

# The Citizen

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## Mission

The Citizens League of Greater Cleveland seeks to achieve integrity, efficiency, and transparency in local and county government by promoting citizen education and involvement.

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## The Citizens League Endorses FitzGerald for Cuyahoga County Executive

On November 2, 2010, the voters of Cuyahoga County have the opportunity to shape their future through the historic election of the County's first County Executive. This election follows the electorate's decision last November, in the wake of sweeping corruption investigation, to change the structure of the county's government. The new charter eliminates a three-member commission and several elected offices and in their place creates the office of County Executive, eleven County Council seats, and several key appointed positions.

The September 7 primary yielded two major-party candidates who are competing with four third-party candidates. Those on the ballot include Matt Dolan (R), Ed FitzGerald (D), Ken Lanci (I), Don Scipione (I), Tim McCormack (I) and David Ellison (Green). The Citizens League has chosen to endorse Lakewood Mayor Ed FitzGerald as the preferred candidate.

In addition to selecting a preferred candidate, The Citizens League has provided qualifications-based ratings (one to five stars) and Digital Dossiers for each candidate. The Digital Dossiers, posted on our web site, contain searchable summaries of each candidate's background, a summary of his interview performance, and responses to lengthy and detailed questionnaires.

Major party status and experience in public administration divide the candidates into two distinct groups. Mr. Dolan, Mayor FitzGerald, and Mr. McCormack have all spent a significant portion of their careers working in public service and campaigning as members of the two major parties. Though Mr. McCormack is running as an Independent, he was a member of the Democratic Party for most of his career. In this respect, these three candidates are studied and disciplined campaigners and experienced public servants.

The other three candidates have run less conventional campaigns and do not have a history of holding public office. Mr. Ellison is clearly working to establish the Green Party in a region with little exposure to its values. Mr. Lanci is running as an unaffiliated candidate, beholden to no one. Mr. Scipione is also a life-long Democrat and in the race because he was not impressed by the major party candidates who declared for the race. Each of these stories is familiar to the American voter, with some presidential election campaigns echoing the same themes (Ralph Nader, Ross Perot, John Anderson).

Despite these groupings, the candidates are generally quite distinct. Each appears to have the intellect and ability to handle the position of County Executive. Mr. Ellison's experience was the narrowest, and thus he was the only candidate who drew concern as to basic qualifications. He can best be described as the outsider and consensus builder whose mission is perhaps more to promote his party than to prevail in the campaign. The Citizens League gives Mr. Ellison a rating of two stars out of five, meaning we believe he is sufficiently qualified and would serve adequately.

Mr. Scipione is a scientist and businessman working to apply his impressive skills to solve civic problems. He is an efficiency

expert with a broad intellect and apparently boundless energy. He has a history of involvement in the civic life of the community (including support for the new charter) that The Citizens League is sure will not end with this race. If he is not elected, the elected candidate should find a place for him in the administration or as a special consultant, particularly on efficiency, technology, and transparency issues. The Citizens League gives Mr. Scipione an overall rating of three stars, meaning that he is well qualified for the position and would serve capably.

The panel that interviewed Mr. Lanci agreed that he was the candidate most likely to gain votes through personal contact. He has a compelling personal history and great charm. He also has a significant record of accomplishment as a turn-around specialist in the business world. A turn-around specialist is exactly what Cuyahoga County needs at this time. However, the panel also agreed that Mr. Lanci presents a high risk and high reward proposition. It may be that he is just the man, with his force of personality and street knowledge, to lead the County in the right direction. His experience, however, is in the business world, not in the world of public administration. For that reason, his candidacy raises concerns that his style and experience may not transfer well to the public world. His candidacy drew varied opinions from our panel. One member thought he should be the preferred candidate. Others gave him consideration for that status. One other thought he should not be elected. Because of the risk presented by his personality and approach, The Citizens League's panel collectively gave Mr. Lanci a rating of two stars.

Mr. Dolan is a pragmatic candidate with a history of public service and leadership. His chairmanship of the Finance and Appropriations Committee in Columbus represents a substantial credential in his

favor. He also garnered consideration for preferred status. Unlike Mr. Lanci, the panel was uniform in its assessment of his candidacy. The Citizens League believes he is well qualified for the position and would serve capably if elected. Thus, the Citizens League gave Mr. Dolan three stars.

