

Bill Thompson declared the victor in live debate against Tony Avella



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Candidates for New York City Mayor, Comptroller Bill Thompson and Council member Tony Avella, met for a live debate at Pace University. Current Mayor Mike Bloomberg was invited but declined the invitation. The debate was hosted by NOW - National Organization for Women. The event was moderated by Sonia Ossorio, president of the New York City chapter.

The debate opened with questions about pay equality for women, domestic violence prevention and concerns about human trafficking. Avella pledged to issue an executive order to city department heads ordering them to share data that will help the Mayor enforce the Fair Pay Act of 2008. Thompson offered to approach the problems by also enforcing current laws and giving women business owners the opportunity to do business with the city. Both candidates expressed concerns about a lack of pro-active outreach by the Human Rights Commission. It was agreed that the Human Rights Commission needs more funding.

Avella suggested the creation of a special unit of the district attorneys office to handle human trafficking cases and more aggressive action by local police. He also plans to assign a deputy mayor to handle womens issues. Thompson believes more coordination is needed amongst current agencies to combat the problem. The audience raised other issues such as abuse against teens, violence against women on the subway and teen pregnancy. Both candidates agreed that violence against youth prevention should start in the schools with training for school personnel to identify the problem. Avella wants to break up the MTA and take local control of the transit system. Thompson wants sex education taught in schools while Avella insisted that equally distributing education funds to black areas would help alleviate many problems. Both candidates agreed that daycare centers are disappearing in the city and funding is drying up for child care programs.



Tony Avella, left, and Bill Thompson

To pay for these suggestions, Avella plans to eliminate wasteful spending. Thompson thinks priorities need to be set citing the fact that New York City has an annual budget of \$60B. Additionally, Thompson feels there are not enough family court judges to handle the high case load. Avella wants to increase salaries to caseworkers and for legal aid. Both candidates are pro-choice and agreed with many of the initiatives already in place to handle reproductive issues.

While many great ideas were stated by both candidates, when it came to the current state of the national and local economy, the conversation broke down. When Avella said, "I guess you could say we are in a recession," the room fell silent. Comptroller Thompson quickly piped up and declared (as if there were ever any doubt), "Yes, we ARE in a recession." The unemployment rate is hovering around 14% for some New Yorkers who struggle to afford the cost of housing.