



# Doing a better Job

Labour's Local Manifesto 2004

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You can contact us at Head Office, 17 Ely Place, Dublin 2, Telephone 01-6784700

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# Introduction

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Whatever way you look at these Local Elections, the best vote is a vote for Labour.

If you want to vote against the Government, the most powerful message is one which says you want to change the government, and not just complain about it. That means voting for an alternative. And that means voting Labour.

If you want honesty in Local Government, you vote Labour. Because no other party has Labour's record of integrity on our city, county and town councils. Many politicians from other parties have brought shame on our local government system through bribery and corruption. No Labour councillor has been before a tribunal accused of corrupting the planning process and betraying public trust. Labour is proud of our record of integrity and honesty in relation to planning.

If you want the system of Local Government in Ireland to be changed, then you vote Labour, because only Labour has detailed radical proposals for the reform and remapping of the councils.

If you want your local council to do a better job, you vote Labour, because Labour has the greatest commitment to local democracy, and Labour has the best policies on the things that Councils do. That is what we will demonstrate in this Election manifesto.

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# Housing

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The Housing Crisis is the result of seven years of Fianna Fáil/PD rule.

Seven years ago, when Labour was last in Government, working families on modest incomes could afford to buy a home of their own. People on Council waiting lists got housed within a reasonable time, and there were far fewer homeless.

But now, after seven years of Fianna Fáil and the PDs

- House prices have trebled. In 1997, the average price of a new house was €97,000. Now it is over €300,000.
  - House prices have increased by 9 times the rate of inflation; 5 times the rate of increase in average earnings and 4 times the rate of increase in the cost of building.
  - A house which takes 100,000 to build, costs 300,000 to buy! That gap opened up in the last seven years, under Fianna Fáil and the PDs.
  - Nearly half of all new families can not now afford to buy a home. According to the Local Authority Housing Strategies, 33% of new families nationally, 42% in urban areas and 50% in Dublin can not afford to buy!
  - The numbers on Council Housing lists have doubled, up from 26,000 in 1996 to over 60,000 now. Less than 5,000 local authority houses are being built each year. It was 8,000 under Labour in the mid-eighties, when the country was much poorer.
  - There are twice as many homeless as in 1997.
  - They have failed to legislate to give basic legal rights to private tenants. The Report of the Commission on the Private Rented Sector has still not been implemented, four years after its publication!
  - Under the Partnership Agreement with the social partners, the Government agreed to provide an additional 10,000 Affordable houses. To date, none have been built, none started and none even designed!
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## Housing continued

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Meanwhile, the builder friends of Fianna Fáil have grown rich on the housing crisis. Land Rezoners and speculators have made huge fortunes. And Fianna Fáil has made them even richer, by halving their Capital Gains Taxes!

Instead of tackling the causes of the Housing Crisis, Fianna Fáil has attacked its victims. They abolished the First Time Buyers Grant. They gave Tax Incentives to Investors. They sabotaged the Affordable Housing Scheme. They hiked up rents. They cut the Rent Allowances of those in the poorest circumstances.

The Housing record of Fianna Fáil and the PDs is shameful, and they should be told so on June 11th.

Labour believes that Shelter is a basic right, and that every household should have a home of their own. That is why we say that there should be a Constitutional right to housing. And it is why Labour, whenever in Government, always provided for the housing needs of the people.

Labour has the most complete and fully researched policy on Housing.

Labour believes that Land speculation and profiteering is at the heart of the Housing Crisis. That is why we have proposed new laws to control the price of building land, in order to make housing affordable for the working family. The All Party Committee on the Constitution agrees with us. The Kenny Report on building land should be implemented. But the Taoiseach is still dithering. Still nervous of the vested interests.

Labour serves no vested interest. Our only interest is in the household trying to establish and keep a home. Our main proposals on Housing are to:

- Control the price of building land. Implement the recommendations of the All-Party Committee. The Government should now accept the Labour Party Private Members' Bill which was voted down last October, and which contains the essential measures endorsed by the All Party Committee.

