



Seaside Independent Democrats

Est. 2019

Statement Regarding Allegations Made Against Our Club by Councilmember Mark Treyger

May 3, 2021

The Seaside Independent Democrats is a diverse group of Southern Brooklyn residents, most of whom live in Coney Island as well as surrounding communities. We are Black, White, Asian and Latin American. We are Jewish, Muslim and Christian. We are immigrants and children of immigrants who grew up in homes where we learned Spanish, French, Haitian Creole, Hebrew, Yiddish, Japanese and Italian. We come from all walks of life and represent the wonderful diversity of our borough.

We built our club in early 2019 with the desire to become the change we wish to see in local politics. As such, we hold regular events for the community such as voter registration drives, candidate forums, voter education programs, and much more. We are committed to helping build a more informed electorate and have been doing our part to be an educational forum for local voters especially in the days leading up to every election.

On Tuesday April 20th our club reached out to the four Democratic candidates for the 47th Council District: Alec Brook-Krasny, Steven Patzer, Joe Packer and Ari Kagan, inviting them to participate in a debate on April 29th. Brook-Krasny, Patzer and Packer responded within minutes to confirm their participation. However, when our club Secretary reached Ari Kagan by phone, he declined and said that he had already participated in a debate with our club and that our last event was too long. To be clear, Ari did participate in a “meet the candidates” event we held on December 8, 2020.

While that event was more of a candidate forum and not technically a debate, we were fine with his decision as it was his prerogative. We felt it

had been our duty to invite him and the other candidates as our club had received multiple requests from community members to hold additional forums where they could hear from all four candidates.

After a very successful candidate debate on April 29th where Brook-Krasny, Patzer and Packer spent over 90 minutes answering an array of unscripted questions, we were shocked and appalled to awaken the next morning to Facebook comments made by Councilman Mark Treyger against our club. In response to a Facebook user who asked the Councilman the following question:

“Mark, you are backing Ari Kagan for your seat. You are the reason that a lot of people are considering voting for him. Do you know why he doesn’t debate the other candidates?”

Treyger made several inflammatory accusations against our club in the following response:

“[Ari] has participated in many forums. The one tonight was organized by a group that smeared his name and his identity as a Russian speaking Jew, they smeared my office, me personally, they smeared his campaign manager calling her an intruder while she’s lived here her whole life and contributed greatly to this community, and others in our community. Ari spent time helping with a distribution and then speaking with voters tonight and solving problems rather than participating in a sham.”

We found the comments made by the Councilman to be preposterous, offensive, slanderous and beneath the dignity of a sitting elected official. We also found his words hurtful and bizarre because we are not nameless and faceless out-of-space aliens, but the neighbors and constituents of Mr. Treyger who have voted for him in the past two elections. He knows each one of us personally and by name. His comments are insulting to our intelligence and an attempt to malign our club’s reputation which is wrong-headed and inappropriate.

Treyger’s claim that our club has smeared Ari and his identity as a Russian Speaking Jew was abhorrent as it was deeply divisive. As immigrants and children of immigrants, we ourselves have accents and grew up in homes where our parents had accents and did not speak English. We have more than one club member who is Jewish including an executive officer who grew up in a home where Hebrew and Yiddish were spoken. Another club member has been a member of synagogues which worked and fundraised for the settlement of Soviet Jewry in the early 1990s. Moreover, our club

members are very well known to Kagan. Many consider him a friend; some have worked together with him on important community issues over the last few decades and one officer of our club even ran on the same political slate with Mr. Kagan when he ran for the NYS Assembly in 2006. We wholeheartedly reject the claim that anyone in our club has smeared Ari because of his ethnic or religious identity and demand that Treyger provide proof of this wildly slanderous claim or issue an apology to the community immediately.

We reject claims that we have smeared the Councilman, his office or Kagan's campaign manager, and suspect, regarding the latter, that he is referring to a recent incident regarding a community member who is not a member of our club although he attended meetings when we first began two years ago. It is intellectually dishonest and grossly misleading to hold the club responsible for the actions of someone who is not a member and doesn't speak on our behalf.

Finally, we take extreme pride in the work we have been doing in the community to promote civic engagement and take great offense to anyone calling our events a sham. Coney Island residents do not have many opportunities to hear directly from local and city-wide candidates, and we are proud to be one of the few clubs to offer livestreamed candidate forums that take real time questions from viewers at home. We have had people walk up to us in the street to thank us for our events which they find informative and, in their words, "a true public service." For an elected official to refer to our voter education efforts as a sham when our events have been organized with the highest level of integrity and transparency, is just plain wrong.

Public officials who make baseless claims must be held accountable to voters and constituents. While people can disagree about issues important to the district, we must keep our political discourse civil. We hope that Councilman Treyger understands and appreciates the extent of the impact his comments have had, that he will acknowledge and own his misstatements about our club, and that he can find it in his heart to apologize for them.

Thank you.