

City's no-cash poll dance

Director says board lacks funds to pay 30,000 workers for Nov. 3 general election

THE CITY'S Board of Elections warned yesterday it has no money to pay the 30,000 poll watchers for the Nov. 3 general election.

Election officials blamed the shortfall on the \$13.5 million cost of the unbudgeted runoff election.

The warning came in testimony before a panel of three Assembly committees dealing with the looming statewide conversion to electronic machines.

The board had to use its available funds for the general election to pay bills for the Sept. 29 runoff.

EXCLUSIVE

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In a citywide election, more than 30,000 poll workers are assigned to 1,350 poll sites around the city.

Most are paid \$200 for the day, with poll site coordinators receiving \$300. Total cost is put at \$7 million.

Signed by board Executive Director Marcus Cederqvist, the letter to city budget officials stated that due to the "failure of the

city to provide sufficient funding," the board "does not have the necessary funding to enable it to meet its financial obligation to vendors and poll workers for the General Election."

Without an immediate appropriation of additional funds, the letter continued, the city has "a legal and moral obligation" to advise poll workers and contracted vendors that "if they chose to provide any service to the voters of this city, they do so at their own financial risk."

Even with a full complement of poll workers — largely recruited

by political clubs and party leaders — the board has been criticized in the past for being unable to cope with large-turnout elections, resulting in long lines and confusion at the polls.

That has not been the case this year, because the primary and runoff elections saw abysmal turnouts.

Still, citywide general elections attract far more voters than primaries. The city now has 4.2 million registered voters. Nearly 1.3 million voters cast ballots for mayor four years ago, and 1.5 million did so in 2001.

In the event that not enough

poll workers show up, the board would have to make do with reduced staffing.

Normally, one Democrat and one Republican worker is assigned for each machine at a polling site.

Mayoral spokesman Marc LaVorgna said, "The dollars are in place for the Board of Elections to fully fund the general election.

"Anytime a runoff or special election occurs, that bill is subsequently paid by the city."

The Thompson campaign called the shortfall another way to suppress the vote.

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Election Board broke

The city's Board of Elections says it's burned through its budget for the Nov. 3 election and won't have enough money to pay thousands of poll workers needed that day.

Executive Director Marcus Cederqvist disclosed the problem in an Oct. 15 letter to city budget officials. He said no money had been tucked into the fiscal plan for the Sept. 29 primary runoff, which cost \$13.5 million.

Some 30,000 workers get assigned to more than

1,300 polling sites for general elections. He said the city should warn them that "if they chose to provide any service to the voters of this city, they do so at their own financial risk."

Mayor Bloomberg's spokesman Marc LaVorgna insisted the money will be there because runoffs are never budgeted for in advance and any shortfall is reimbursed to the board by the city.

Maggie Haberman