



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Aileen Kain,
Committee of Seventy
(267) 861-6041 (office)
(610) 331-4107 (cell)
akain@seventy.org

Committee of Seventy Calls for an End to Elected City Commissioners

PHILADELPHIA, PA (January 21, 2016) – Committee of Seventy CEO David Thornburgh today released the following statement:

As it's been revealed over the last few years, and even the last few weeks, City Commissioner Anthony Clark's behavior is embarrassing and insulting to the voters and taxpayers of Philadelphia. His conduct also has serious and damaging consequences for Philadelphia's reputation in our state capital and around the country. At a time when the city needs political support from lawmakers from across Pennsylvania on important issues like school funding for our children, we can't afford the perception that we tolerate and reward elected officials who can't be bothered to show up for work. In similar fashion, this summer the eyes of the world will be on Philadelphia during the Democratic national convention, and this stark example of a self-serving political culture will only create headlines for countless damaging stories about Philadelphia.

But there's more than perception at stake here, and the problem is larger than Mr. Clark's conduct. The political system and political culture in Philadelphia that enables his conduct deflects attention from the real and important work that the City Commissioners are supposed to lead. The people of Philadelphia deserve more, and there's plenty of work to do. Voter turnout continues to spiral downhill—only about 12 percent of young voters voted last May. Our growing communities of immigrant citizens, and our disabled citizens, demand and have a right to complete access to the polls, and they're not getting it. Also telling, a Committee of Seventy survey of Philadelphia voters last November revealed that fully 1 in 5 don't really trust the fairness of the voting process in the city.

Philadelphia voters deserve professional leadership of the election process. The fundamental right to fair elections—which in our history countless men and women gave their lives to protect—is too important to be left in the hands of a comfortable and corrupt political process. What can be done? Over the past few weeks, many other citizens and public officials have asked that question—and come up empty-handed. The legal paths in Pennsylvania to removing a City Commissioner from office are few and difficult.

But there is a way to solve this problem, and there is a clear path forward. **We need to replace the politically elected and connected City Commissioners with the leadership of appointed election professionals, as does every other county in Pennsylvania and big cities like Chicago. The Committee of Seventy calls on members of City Council to begin the process that amends the City Charter to accomplish that goal.** In the weeks and months ahead we look forward to joining forces with other like-minded citizens and civic leadership groups from across the city to advocate for this change and restore our confidence that the electoral process is run fairly, effectively and efficiently.

It's about time we make sure that this system, fundamental to our local democracy, works for all of us, not for the self-interest of a few politically connected individuals.

#

The Committee of Seventy is an independent nonprofit advocate for better politics and better government in Philadelphia and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. For more information, see www.seventy.org.