviction)
 - ii. Jordan Stein – the City Council has debated allowing landlords to use security deposits to pay for April rent; is this a good idea?
 1. This measure would simply be a band-aid, not a long-term solution, and would risk setting a dangerous precedent for the misuse of security deposits
 - iii. Matt Lombardi – how do we provide relief to commercial tenants?
 1. We need to build alliances between commercial and residential tenants, because all are suffering right now
 - iv. Julianne – how do the current bills apply to SROs?
 1. The eviction moratorium applies to all tenants, as do other bills currently being considered
 - v. Ilyssa – what is the best option for tenants whose lease has expired and they were not planning to renew, but they also cannot move?
 1. One of the bills being considered gives judges the discretion to allow you a year to move
5. District Leader Elections Update (15 minutes)
- a. Kim and Ben gave an update on what is happening in our district to help respond to the crisis and prepare for the 2020 elections
 - i. The primary election has been moved to June 23rd
 - ii. The state will interpret election rules to permit every registered voter to request an absentee ballot
 1. Voters should request a ballot no later than June 16th, and the ballot must be postmarked no later than June 22nd
 - iii. Groups have asked the governor to prohibit all petitioning challenges, since such challenges require in-person review
 - b. The elections working group is meeting on Wednesday, 4/22, at 6:30pm, via Zoom
6. Working Group Reports (15 minutes)
- a. Working groups gave an update on their recent activities:
 - i. Health working group (Jeremy Berman):

1. The group passed a resolution to protect whistleblowers who speak out about conditions at hospitals
 - ii. Wellness working group (Esther Yang):
 1. The group invites all member to join a Yoga session at at 12:00-12:15 tomorrow
 2. The group also created a quarantine resources [portal](#)
 - iii. Education working group (Amy Schwartz):
 1. Co-Chair Amy Schwartz thanked FFDC members for recently reaching out to NYS Legislators to request full funding of Foundation Aid for NYC schools in proposed State budget.
 2. She reported that recently enacted state budget had deep cuts in school funding, and asked members to look for upcoming FFDC newsletter that will include a request to NYS Legislators to prevent further cuts
7. Guest Speaker – City Council Member Ben Kallos (20 minutes)
- a. Our District’s City Council Member Ben Kallos spoke to the club about the City’s efforts to combat the coronavirus, and to aid those most in need during this crisis – updates included:
 - i. The City is facing a huge budget shortfall due to the pandemic, and is looking at ways to shore up its resources
 - ii. Schools with continue virtually through the end of the semester
 1. CM Kallos is working with Spectrum to bridge the digital divide and ensure all students have broadband access, which is necessary for remote learning
 - iii. The SBA loan program has run out of money
 1. However, businesses should still apply now so their applications are processed by the time the program gets more money
 - b. Q&A:
 - i. Jordan – the City Council has proposed using security deposits to pay for rent; is this a bridge to a better solution, or would it give Albany license to abdicate its duties?
 1. A security deposit may *not* be used for rent (only for repairs), and thus this proposal would set a dangerous precedent
 2. Rent cancelation is preferable
 - a. We gave banks bailout lans with zero interest, and provided property owners with mortgage relief; they should pass these forms of assistance on to tenants, who need it the most, in the form of rent holiday
8. Guest Speaker – Assembly Member Rebecca Seawright (20 minutes)
- a. Our Assembly Member Rebecca Seawright spoke to the club about her efforts to address the crisis – updates included:

- i. There is a push to allow New York's delegate to the Democratic National Convention in August to vote remotely, and/or by proxy delegates to the DNC in August be allowed to vote remotely?
 - ii. AM Seawright is leading an inquiry into the conditions at Coler Hospital on Roosevelt Island, which has not received adequate PPE
 - b. Q&A:
 - i. Ben – what are the prospects that the legislature could reconvene this year to debate more relief bills?
 - 1. The legislature is working out how to allow virtual voting; however, no physical session in Albany is expected
 - ii. Amy – should we be concerned that the budget allows the governor to make future cuts to education?
 - 1. Members are encouraged to write letters to the Governor expressing their view that education funding not become a casualty of the pandemic
 - c. AM Seawright invited members to volunteer to help deliver meals to people in need, and to contact her office with any further questions
- 9. Adjourn (2 minutes)
 - a. Jerry called the meeting to a close
 - b. In keeping with the club's tradition of convening at a local bar following meetings, the Zoom was kept open, providing members an opportunity to interact