## Housing continued

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- Double the output of Social Housing to provide housing for those on Council waiting lists.
- Implement the Strategy on Homelessness. How can a wealthy country justify so many sleeping in doorways?
- Legislate to give basic rights to tenants. More Irish families have lost their homes through eviction, during the past seven years under Fianna Fáil and the PDs, than during any equivalent period of British rule in the nineteenth century.
- Legislate to provide consumer protection for home-buyers, to stop price gazumping and to force developers to finish off housing estates.
- Repeal the new regulations on Rent Allowances.
- Change the income limits for the Shared Ownership Scheme and the Affordable Housing Scheme, to make them more available.
- Support Voluntary and Co-operative Housing. Councils should ensure that sufficient sites are available.
- Reform the Rent Scheme. Now, every time a Council tenant gets a pay rise or a Social Welfare increase, it is clawed back by the Council in increased rent.
- Ensure that vacant, Council houses are re-let within a reasonable time. Empty, boarded-up houses are an affront to those on the waiting lists.
- Increase funding for Disabled Persons Building Grants.
- Implement the plans for the housing and settlement of Travellers.
- Strengthen the legislation on Estate Management to include all forms of house tenure, in order to deal more effectively with anti-social behaviour in housing estates.

The end of the Housing Crisis begins on June 11th., by voting Labour and by electing the maximum number of Labour Councillors.

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# Planning

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The Labour Party believes in good planning and Sustainable Development. Our Councillors have an honourable record of integrity and of acting in the public interest on planning matters.

**There is a need for considerable reform of Planning at both local and national levels:**

## Enforcement

The biggest weakness in the Planning system at present is the failure of Local Authorities to adequately enforce the Planning laws and the conditions of Planning permissions. Recent television documentaries and the Annual Report of the Ombudsman have highlighted this. Labour believes that a Planning Inspectorate should be established to concentrate on Enforcement. On all Councils Labour will make the enforcement of planning decisions a priority.

## Development Plans

The new Planning Act, introduced by Fianna Fáil and the PDs has greatly diminished the rights of the public in relation to planning matters, and especially regarding the Development Plan. The powers of County Managers have been greatly increased. Development Plans have become more like a charter for developers than a contract with the people. Labour wants to amend the Planning Act to restore control over the development Plan to the people.

## Consultation

The process of public consultation in this country is seriously flawed. Huge sums of public money are spent engaging consultants and in the production of confusing Environmental Impact Statements, but the views and concerns of the public are usually ignored. Labour believes that there is a need for a new Public Consultation procedure, which will listen respectfully to the public, will genuinely try to resolve problems over development projects and will ensure that necessary development is compatible with environmental and community needs.

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# Planning continued

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Unfortunately, the Government appears to be going in the opposite direction, and they are planning new legislation to "fast-track" development, which will not be published until after the local elections.

## Planning Fee

The Labour Party strongly opposed the introduction of the E20 Fee for making a Planning objection. We consider it to be a charge on a democratic right and we believe it should be repealed.

## Spatial Strategy

Three years ago, the Labour Party published a draft National Spatial Strategy, ("Visions of Ireland"), in which we mapped out the way in which a growing and increasingly prosperous Ireland should develop. We showed how, with good planning, the housing needs of our people could be met, how residential development could be integrated with transport and other infrastructure, how community and neighbourhood could be fostered and how a sustainable balance could be struck between urban generated development and the protection of the Environment.

Unfortunately, the FF/PD Government took a different and more laissez-faire approach to national planning. Their so-called National Spatial Strategy was published after decisions had already been made on the National Development Plan, and now it has been abandoned by the announcement on "Decentralisation".

## Rural Housing

The draft Guidelines on Rural Housing published by Minister Cullen will neither protect the countryside nor make it easier for rural residents to get planning permissions. The Minister chose not to make regulations nor to issue a directive, either of which could be enforced. Instead he chose to publish draft guidelines which can be ignored.

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## Planning continued

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### An Bord Pleanala

The independence of An Bord Pleanala has been called into question by a number of decisions where the Board has overturned the recommendations of its own inspectors. Labour wants the Planning laws to be amended so that in such cases An Bord Pleanala will at least be required to give full reasons for such decisions.

### Conservation

New Architectural Heritage laws were passed some years ago, but they are not being implemented by Local Authorities, mainly because of lack of resources. Labour is strongly committed to conservation and to the protection of our architectural heritage. Our Councillors, therefore will press councils to implement conservation measures.

## Reform of Local Government

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The Labour Party has published the most far-reaching proposals for the reform, re-organisation and re-mapping of Local government in Ireland.

