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EDITORIAL

Manhattan's District Attorney

The decision by Robert Morgenthau not to seek re-election as the Manhattan district attorney after more than a third of a century of distinguished service in the job means a changing of the guard come January in one of the nation's premier prosecutorial offices.

His successor will be chosen in the Democratic primary on Sept. 15 because the Republican Party has no candidate. **Of the three impressive candidates, our choice is Cyrus Vance Jr.**

The Manhattan district attorney commands an army of 500 lawyers in a jurisdiction encompassing violent street crime, Wall Street white-collar crime and public corruption. The winner of the current spirited three-way contest will be just the third person elected to the post in some 68 years. Frank Hogan, the legendary district attorney who preceded Mr. Morgenthau, also served for more than three decades.

All of the candidates gained valuable experience as assistant district attorneys under Mr. Morgenthau.

Richard Aborn is a leading gun control advocate who has been a consultant to police departments and other government agencies. He is politically wily and has plenty of energy and some good ideas, but he cannot match his opponents' broader experience and gravitas.

Leslie Crocker Snyder is an able former judge and prosecutor who showed personal courage years ago, presiding over violent criminal cases, when her own life was threatened. We supported Ms. Snyder four years ago in her challenge to Mr. Morgenthau, believing that 30-plus years in the job was enough for even such an accomplished man. But the current campaign presents a different set of candidates, and we have concerns about Ms. Snyder, who has sometimes shown a taste for publicity, even as a judge, that can be at odds with the extraordinary restraint required of the district attorney.

Mr. Vance (whose father served on the board of directors of the Times Company from 1980 to 1997) **is an accomplished criminal and civil trial lawyer who offers balanced judgment and a commitment to criminal justice reform.**

More managerial experience would be a plus, but he has excellent ideas for strengthening the office, by assigning prosecutors to cover particular communities, by creating a rackets bureau unit focused on public corruption, and by beefing up efforts to protect immigrants from exploitation and to help newly released offenders reintegrate into society and avoid going back to prison.

We like Mr. Vance's plan for a "Conviction Integrity Panel" that would serve as an internal check against improper practices and wrongful convictions as cases proceed. Ms. Snyder has proposed a more narrow, mostly retrospective "Second Look Bureau."

Mr. Vance sensibly says he will make it his mission to end the huge backlogs at Manhattan Criminal Court, which handles the nonfelony assaults, thefts and quality-of-life crimes comprising the bulk of the D.A.'s caseload. He said he would devote ample resources to white-collar crime, including local mortgage and predatory lending scams, as well as corporate frauds and money-laundering schemes by arms and narcotics traffickers — larger cases for which Ms. Snyder expresses little appetite.

We strongly endorse Mr. Vance.

Daily News endorses Cy Vance for Manhattan District Attorney

Sunday, August 9th 2009

The clear choice to succeed Robert Morgenthau as Manhattan district attorney is Cy Vance.



Smith for News

For the good of all New Yorkers, leadership of the nation's premier local prosecutor's office must go to a top-flight legal talent who shows the superior vision and judgment needed to sustain this criminal justice flagship.

Vance stands well above his rivals in fitness to extend the excellence the city has come to take for granted during Morgenthau's 35 years at the helm.

Preparing for his departure at 90 years of age, Morgenthau gave intense consideration to the question of who among would-be successors has what it takes. **He chose Vance, no small honor coming from a man who has groomed scores of New York's best lawyers and judges, including new Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor.**

Vance built a distinguished career, both as a Morgenthau assistant and as a nationally known big-case defense lawyer. His experience ranges from homicide to white-collar crime to complex corporate litigation.

Thanks to the depth of his background, Vance shows a greater understanding than do his two challengers of the missions of the Manhattan district attorney, as they have been elevated by Morgenthau. Those start with prosecution of violent crime and extend to policing Wall Street, busting corrupt politicians, even to stopping the illicit flow of money and weapons technology to regimes like Iran.

Vance would build on strengths and address weaknesses. Among them, he would beef up quality-of-life enforcement by fixing a dysfunctional Criminal Court, maintain the DA's gold-standard rackets bureau and create a program to head off recidivism by newly released inmates.

Rivals Leslie Crocker Snyder and Richard Aborn can't match Vance.

Snyder was a successful Manhattan prosecutor in the early 1970s and a respected Criminal Court judge and acting Supreme Court justice for almost 20 years, ending in 2004. She developed a reputation as a tough jurist presiding over drug-gang cases.

While Snyder's accomplishments, energy and familiarity with criminal justice are significant, she has failed more recently to show a full tempering of judgment or a convincing commitment to what she stands for.

Consider the death penalty. On the bench, Snyder backed capital punishment with gusto. In a 2002 memoir, she wrote of one defendant, "I actually told [him] that he should have received the death penalty and that I would have been willing to give him the lethal injection myself."

Then, running against Morgenthau four years ago in anti-death penalty Manhattan, she backed execution only for terrorists and child rapist-murderers. Today, she opposes all capital punishment, citing concern for errors.

Similarly, Snyder has morphed from emphasizing law and order to promising an ill-defined program to divert first-time nonviolent offenders into some form of preventive social work.

And Snyder was simply wrong to promise a grand jury investigation into the disappearance 30 years ago of 6-year-old Etan Patz while accepting the endorsement of Etan's father. Wrong to hold a fund-raiser in a nightclub that had been the scene of drug dealing and brawls. Wrong to insert personal opinions into a prosecution report. And wrong in 2005 to criticize Morgenthau for supposedly focusing too much on major business fraud.

In that last position, Snyder was urging dismantling of a potent check on financial industry corruption - an operation that delivers \$300 million a year to the city and state in seized assets and tax arrears. Today, post-economic meltdown, she has been forced to recover by vowing white-collar crackdowns for "the little guy."

Richard Aborn is the third candidate in the race. A former prosecutor, gun control advocate and criminal justice consultant, he is running almost entirely on a platform of reorienting the office into trying to prevent crime through social programs.

The Manhattan DA's office is a crucial pillar underpinning civic life in New York - from the streets to the suites. It is an invaluable asset and must remain so. The right person in this race is Cy Vance, without a doubt.