

Speakers from Common Cause and NYCLU Report on Steps to Protect the Vote

At the Three Parks Club meeting on September 9, the topic was how to protect the November vote in the face of the COVID pandemic, vote suppression efforts, and threats to the Postal Service. The speakers were Susan Lerner, Executive Director of Common Cause NY; Donna Lieberman, Executive Director of the NYCLU; and Democratic District Leader Cynthia Doty.

Lerner described the long-overdue steps that have been taken in New York State to make voting easier, especially new rules allowing the wider use of absentee ballots. Various regulations have been revised to be more “pro-voter,” including those covering absentee ballot postmarking and delivery deadlines.

Voters are also now allowed to fix inadvertent errors made on absentee ballots, such as neglecting to sign and date the envelope. Lerner applauded the progress that has been made, but emphasized that much remains to be done to “bring New York’s voting system into the twenty-first century” and to ensure that every vote gets counted.

Lieberman focused on the danger that the Trump administration will not respect the results of the November election. To combat the threat that Trump will claim victory before all the votes are counted,

she stressed the urgent need to publicize the idea that election results may not be known for some time and to demand that every vote be counted. In Lieberman's view, the vote count is likely to be "messy," "untidy," and to last days or even weeks, and the public needs to be prepared for that event.

Doty reported on what the New York City Board of Elections has done to facilitate absentee ballots and voting by mail. Many lessons were learned as a result of the June primary. Measures have been taken to prepare for the huge increase in mailed-in ballots, and improvements have been made in designing, delivering, and counting absentee ballots. A welcome innovation will be the provision of drop-off boxes at every poll site where voters can deposit their completed absentee ballots conveniently and without waiting in lines.