

CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION TESTIMONY
MAY 25, 2010 — TERM LIMITS
BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT MARTY MARKOWITZ

WELCOME TO BROOKLYN, CHAIRMAN GOLDSTEIN AND MEMBERS OF THE CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION.

I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR YOUR DEDICATION IN LISTENING TO ALL VOICES ON CRITICAL ISSUES LIKE THE ONE BEFORE YOU TODAY — TERM LIMITS.

I MUST TELL YOU — I HAVE NEVER FOUND TERM LIMITS TO BE GOOD GOVERNMENT.

I BELIEVE THE VOTERS SHOULD ALWAYS BE ABLE TO DECIDE FOR THEMSELVES WHO WILL REPRESENT THEM. AND THAT THE MOST EFFECTIVE “TERM LIMITS” WE CAN POSSIBLY HAVE — ARE KNOWN AS “ELECTIONS.”

I SERVED IN THE STATE SENATE FOR 23 YEARS, AND RAN FOR ELECTION ELEVEN CONSECUTIVE TIMES. I’VE NOW RUN THREE TIMES FOR BOROUGH PRESIDENT. AND AT ANY TIME, THE PUBLIC COULD HAVE SAID — “YOU’RE FIRED!”

EVERY ELECTION ALLOWS VOTERS TO “TERM LIMIT” OUT THEIR ELECTED OFFICIALS.

THE PROBLEM WITH TERM LIMITS IS THAT THEY DO NOT ALLOW PUBLIC OFFICIALS TO BECOME “EXPERTS” — TO GAIN A REAL WORKING KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR POSITION AND THE SUBJECT FIELDS OVER WHICH THEY PRESIDE OR LEGISLATE — AND TO SEE MAJOR PROJECTS THROUGH TO COMPLETION.

QUITE THE CONTRARY — LIMITING SERVICE TO TWO FOUR-YEAR TERMS TURNS ELECTED PUBLIC OFFICIALS INTO PERPETUAL “JOB HUNTERS” — PLANNING THEIR RUN FOR ANOTHER PUBLIC OFFICE OR EYEING THE PRIVATE SECTOR FOR OPPORTUNITIES. THESE “JOB HUNTERS” ARE FAR LESS INCLINED TO TAKE A STAND AGAINST THE “SPECIAL INTERESTS” WHO MAY BE GIVING THEM THEIR NEXT JOB.

AND LET’S BE HONEST, IN A “TERM LIMIT” SCENARIO, EVENTUALLY THE ONES WHO KNOW THE MOST ABOUT GOVERNMENT ARE THE UNELECTED BUREAUCRATS — WHO MAY BE WONDERFUL — BUT WHO, AT THE END OF THE DAY, ARE NOT DIRECTLY ACCOUNTABLE TO THE VOTERS —

AND WHO, AS THE ONLY ONES WITH WHAT WE CALL “INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY,” END UP HAVING VASTLY MORE INFLUENCE OVER VOTERS’ LIVES THAN THOSE ELECTED TO SERVE AND CARRY OUT THE PEOPLE’S WISHES.

PUBLIC OFFICIALS SHOULD HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN AND TO ASCEND — TO HOLD POSITIONS OF LEADERSHIP, FOR EXAMPLE AS CHAIRS OF COMMITTEES — AND TO WORK ON LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS.

FRANKLY — THIS IS THE ONLY WAY TO ENSURE THAT THE BUREAUCRACY OF GOVERNMENT REMAINS ACCOUNTABLE TO THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE.

I RECOMMEND THE COMMISSION PUT THE FOLLOWING CHOICE ON THE 2010 BALLOT — EITHER MAINTAIN THE CURRENT LIMIT OF THREE TERMS — OR ABOLISH TERM LIMITS ENTIRELY.

I ALSO ASK THAT THE COMMISSION LEAVE THE CRITICAL ISSUES OF LAND USE PROCEDURE AND THE CHARTERED ROLES OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE, BOROUGH PRESIDENTS AND COMMUNITY BOARDS TO BE TAKEN UP THE FOLLOWING YEAR — TO BE CONSIDERED ONLY AFTER FULL STUDY AND FURTHER, EXTENDED PUBLIC COMMENT. THANK YOU FOR YOU TIME.