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# An Era of Change for City Council

By Ron Howell
STAFF WRITER

Experts say the winners in Tuesday's primary elections will dramatically change the make-up of the City Council, bringing in new ideas to go along with new faces.

But a watchdog group yesterday worried that Democratic Party bosses may end up controlling the biggest prize of all: the position of City Council speaker.

"One of our big fears is that the party leaders in the boroughs will wield tremendous influence over the speaker," said Neal Rosenstein, government reform coordinator with the New York Public Interest Research Group.

Because New York is such a strongly Democratic town, winners of Tuesday's Democratic primaries are the likely winners of general elections to be held in November.

Term limits have put two-thirds of the council's 51 seats up for grabs, guaranteeing a turnover of the likes not seen in recent city history.

Among the apparent newcomers are a couple of political heavyweights who could be strong contenders for the position of speaker, Rosenstein said.

One of them is Al Vann, veteran assemblyman and power broker from the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. Another is Oliver Kopell of the Bronx, a former state attorney general.

Noting that several incumbents have already expressed an interest in becoming speaker, Rosenstein said he fears Democratic officials are already meeting and cutting deals to get their favorite person in.

## New faces will bring new ideas, experts say

Reformers also complain that some politicians are playing musical chairs with City Council seats.

A dozen of Tuesday's winners are close relatives of elected officials. In several cases, they are the offspring of incumbents. Primary winner Helen Foster of the Bronx, for example, is the daughter of Wendell Foster; Yvette Clarke of Brooklyn is the daughter of Una Clarke; Felix Malave Dilan of Brooklyn is the son of Martin Malave-Dilan; and in Queens, winner Peter Vallone Jr., is the son of Speaker Peter Vallone.

Tuesday the elder Vallone lost his bid to be the Democratic candidate for mayor.

"Let's hope this isn't a case of Appalachian inbreeding, and that they will be truly independent policy makers and not just elected by virtue of their family names," Rosenstein said.

Council-watchers say the very first order of business for the new council, when it takes office in January, will be to elect a new speaker and decide how powerful he or she will be.

Firebrand activists like Charles Barron of Brooklyn have said they will fight to "democratize" or weaken the position of speaker. As of last night, Barron was locked in a tight contest against Donald Wooten, son of incumbent Priscilla Wooten, with only a couple hundred votes separating them.

Taking issue with some of the reformers, there are those who say a strong speaker is needed to balance the far-reaching powers of the mayor, who appoints agency heads, has wide discretion over the budget and uses his "bully pulpit" to sway public opinion.

"What's going to make the [new] council different is not so much independent members but whether the body is disciplined, cohesive and organized," said Jordan Barowitz, an aide to speaker Peter Vallone.

"The new council will need to marshal its forces against the chief executive," Barowitz added. "A legislative body that's a free-for-all is very dangerous, given the power the mayor of the City of New York has under our charter."

One of the very close races still being watched yesterday was between incumbent Philip Reed and challenger Felipe Luciano of East Harlem.

One of Luciano's supporters reported a confrontation at one voting place, Junior High School 57, and police made arrests. Commanders at the 23rd Precinct station house would not comment on the report.

"This one is going to go down to the last vote," said Robert Stopper, a Luciano campaign official.

Term limits, combined with a campaign finance program that gave tens of thousands of dollars to qualifying candidates, made this a wide-open field.

"I think we've seen amongst the victors today people who would never have been able to run without a system of matching funds," said Joseph A. O'Hare, president of Fordham University and chairman of the New York City Campaign Finance Board.

*Staff writer Dan Janison contributed to this story.*

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