

October 19, 2014

Dear Fellow East Siders:

This week's letter discusses a Constitutional convention, infrastructure repairs and school lunches.

Question 3 on the November ballot will ask voters whether to approve a Constitutional convention. The 1986 Convention produced a stronger Ethics Commission, which helped bring Stephen Alves, John Celona, Gerard Martineau and Edward DiPrete to justice. In 1994 and 2004, the General Assembly approved ballot questions to amend the Constitution in specific areas (four-year terms and judicial selection in 1994, separation of powers in 2004) that made a convention unnecessary. Despite the scandals involving 38 Studios and Speaker Fox, the 2014 General Assembly failed to propose needed Constitutional reforms, such as expanded Ethics Commission jurisdiction. The General Assembly also failed to allow a vote on a Constitutional right to education, a failure I addressed in [an op-ed published in last week's Providence Journal](#). The newspaper also published op-eds by [Phil West](#) and [Timothy Murphy](#) about the need for structural reform of our General Assembly, reforms that cannot occur absent a Constitutional Convention. A [letter by Robert Benson](#) links the ACLU's opposition to a Constitutional convention to its testimony against legislative accountability. As I explained in my op-ed, there are three different checks on Constitutional amendments to abridge civil rights, namely the voters' choice of delegates, the requirement of voter ratification and the federal Bill of Rights which cannot be abridged by state constitutions. It is sad that the Convention opponents have such little faith in our State's voters. By voting Yes on Question 3, We the People can give ourselves the power to improve our State government.

This past Tuesday, the Department of Public Works submitted and discussed a [Report](#) on the City's sidewalk repair program pursuant to a [Resolution](#) I introduced over the summer. The report estimates it would cost approximately \$20 million to repair the current known backlog of sidewalks, but that the City should commission a study of all sidewalks to ensure a complete inventory. The Report documents a number of gaps in the current accounting and inventory of sidewalks needing repair which limit our current ability to assess the program. With that said, the Committee supported the Department's proposal, and the Department will report back with further information in the coming weeks. I am hopeful the City Council will ask the voters, in the 2016 election, to approve a sidewalk repair bond which, if approved, could address a longstanding problem in a systematic manner.

Last Thursday, the Education Committee reviewed the contract under which Sodexo would continue as the vendor for the school lunch program. This program is funded exclusively with Federal funds dedicated to this purpose, and the current vendor has been able to manage costs so that free lunches are available to all children (not just children in poverty), reducing the stigma associated with the traditional program. The vendor also provides free breakfasts and other amenities (such as food backpacks), while allowing funds under the contract to support the School Departments' staff assigned to monitor the program. The School Board has a committee responsible for reviewing the vendor's operations in such areas as food quality, and the Committee expressed its support for the School Board to step up its efforts in this area.

Sincerely,