Our system of local administration, through which unelected city and county managers exercise most of the executive power, was adopted in the 19th century, when we were still under British rule. It is past time for it to be changed.

Ireland has the weakest system of Local Government in Europe. Under the FF/PD Government, elected councilors have been stripped of their powers in relation to roads, waste management, waste charges and many planning functions. These powers have been handed over to unelected Managers. Ultimately it is the people who have been left powerless, in a system, which is neither democratic nor local.

The Labour Party is proposing a new modern system of local government, which is more democratic and accountable and which will provide a better quality of service for the public.

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## Devolution

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Labour is proposing a major devolution of Government functions from the national to regional and local authorities. Every Government department and State Agency should be examined to identify those functions which can be performed more effectively and appropriately at a more local level. Examples should include school buildings and school transport, the distribution of National Lottery funds, employment services and training, rural development, social welfare services and coastal zone management.

## Accountability

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All public services, including those provided by private bodies, should be made accountable to the public, through Local Councils. A new Public Services Accountability Bill should be enacted, which would oblige the providers of any public service, the holder of public licenses, or the recipients of public funding, to account to the local councils for the discharge of their public remit.

## Re-mapping

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The boundaries of Local Authorities should be remapped to make them more relevant to modern needs. Where a dispute arises over Local Authority boundaries, the issue could be decided by vote of the people concerned, in a Local Plebiscite.

- Regional Authorities should be established, and would have overall responsibility for strategic planning, transport and traffic, economic development, health services and Communications infrastructure. The Regional Authorities would be directly elected, at the same time as Local Authorities.
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## Re-mapping continued

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- A Dublin Regional Authority should be established, which would have overall responsibility for the running of the city and county. It would be responsible for Transport and Traffic, and for overseeing the services which are delivered Dublin-wide. The DRA would be directly elected and be headed by a directly elected Mayor of Dublin.
- The current Dublin City Council and the three Dublin County Councils would be replaced by 10-12 Dublin District Councils, based on populations of approx. 100,000, each of which would have the status of a County Council.
- City Authorities could be established for the other larger cities in the country, and/or Regional Authorities could be established for different regions, e.g. South-East or Mid-West.
- The larger Town Councils would be given the same status as County Councils.

## Democracy

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The position of County Manager should be abolished, and be replaced by a Council Chief Executive, who would be subject to the policy decisions made by the elected Council, and whose executive functions would be limited to those originally intended in the City and County Management Acts.

- The power of the Minister to abolish a Council and replace it with a Commissioner should be ended. Instead, where a Council fails to adopt an Annual Budget, the Council should stand suspended, and fresh elections should be held to elect a new Council for the remainder of the five year term.
  - Each Local Authority should have a Directly Elected Mayor, for the five year term of the Council. Mayors should be full-time.
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## Democracy continued

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- FINANCE. As functions are devolved from the centre to local level, the corresponding resources and finance should also be transferred.
- Rates should be levied on State owned property. There is no continuing justification for exempting State owned property from the rates regime which applies to privately owned businesses.

## Waste and Recycling

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Waste is a problem of modern society. There is too much of it. There is nowhere to put it. And it costs a lot to manage.

Managing waste used to be a public service. But now Fianna Fáil and the PDs are turning it into a private business. Throughout the country they want to build private incinerators (which will encourage the production of waste!), they want to privatise waste collection and they want to make the householder pay the full cost. What a collection of Wasters!

Meanwhile, there is an outbreak of illegal dumping, and of illegal export of waste.

Minister Cullen wants to increase waste charges up to €700 a year! He has said publicly that he wants householders to pay the full economic cost of the waste service.

There is another way. Labour is the only party to produce a fully costed alternative on Waste Management.

Labour believes that investment should go to recycling. Recycling can not work without a Recycling Infrastructure. Since the closure of the Glass Bottle Company, glass is now sent to the North. Plastics are sent to England. Tetrapak is sent to

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## Waste and Recycling continued

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Scotland. And paper is sent to China. All because they can not be recycled here! We need to build up a recycling industry in Ireland, by investing in recycling plant and facilities and by developing markets for recycled products.

The producers of waste, such as excess packaging, should bear the cost. That way they will have an incentive to reduce waste and to encourage recycling.