Mr. McCormack is a former independent-minded party member running as an outsider. Even so, he did not tell the story that we expected to hear: that he was a long-serving Democrat who became disenchanted with the status quo and his experience bestows him the mantle of reformer. Though he was a frequent critic, his years of service in county government came during a period that is now marked by corruption. While he accomplished much in his career, Mr. McCormack still seems to represent the past more than the future. The Citizens League gives Mr. McCormack an overall rating of two stars.

The Citizens League has given Mayor FitzGerald three stars and its rating as the preferred candidate. In a county long dominated by the Democratic Party, Mayor FitzGerald is the establishment candidate. Even in an election that is based upon changing that establishment, he represents the safest choice for County Executive. He has experience as a trial lawyer in both civil and criminal cases. He served as a public corruption investigator for the FBI, mitigating concern over the recent stories about a phone call he received from Commissioner Dimora. After several years on Lakewood City Council, he gained executive leadership experience as Lakewood's mayor. No other candidate has that executive/council experience. Though it was not for a long tenure, that qualification is what most distinguishes Mayor FitzGerald from Mr. Dolan and Mr. Scipione, the other three-star candidates. His prior support for Issue 5 and an establishment culture both raise concerns that, contrary to his promises, he is not an

agent for change. Because of these issues, he will have to move decisively to demonstrate that his administration will not conduct business as usual. He must make key appointments with an open and independent-minded selection process. He must inspire transparency and integrity. He must eliminate cronyism and nepotism. Only then will the cynicism that now marks our public discourse fade.

Only one of these candidates will enter the history books as Cuyahoga County's first County Executive. That individual will have to lead two great transitions: one is structural, from a charter characterized by numerous elected offices toward a strong executive model; the other is cultural, from a bureaucracy marked by corruption toward one characterized by transparency and integrity. Neither task will be easy. We believe at least three of the candidates can do the job well. We believe the executive/council experience of one distinguishes him from the rest. Like the voters, we can only hope that the choice we have made is the right one. We do know, based upon our work researching and evaluating the candidates, that the choice is an educated one. With the information we have provided, we know that voters can make their decision based upon facts and without regard for party affiliation, surname popularity, or cultural heritage. In this way, the voters can continue to move the political culture in a positive direction, just like they did last November.

## Understanding The Rating System and Process

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Preparations for the endorsement and evaluations began in early 2010, when The Citizens League reconstituted The Candidates Program. Through the summer,

the League recruited researchers to provide background information on the candidates that were participating in the special September primary and the candidates from other parties that had declared for the race. Prior to September 7, when citizens cast their votes in the primaries, the League published Digital Dossiers for each candidate. The purpose of the Digital Dossiers was to publish the results of the League's research with web links to the source information. In that way, voters can use their web browsers to review the background data for themselves.

Following the primary, the League circulated questionnaires to the six candidates. By then, Mr. Dolan had won the Republican primary and Mayor FitzGerald had won the Democratic primary. They joined Green Party candidate David Ellison, independents Tim McCormack, Ken Lanci, and Don Scipione on the November 2 ballot. Except for Mr. McCormack, each candidate returned a response to the questionnaire.

The League then invited its members to interview the candidates. On October 1, each of the candidates sat for an interview with our panel. The interview began with an introduction from the candidate, and was followed by questions from the panel. After the interviews, the panel met to discuss ratings and an endorsement. They then cast their votes, conferred to review the results, and made a recommendation to the League's Executive Committee. The Executive Committee then voted. A two-thirds vote is needed to reverse the Candidate Program Committee's recommendation. A quorum of the Executive Committee concurred with the Committee's ratings and recommendations.

Researchers and interviewers are members of The Citizens League. They each sign a pledge indicating that they will participate in a non-partisan fashion. Throughout the process, the League consulted with those

who ran the program in the past to benefit from their collective wisdom and takes the steps necessary to ensure that the process maintained high standards of integrity and quality.

The Citizens League utilizes an evaluation system that is based upon five stars, with the designation of a candidate that is "Preferred," and, on rare occasions, a candidate that is rated "Should Not Be Elected." The "Preferred" rating is used for the best candidate in the race, whether or not that candidate is outstanding or simply better than the rest. The use of these two designations matches that last used by The Citizens League. Our committee elected to move from a four-star to a five-star rating system. The stars represent the following evaluation:

\*\*\*\*\* Superbly Qualified. Superior candidate for the office, extremely well qualified with exceptional governmental leadership skills.

