

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Joseph Strasburg

In the recently enacted state budget, New York policymakers believe they balanced stabilized building owner needs, tenant concerns and looking to the future with developing new housing, angering everyone involved and satisfying nobody. Not since half-baked criminal justice “reforms” led to a spike in violent crime a few years ago has there been such outcry and focus on reckless lawmaking.

In setting the range for possible upcoming increases in stabilized leases, the New York City Rent Guidelines Board ignored its own data, allowing the possibility only for increases that absolutely don't keep up with always escalating costs and that barely even meet the rate of inflation. The economic life of stabilized apartment buildings, after Albany again shirked their responsibility to govern thoughtfully, now relies on the increases allowed by the RGB. The Owner Representatives on the Board are industry professionals who suggested increases that should have been taken seriously, but which instead get ground up in a political process that should be more data driven. The Tenant Representatives walked out of proceedings – abandoning their responsibilities, while the Public Members adhered to sober consideration and the Chairman continued efforts to build consensus.

Politicians are caring more about talking points and litmus tests than ever before, not even trying to consider the hard truths that require mature decision making. Consider the inadequate increases in IAI's recently enacted in Albany. Politicians get to cling to the easy headline – “We doubled the allowable IAI rent increases, in some cases more than tripled them!” – but ignore that the initial number they were doubling or tripling was ridiculously low to begin with. Three times pitifully inadequate is still inadequate. More than tripling \$15,000 to \$50,000 is still far off from the \$100,000 many apartments need. Or consider that a responsible approach to bringing empty stabilized apartments back on line – a vacancy reset – has been relentlessly blocked by the Chairs of the

Assembly and Senate Housing Committees and by other influential legislators. That policy would have returned vacant stabilized apartments to the market after rehabbing them following long tenancies, adding desperately needed units to a city in the midst of an affordable housing crisis.

What do these examples have in common? Other than the obvious theme of punishing and vilifying building owners, what is the thread running through all these civic roadblocks?

You. You are the thread running through these difficulties. RSA's diverse membership is what these stories, and so many more like them, have in common. More precisely, your ability to change it all. Your participation in elections and campaigns can make a difference. More than just voting – though that is vitally important and a must do! – you have a role in supporting candidates for public office who will focus on the data, will take your stories seriously, will have an open door and an open mind and who will govern from the middle without insisting on dysfunctional ideological battles.

Democratic Primary elections are coming up in June. Election Day itself is on Tuesday, June 25th and there is early voting ahead of that and paper ballots that can be mailed in early as well. Building owners and managers – and their families and friends! – must vote in every election, sign “Dear Neighbor” letters and activate their networks. This coming June in particular, there are State Assembly elections in the Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn in which moderate challengers and incumbents are running against radical and reckless ideologues. The full diversity of New York City includes the voices of affordable housing providers. RSA members must vote, must bring others to the polls with them, and must continue to shoulder the responsibility of restoring balance to city and state politics.

All the examples I shared earlier in this column get better when we vote. We'll be sending updates with specifics, but for now mark your calendars for June 25th! It's that important. ■

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