There is a fair and responsible way to manage our waste problem. On the Councils, Labour Councillors will:

- Press for increased recycling, composting and re-use facilities.
- Seek effective implementation of the Litter Pollution Act
- Force Councils to fulfil their own legal obligations by keeping public places free of waste and litter
- Investigate and where necessary seek prosecutions for illegal dumping
- Seek proper regulation of private waste service providers

## Change the Bin Charges

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### **Labour is opposed to the present Bin Charges.**

Labour says that the Bin Charges are unfair. For some low income families, the annual charge now amounts to a full week's wages. The charges take no account of ability to pay. Most charges are not related to the amount of waste. There is no real incentive to recycle or reduce waste. At very least, some changes should be made to the charges.

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## Change the Bin Charges continued

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Up to last year, Councillors had the right to decide Waste Charges. Fianna Fáil and the PDs changed that and gave the power to the County Managers. Labour opposed that legislation, and we intend to repeal it, when we are back in Government.

### **Labour proposes the following changes to the Bin Charges:**

- There should be no charge for recycling
- Any charge should be based on the amount of waste presented
- There should be an allowance for large families
- Any Charges should be related to income, so that households who can not afford the charges will be relieved from paying them.
- There should be a National Waiver Scheme, which would apply to both Council and private collection services.
- Increases in charges should be limited to inflation

The power to make charges should be removed from County Managers and given back to the elected councillors who are accountable to the people. Waste collection and management should remain a public service, and therefore Labour opposes the privatisation of waste services.

The Minister for the Environment should introduce Regulations to govern the Waste Services, where they are already privatised.

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# Health

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This Government was elected on a promise to end the waiting lists of people who need urgent medical care. Yet another broken promise - and this broken promise is keeping people sick and in pain. A government that neglects the needs of vulnerable people, that breaks its promises to people who are ill, deserves to be punished. In the local elections in June, they should be.

They also promised 200,000 additional medical cards. Instead they removed the medical card from many of those who needed it.

Our health services employ thousands of dedicated people. But the service is often under pressure, understaffed and unfairly delivered. After all the broken promises very sick patients still wait on trolleys and wheelchairs in A&E Departments; hospital beds are still closed; and thousands of patients are waiting months, even years to get the hospital care that they need. You and your family deserve better than that.

The Hanly Report, which has been accepted by the Government, threatens to downgrade and remove A&E services from many local hospitals. Now, just before the local elections, Ministers are busy trying to re-assure local communities that their hospital is safe.

But we don't believe them! The Labour Party has led the protest campaigns about all the broken promises. But we want to do far more than protest. We want to make a real difference. Our policies - which put patients first always - include:

- 1. Quality, equality and value for money in Healthcare.**
  - 2. Development of Community and Primary Health Care.**
  - 3. Effective action to end hospital waiting lists.**
  - 4. Access to Accident and Emergency Services to be protected from closure.**
  - 5. Steady investment and capacity building in health.**
  - 6. Democratic accountability in the management of our health service.**
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# Childcare

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Parents continue to face a childcare crisis, in terms of both availability and affordability. The Fianna Fáil/PD Government has initiated no policy to assist parents. Labour believes that local authorities can play a role in supporting parents in the choices they make about caring for their children. We want a free pre-school place for every child over three, and financial support for childcare at all levels

- Expand childcare and after-school services
- Paid family leave for both parents, with scope for couples to divide leave between them as they choose.
- Direct financial support for childcare costs
- Childcare needs to be built into housing development as condition of planning permission
- A pre-school place for every three-year old

# People with Disabilities

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The Labour Party is committed to ensuring that Irish Local Authorities sign up to, and implement the Barcelona Declaration of 1995. This commits cities to including people with disabilities as full citizens with access to services, public spaces, housing, health, education, and all other areas of activity under the control of local Government. The commitment is simply not just signing up

to the declaration but also to drawing up an Action Plan consistent with the declaration which includes such inclusion and evaluation deadlines.

Labour Councillors will work on every Council for the implementation of the Barcelona Declaration.

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# Education

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The Labour Party is strongly committed to the concept of life long learning. Vocational Education Committees, which are appointed by Local Authorities, following the local elections members, are major providers of Education, especially Adult Education and Further Education. Labour is committed to the appointment of VEC members who have a deep interest and knowledge of education and of the needs of the local community.

