



## Citywide Candidates, Minus Bloomberg, Speak on Poverty in New York City

By [Alex Kane](#)

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Less than a week before Election Day, 5 citywide candidates for public office—minus [billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg](#)—spoke at a forum at [Trinity Church on Wall St.](#) on poverty, hunger and homelessness in New York City this afternoon.

Public Advocate candidates [Bill de Blasio](#) (D) and [Alex Zablocki](#) (R), Comptroller candidates [John Liu](#) (D) and [Joe Mendola](#) (R), and mayoral candidate [Bill Thompson](#) (D) attended the forum, which was organized by the [New York City Coalition Against Hunger](#).

Moderated by [Mimi Abramowitz](#), a professor of social work and social policy at [Hunter College](#), and [Bill Ayres](#), the executive director of [World Hunger Year](#) and a radio host on [WPLJ](#), the citywide candidates answered questions on Bloomberg's [Center for Economic Opportunity](#), food stamps, a living wage, homelessness and the [Work Experience Program](#). Thompson criticized Bloomberg on a host of issues, while the other candidates largely agreed with each other.

“Poverty continues to escalate in the city of New York. The gap between those who are doing well and those who aren't continues to increase and it's something this city has to focus on,” said Thompson, the Democratic mayoral candidate and current [City Comptroller](#). “We can't continue to be a city of the rich and the poor—with the poor continuing to grow in numbers and the middle class continuing to disappear.”

All of the candidates criticized the state law, and the city's insistence on using it fully, that forces people who rely on food stamps, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, to get [fingerprints](#). The candidates, and other critics of the finger imaging, say it discourages needy people from applying for the program.

“Finger imaging is a very ill-conceived policy. I think it has had a stigmatizing, deterring effect on people getting food stamps,” said de Blasio, a [Councilman from Brooklyn](#) who walked in late after chairing a [General Welfare Committee](#) hearing at City Hall this afternoon.

Democrats De Blasio and Liu, a [Councilman from Queens](#), are both backed by the [Working Families Party](#), and are expected to cruise to victory against their Republican opponents Nov 3. But Thompson [continues to trail against Bloomberg](#) in the polls.

The forum was held in the midst of what is increasingly being seen as a [jobless recovery](#) from the recession, and in a city where unemployment has hit [double digits](#), [homelessness is at record highs](#), and affordable housing [remains hard](#) to come by.

Commenting on Bloomberg's Center for Economic Opportunity, an initiative to reduce poverty in the city, Zablocki said, "I think it served 44,000 people last year, which doesn't come nearly far enough to serve the population that is in need in our city...As Public Advocate, what I could do, which is what I plan on doing after learning more about it, is investigate whether or not C.E.O. is living up to its obligations."

A chair for Mayor Bloomberg sat vacant at the forum, and at the end of the forum, Liu quipped, somewhat sarcastically, "Where's the sixth [candidate]?"

Thompson took aim at the [\\$17 million in city tax breaks](#) given to [Related Companies](#) for developing the Kingsbridge Armory in the Bronx, saying that it was unfair to subsidize a developer while ignoring [community requests](#) for a living wage provision for jobs created by the development. "The only reason why a developer would say, 'jeez, I don't want to ensure [a living wage],' is because they want to put more money in their pocket," he said.

On homelessness, every candidate criticized the [charging of rent](#) to homeless families who live in publicly run shelters, a policy that has since been suspended but that generated ire at the Bloomberg administration last May. "I don't believe that we should be charging rent from people who have no choice but to live in homeless shelters," said Liu.

Thompson and de Blasio said that they would work to reinstate priority in the Section 8 federal housing program for homeless New Yorkers, which would reverse a four-year old Bloomberg policy that changed longstanding city practice by not giving the homeless priority in Section 8.

"There is one industry here that we need to look at to help us with [homelessness], and that is the real estate industry in this city. Why, for instance, are so many apartments [warehoused](#)? Why, for instance, are there so many areas in the city with apartments that could be used right now, today," said Mendola.