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## **Candidates Should Press Some Flesh**

By Konstantin Sonin

Michael Bloomberg won a second term as the mayor of New York last week, crushing his opponent by a 20-point margin. Bloomberg's margin of victory broke the old Republican record of 19 points set by Fiorello LaGuardia in 1937.

Bloomberg's landslide victory came as no surprise. The incumbent led by more than 30 percentage points in pre-election polls. Last Monday, on the eve of the election, Bloomberg nevertheless spent 17 hours in the streets and subway stations of New York asking average New Yorkers for their vote. The mayor spoke to several dozen residents of a retirement home -- not to a huge senior citizen rally. He visited a church in the Bronx to talk with parishioners -- not with bigwigs in the church leadership.

The day before he had delivered speeches in all five of the city's boroughs. He campaigned at this furious pace for several months. Keep in mind that Bloomberg is a billionaire, the founder and owner of the Bloomberg financial news agency, and that he spent some \$70 million on his re-election campaign, nearly 10 times more than his opponent.

Why would a politician who's leading by a huge margin in the polls spend so much time and effort campaigning door to door? Because for the loser election day is the end of the road, while for the winner victory at the polls is just the beginning.

To run a major city effectively you need to have more than a message; you have to know how the voters will react to it. And there's only one way to find out.

What kind of problems does New York face? The business districts in lower Manhattan and Brooklyn need to be revitalized. The city needs a new baseball stadium. There is a chronic shortage of affordable housing. Sound familiar?

Last Monday, I was invited to attend a campaign event organized by Alexei Navalny and Ilya Yashin of the Yabloko party, both running for the Moscow City Duma. The candidates were meeting with the residents of an apartment building on Leninsky Prospekt to ask for their votes on Dec. 4.

Navalny, who is running on the Yabloko party list and therefore will almost certainly win a seat in the next City Duma, tackled the nuts-and-bolts issues, such as the thorny problem of rakushki, the temporary garages which have sprouted like mushrooms in the city's courtyards in recent years. It came as no surprise that the 30-something middle manager who had recently bought an apartment in the building was in favor of the garages, while a stern elderly woman who had lived there for 30 years was opposed.

Yashin, who is running for a single-mandate seat, stuck to the big-picture issues where consensus was easier to reach. None of the residents who attended the meeting in their courtyard knew that Muscovites no longer directly choose their mayor, for example, and no one was particularly pleased by the news. This does not, of course, mean that they will automatically vote for opposition candidates on election day.

I'm particularly interested to find out how the 16 percent of voters in my district who backed "against all" in the 2003 election will vote now that this option has been removed.

I'm not asking Muscovites to vote for Navalny and Yashin or any other specific candidate in the City Duma race. I would simply encourage them to vote for the candidate who takes the trouble to meet with them in their courtyard or stops to speak with them in the metro, and explains why he or she deserves their vote. If a New York billionaire is willing to get out there and press the flesh, our politicians should be, too. It won't cost them a dime and might win them a new follower or two. And I'll be right there ready to shake their hands.

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