Adult and Further Education are powerful means to open up opportunities to those who were let down by the school system in the past. It is the door through which many people in disadvantaged communities have the opportunity to build up their knowledge and skills.

Labour Party Councillors have, through their participation in V.E.C.'s, Adult Education Committees and County and City Development Boards, played a pioneering role in developing the Adult Education sector from a very low base. However, Ireland still lags behind most of our E.U. neighbours in providing for life long learning.

The Adult Education, Further Education and PLC sectors are most responsive to communities that have been educationally disadvantaged. They must be developed and resourced.

## **We are committed to:**

- (a) Implementing the White Paper on Adult Education and the Report on the Task Force on Life Long Learning
- (b) Prioritising funding and resources for this sector which has slowed down considerably in the past two years
- (c) Providing secure funding for the development of Adult Literacy Programmes
- (d) A Basic Education Work Place Fund focused on Literacy skills in particular as agreed in 'Sustaining Progress'.

# Education continued

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- (e) Restoration of child care funding to V.E.C.s which was reduced by 37% last year
- (f) Reversal of the Back to Education restriction from 15 months on a qualifying payment back to six months.
- (g) Removal of the cap on PLC places
- (h) Implementation of the McIver Report - to establish proper structures and recognition for the Further Education/PLC sector

# Transport and Traffic

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The country is choking, gridlocked by traffic. This Fianna Fáil/PD government told us that tackling the problem was its priority. So far, they have done nothing - the only vehicles that move quickly in the capital city today are the limos of EU ministers and officials. Congestion is getting worse, bus corridors remain unfinished. Bus and rail services cannot meet demand, and major projects like LUAS are years behind schedule and way over budget. Little done, and everything still to do.

**Public Transport is a Labour priority. We must modernise transport services and get the country moving again.**

## **Labour will**

- Establish a Transport Authority for Greater Dublin, coordinating and regulating all transport, ensuring adequate and reliable bus and rail services are provided in all parts of Dublin city and county;

## Transport and Traffic continued

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- Establish a special Traffic Corps to enforce traffic laws and ensure the free flow of traffic;
- Give priority to safety for pedestrians and cyclists;
- Give greater powers to Councils to impose penalties where road-works unreasonably delay traffic or where reinstatement is poor.
- Oppose CIE privatisation: evidence from Britain and other countries shows privatization means poorer services and higher fares;
- Support an underground Metro, serving the airport, built at a realistic price with property owners and developers who stand to benefit from it paying a fair share of the cost.

## The Safe Society

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We all want to live and raise our children in a community that feels safe and secure.

We want to walk the streets of our towns and cities freely and without fear. It is our right. But anti-social behaviour and drug related crime are making life miserable for too many. We deserve better.

This Fianna Fáil/PD government has failed to deal with criminal activity and refused invest in tackling crime.

The Labour Party believes that the quality of life in a community is determined by good planning, adequate resources AND effective policing.

We need the 2000 extra Gardai promised by the government before the elections. But a new model of policing is also needed to restore the link between the Gardai and the community which has broken down in many areas. The answer lies in Community Policing based in the local community.

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## The Safe Society continued

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A Community Policing Forum, for instance, would bring together the local Gardai, the local authority, public representatives, local residents and business groups and other relevant agencies, such as, health, education and employment boards. Labour will propose that Councils should take the initiative to establish such forums.

The Gardai must ensure that their policies and activities meet the needs and priorities of the local community. Local Forums can help make this happen.

Local Policing Forums involve more than the democratic accountability of the Gardai. The Forums will also provide a means by which local authorities play their part in making our neighbourhoods safer, through for example, the improvement of public lighting and the appropriate siting of CCTV.

## Council Services

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People are entitled to the highest quality of service from their local Council.

Labour Councillors will work to ensure that the core services of the Council - Roads, Traffic Management, Water, Sewage, Waste, Fire Protection, Planning, Community services, Arts, Libraries, Parks etc - are provided efficiently and cost effectively.

Labour respects the Council staff who provide these services, and we believe that there should be far greater involvement of Council staff in Council policy making.

Labour believes that the public has a right of access to their local council. Council business should be conducted in public and in the public interest.

Above all, Labour Councillors are good public representatives, committed to serving the local people.

The reform of local government and the replacement of the present national government begin on June 11th by voting for Labour candidates in the local elections.

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