

Democracy in New Bedford and The South Coast



by
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The 2012 elections were depressing. Not because of the winners and losers, but because democracy in America seems to be dying a slow death. A few stats to chew on. While we've had some 20 million new voting age men and women since the 2008 elections, President Obama and Mitt Romney took in 8 million fewer voters than did President Obama and Senator McCain. In the 2012 Presidential elections, President Obama received 4.2 million less votes than he did in 2008 (66.8 million compared to 62.6 million in 2012) and Romney received about 800,000 less votes than McCain. Most attribute the low turn out to the swing from the positive campaigns that Obama and McCain ran to mostly negative campaigning in 2012. I can confidently say that in New Bedford democracy is dead with little chance of being revived. In the New Bedford and south coast Massachusetts area, incumbents mostly ran unopposed in 2012.



As an Air Force veteran, I've seen what democracy looks like in Iraq, Afghanistan, Serbia (and several former Yugoslavia countries), and many other countries. Outside of America, most countries seem to take their elections seriously. They come out in high numbers and there is plenty of choice. When

casting my ballot in New Bedford on November 6th, I noticed a troubling trend. Almost all of the local candidates ran unopposed. It reminded me of the "elections" in Iraq when Saddam garnered 99% of the vote. Does New Bedford really lack qualified candidates? Are our incumbents so entrenched that no one feels they can win? Money and name recognition win elections, and challengers always face an uphill battle, but I feel as a city we deserve at least a choice. I'm not saying the incumbents are bad and are not the best choice, but how do we really know if we are given no options?

If you take a quick look at the New Bedford Election Commission's November 6th, 2012 Election Results page, you will notice that the national elections (President Obama/Mitt Romney, Warren/Brown and Keating/Sheldon) provided us choice, but once you look at the state and local elections you'll notice that out of the 11 elections, 9 had candidates ran unopposed. Even the national elections really provide little choice for New Bedford residents as our city wouldn't vote for a Kennedy if he had an (R) or (I) by his name. Obama, Warren and Keaton, on average, won by a 3 to 1 victory. State Senator Mark Montigny has had one challenger since being first elected in 2002. So, he's faced opposition once out of five elections. State Representative Tony Cabral has a similar opposition history. Here's a look at the local election results:

SENATOR IN GENERAL COURT	ward/precinct details
MARK C. MONTIGNY	28275
WRITE-IN	303
REPRESENTATIVE IN GENERAL COURT - EIGHTH BRISTOL DISTRICT	ward/precinct details
PAUL A. SCHMID, III	2764
WRITE-IN	28
REPRESENTATIVE IN GENERAL COURT - NINTH BRISTOL DISTRICT	ward/precinct details
CHRISTOPHER MARKEY	2650
WRITE-IN	21
REPRESENTATIVE IN GENERAL COURT - TENTH BRISTOL DISTRICT	ward/precinct details
WILLIAM M. STRAUS	1835
WRITE-IN	26
REPRESENTATIVE IN GENERAL COURT - ELEVENTH BRISTOL DISTRICT	ward/precinct details
ROBERT M. KOCZERA	7677
WRITE-IN	86
REPRESENTATIVE IN GENERAL COURT - THIRTEENTH BRISTOL DISTRICT	ward/precinct details
ANTONIO F.D. CABRAL	12603
WRITE-IN	146
CLERK OF COURTS BRISTOL COUNTY	ward/precinct details
MARC J. SANTOS	26859
WRITE-IN	255
REGISTER OF DEEDS BRISTOL SOUTHERN DISTRICT	ward/precinct details
J. MARK TREADUP	27190
WRITE-IN	257
COUNTY COMMISSIONER BRISTOL COUNTY	ward/precinct details
PAUL B. KITCHEN	14209
JOHN R. MITCHELL	14585
PAUL J. LEVASSEUR	7858
WRITE-IN	120
COUNTY TREASURER BRISTOL COUNTY (TO FILL VACANCY)	ward/precinct details
CHRISTOPHER T. SAUNDERS	26640
WRITE-IN	240

Also running unopposed were State Representatives Paul Schmid, II (8th District), Chis Markey (9th District), William Straus (10th District), and Robert Koczera (11th District). The Clerk of Courts for Bristol County Marc Santos, the Register of Deeds Bristol Southern District Mark Treadup and the County Treasurer Chris Saunders also ran unopposed. This is due to the one party system in that dominates the south coast, Massachusetts area. The only real elections are in the primary elections and even those don't see real challenges locally. To be fair, this happens in both Republican and

Democratic strongholds around the country, not just in the New Bedford area. For example, in 2013, 25 states will be controlled by Republicans and 15 states will be controlled by Democrats leaving only 10 states to have a balanced state government.

In preparation for the 2011 New Bedford municipal elections, I produced an article on how to become a candidate and run for office in New Bedford. I wrote it because in the 2009 elections, half of the Ward City Councilors ran unopposed. In 2011, only one Ward City Councilor ran unopposed, so that is the one choice bright spot. My goal for the 2013 elections is that we continue the trend and offer more qualified candidates. In New Bedford our unemployment is consistently twice the state average, crime is always an issue and our schools seem to always be on the brink of a state take over. As a city, do we really want to be so disinterested in who runs our city or represents us in Boston and Washington?

We have 95,000+ residents in New Bedford with plenty leaders among us. As a city, we owe it to ourselves to ensure our candidates are truly vetted and we have a choice of several qualified candidates. Again, I'm not saying that we do not have the best candidates in office right now, but if we continue to allow our elections to provide a single choice we'll never truly know.