\*\*\*\* Very Well Qualified. Very well qualified for this office and would serve ably and provide solid government leadership.

\*\*\* Well Qualified. Well qualified for this office and would serve capably and provide good government leadership.

\*\* Adequately Qualified. Possesses sufficient qualifications for the office, would serve adequately.

\* Not Qualified. Marginal candidate lacking some of the qualifications for the office.

## Understanding Cuyahoga County's New County Charter

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Beginning in November 2010, a typical Cuyahoga County ballot will display far fewer County-wide non-judicial elections. That is because the new charter, passed through Issue 6 in the November 2009 election, will narrow that list to three: County Executive, County Council, and the Prosecutor. The Executive and Council replace the three-member County Commission.

The County Executive will appoint a number of officers, many of whom replace officials that once appeared on the ballot. Subject to confirmation by County Council, the Executive will appoint a Fiscal Officer, a Medical Examiner, a Clerk of Courts, a Director of Public Works, a Director of Law, a Treasurer, and a Sheriff.

The County Executive will also appoint a Health & Human Services Director, a Development Director, and a Human Resources Commission. A Development Commission and a Budget Commission will also be impaneled in accordance with specified seating. The Executive and Council will appoint a Board of Revision.

The Fiscal Officer (replacing the Auditor and Recorder) will chair an Audit Committee, which will work with a Council-appointed Director of Internal Audit. The Executive will manage the Purchasing Department, while the individuals referenced above will lead the Health & Human Services Department, the Audit Department, the Human Resources Department, and the Development Department.

## The Citizens League Rides Wave of Citizen Volunteerism

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The rebirth of The Citizens League and the success of its Candidates Program are a reflection of the wave of citizen involvement that has swept the region in recent months.

This high level of civic engagement comes at a time when the region's public officials are under intense scrutiny from the media and federal law enforcement authorities. That scrutiny has resulted in numerous criminal prosecutions of elected and appointed public officials, public employees, and members of the business community. The work of the local media and law enforcement has benefitted from input from citizens who were tired of a culture of corruption.

After Issue 6 prevailed in November 2009, bringing with it the structural reform discussed above, hundreds of citizens volunteered to assist with the transition process. More than a dozen threw their hat in the ring to campaign for the office of County Executive. Dozens did the same to campaign for the County Council seats.

The structural reform brought about by Issue 6 should help end the culture of corruption. Primarily, it eliminates several elected offices and centralizes hiring practices. This should curtail the ability of public officials to pad their payrolls with their campaign workers and cronies. This will not, however, bring an end to the need for scrutiny, primarily from the citizenry. The Citizens League is positioned to facilitate further citizen involvement and help end the culture of corruption and instill best practices in public administration. Please join The Citizens League if you would like to help.

## **The Citizens League of Greater Cleveland Individual Membership Application**

The Citizens League of Greater Cleveland offers suggested giving levels. We encourage you to join today at any level.

Student	\$10	Civic Leader	\$500 or more
Under 30	\$25	Civic Principal	\$1,250 or more
Member	\$50 or more	Civic Pacesetter	\$2,500 or more
Civic Builder	\$100 or more	Civic Champion	\$10,000 or more

**Membership Benefits:** Membership is open to individuals of voting age who support the mission of The Citizens League of Greater Cleveland. Members may participate in the work of committees and study groups. They may cast a vote for Executive Committee members at the membership meeting. They may also hold a seat on the Executive Committee. They will also receive, if they provide an e-mail address, the periodic e-newsletter.

To join, complete the form below and mail it with your check to: The Citizens League of Greater Cleveland, P.O. Box 14702, Cleveland, Ohio, 44114.

Member Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail \_\_\_\_\_  
Membership Amount \_\_\_\_\_  
Referred By \_\_\_\_\_

The Citizens League of Greater Cleveland seeks to achieve integrity, efficiency, and transparency in local and county government by promoting citizen education and involvement. Members agree to support this mission and participate in activities in a non-partisan fashion.

**We respect your privacy:** It is the policy of The Citizens League of Greater Cleveland never to provide your email address or contact information to another organization.

The Citizens League of Greater Cleveland is organized as a 501(C)(4) corporation. As such, membership dues are not tax deductible.