

Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission  
700 5<sup>th</sup> Ave #4010  
Seattle WA 98104

August 17, 2017

Complaint: Democracy voucher program violations by Lorena Gonzalez

To the SEEC:

Please see the attached document entitled “Candidate Debate/Forum Self-Reporting.” It was submitted to your office on August 10 – two days after the August 8 reporting deadline – by Lorena Gonzalez, who is a candidate for Seattle City Council, Position 9. The form reflects the rule that candidates attempting to qualify for Seattle’s democracy voucher program must attend at least three public debates or forums during the primary season.

Rule 16 of the Seattle Elections Code (“Implementing I-122”) defines a debate as follows:

B. Debates – SMC 2.04.630(b)

A debate is a live event, open to the general public, at which all the candidates in a particular race have an opportunity to respond to questions. Each candidate must be given an equal opportunity to participate.

Please refer to the first item on Ms. Gonzalez’ self-report: the “Women of Color in Politics Panel.” That event would obviously not have been open to “all the candidates in a particular race” since it was only for women of color. In the Position 9 contest, Ms. Gonzalez was the only woman of color in a field of seven candidates. Accordingly, she was the only Position 9 candidate invited to participate. The panel wasn’t a candidate forum, and it doesn’t even appear to have been strictly related to an election. For these reasons, it would not qualify as an eligible event per Rule 16, and Ms. Gonzalez would reasonably have known that.

The second item on Ms. Gonzalez’ report is the 36<sup>th</sup> Legislative District Democrats’ straw poll. (See the attachment with the Facebook event description or [tinyurl.com/y7wrzq5s](https://www.tinyurl.com/y7wrzq5s).) I was also a candidate in Ms. Gonzalez’ race, but I was not invited to that event. When I contacted the organizer, Nicole Gomez, to ask why, she told me the poll was open only to candidates who were eligible to receive an endorsement from the 36<sup>th</sup> Democrats organization, per their charter. In other words, it was for Democrats only. Like the Women of Color in Politics panel, the 36<sup>th</sup> Democrats’ straw poll was not an event at which “all the candidates in a particular race have an opportunity to respond to questions.” And again, Ms. Gonzalez would have known that.

In any case, Ms. Gonzalez apparently did not even attend the straw poll. Other attendees told me she sent a representative to that event and wasn't there in person. So even if the straw poll had been an open forum, she can't count that toward her three-forum requirement, because she wasn't there.

The final item on Ms. Gonzalez' report is the "Delridge Neighborhoods Candidate Forum." Although candidates didn't answer questions at that event, I'll allow that it could be stretched to meet the requirements of the voucher program. Ms. Gonzalez and I both went to that forum, but whereas I arrived early and left late, she arrived late and left early.

The democracy voucher program was designed to encourage candidates to engage each other in the public forum so voters can compare them and make an informed choice, but if you asked an impartial observer to describe Ms. Gonzalez' campaign, you would get a picture of a candidate who is disengaged and aloof, and largely absent from public view. If there is a private event that's likely to get her an endorsement, she'll attend – or at least send a representative. But if there is a *public* event where she can expect to meet the voters and take questions, she's likely to skip it. And her entries on the report form bear this out. There were several genuinely public forums Ms. Gonzalez might have gone to during the primary season, but she avoided them, opting instead for closed events where she had an advantage. She thus violated the democracy voucher program in both spirit and letter.

Based on Ms. Gonzalez' failure to attend three qualifying events, I am asking the SEEC to declare her ineligible for the democracy voucher program. In addition, I'm asking you to fine her based on her misrepresentation regarding the 36<sup>th</sup> Democrats straw poll. She did not attend that event as she claimed.

I will be available to answer your questions concerning this complaint. Thank you.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Preston" with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Preston

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Seattle WA 98106  
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attachments



**Democracy Voucher Program - Candidate Debate/Forum Self-Reporting**

**Purpose:** Candidates entering the Democracy Voucher Program agree to participate in at least three debates or similar events each for the primary and general elections. SMC 2.04.630(b)

The Seattle Elections Code Administrative Rule 16 defines a debate as a live event, open to the general public, at which all the candidates in a particular race have an opportunity to respond to questions. Each candidate must be given an equal opportunity to participate.

Penalties for non-compliance may include loss of qualification for the program and/or a fine of up to \$5,000.

**Reporting:** Candidates are encouraged to report as soon as possible but no later than the Tuesday following the election week. Candidates may report all events on a single form or turn in multiple forms over time.

I affirm that candidate M. Lorena Gonzalez attended the event(s) listed below:

Roxana Gomez

Print your name

Sign your name

08/10/2017

Date signed

Women Of Color in Politics Panel

Event location

05/15/2017

Event date

36<sup>th</sup> LD straw poll

Event location

05/17/2017

Event date

Delridge Neighborhoods Candidate Forum

Event location

07/25/2017

Event date

**To return this form:**

1. Send by mail to  
Democracy Voucher Program  
P.O. BOX 35196  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98124-5196
2. Or send an image of your signed letter  
to [democracyvoucher@seattle.gov](mailto:democracyvoucher@seattle.gov)

# Seattle City Council Candidate Straw Poll

Wednesday, May 17, 2017  
7-9pm

Phinney Neighborhood Center, Lower Bldg.  
6615 Dayton Ave N, Seattle, WA  
[www.36th.org](http://www.36th.org)



**MAY**  
**17** Straw Poll - Seattle City Council  
Candidates - May 17th

Public · Hosted by Nicole Gomez and Brittney Bush Bollay

★ Interested    ✓ Going



## Details

Join us for a fun straw poll fundraiser for candidates eligible for our endorsement one week prior to the 36th District Democrats endorsement meeting! The straw poll will be in the lower building of the Phinney Neighborhood Center on the ground level. At the end of the night one candidate will be named straw poll champion.

Enjoy appetizers, drinks, and meet candidates competing for Seattle City Council Pos. 8 & 9 in a causal setting.

Candidates will give a brief speech followed by a Q&A session moderated by Hanna Brooks Olsen of [Seattlish.com](http://Seattlish.com).

Entry is a suggested donation of \$3 which includes voting tokens. Other tokens\* can be earned through fun games and by making additional donations to the 36th District Democrats at a specified rate. You also have the chance to submit a short question for Q&A (and earn tokens) - so start thinking up some good ones!