

**Brennan Center for Justice
Common Cause/NY
Citizens Union
League of Women Voters of New York City
League of Women Voters of New York State
New York Public Interest Research Group
Women's City Club Of New York**

**STATEMENT ON GOVERNOR CUOMO'S DECISION TO CALL FOR LOW TURNOUT
SPECIAL ELECTIONS TO FILL SIX VACANCIES IN STATE ASSEMBLY**

For immediate release:

July 1, 2011

As New York's leading civic reform organizations, we are disappointed in Governor Cuomo's decision not to hold regular primaries and general elections this fall for six vacant State Assembly seats and instead issue proclamations to hold special elections for these seats on September 13th. We strongly disagree with this decision, which we believe will result in lower voter turnout, increased confusion at the polls and potentially higher costs to localities.

The governor's action comes after a legislative session that saw no meaningful election reform legislation or administrative actions to increase voter participation. The governor has compounded the lack of action by scheduling special elections for these seats on Primary Day, when fewer voters turn out as compared to the General Election in November. By keeping with political tradition, this decision represents a lost opportunity to change business as usual and challenge the entrenched interests that dominate special elections.

The holding of special elections circumvents the democratic process by denying voters the opportunity to pick the candidates to represent their party as they would in a regular primary election. Special Elections typically empower the interests of party leaders, rather than presenting voters with a real choice of candidates at the polls. They unfairly give hand-picked candidates the advantage of incumbency at the next general election and essentially result in candidates being appointed to office rather than elected given the lack of competitive races.

Moreover, this decision will create confusion for voters and poll workers who will have to administer simultaneous primary elections and special elections where all voters in a district may cast ballots. Finally, this decision could force hard-pressed localities to pay for election operations on primary day even if only one candidate qualified for the ballot. The normal primary process would accommodate such races on General Election day at no additional expense to voters.

We urge the Governor to commit to a swift end of the current practice of filling vacancies for state offices, through legislative or executive action.

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For more information contact:

Russ Haven	NYPIRG	518 436-0876
Dick Dadey	Citizens Union	917 709-2896
Ruth E. Acker	Women's City Club of New York,	212 353-8070, x202