

Some Signs Of Legislative Response To Mayor's School Building Demands



The school budget bills that tumbled out of the hopper on Monday indicated a response by the senate and Assembly to Mayor Michael Bloomberg's demands over the past few weeks for billions in school construction and operating funds.

But they were only the opening salvo in the budget game and Governor George Pataki is yet to be heard from, although his vote would not be needed if Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno and Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver can agree on a package of aid for the mayor and New York City.

The Bloomberg administration's response to all the bills making their way to the floor was that the mayor was not zeroing in on individual proposals, but was more concerned with the final product.

Mayoral spokesman Stu Loeser stated: "He's focused on a final budget resolution passed into law that includes a guaranteed multi-year plan for the capital construction funds we're

owed."

The price tag placed on the package is \$6.5 billion over the next five years. That's only half of the \$13.1 billion to cover the mayor's school

construction plan.

The mayor has threatened, his aides said, that if he doesn't receive this amount, he will try to do what he can, including spreading around some of his personal wealth, to defeat Republican senators from the city who will be seeking re-election in November.

Complicating the mayor's major fight for the school construction funds is a second battle being waged to secure increases in the city's share of funds just to keep the school system operating. Thus Silver and Bruno must find ways to raise these operating funds, not only for the city but the state as a whole.

Getting in the way of these efforts is a plan by Pataki to give some families a tax credit for their children's education. This is aimed at suburban and upstate areas where Republican strength lies. But the Assembly and senate have made their own proposals which will have to be thrashed out with the governor. All of these complicating factors illustrate the prudence of the mayor's overall posi-

tion, which is to wait until a final budget consensus develops and see how it plays out.

In the meantime, the mayor has ramped up the campaign to have local school and community groups by having his surrogates, such as former Mayor Ed Koch, making the rounds of school boards to generate pressure on local lawmakers to support the mayor's goals.

Bloomberg also invited City Council Speaker Christine Quinn to his Sunday radio show to lend her prestige to his campaign.

WEINER TOPS 2009 MAYOR POLL: Congressman Anthony Weiner, who ran second in the Democratic Mayoral primary last year, finished first in a recent poll of Democratic mayoral choices in still-far-off 2009.

A surprising second, since he's not considered a political type, was Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly. Also surprising, Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum finished ahead of City Comptroller William Thompson, considered a likely candidate.

Weiner (D-Queen/Brooklyn) got the nod from 23 percent of the registered city Democrats polled; Kelly 13 percent, Gotbaum 12 percent, Thompson 10 percent, and Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrion 8 percent.

Weiner said it was nice to be leading a mayoral poll, but said

he's not going to campaign for the 2009 election for the next four years. For Kelly, it was the second time that interest in him as a mayoral candidate has surfaced, and for the second time he said he had no interest in running for the job.

The Quinnipiac University Polling Institute, which conducted the survey, recorded a 7 percent approval rating for Kelly, an all-time high.

ONORATO FILES REFORM LEGISLATION: Convinced that Conference Committees can be very helpful in avoiding legislative logjams fueled by partisanship, state Senator George Onorato (D-Astoria) has filed legislation that would establish a new Standing Committee On Conference to ensure that bills which are similar in content and are passed by the Democrat-dominated Assembly and the Republican-controlled Senate can be routinely negotiated in an open, public forum.

In announcing the new bill, Onorato explained: "As it stands now, conference committees are occasionally created to hammer out compromises on similar, but not identical, legislation approved by both houses." He noted that another conference committee was formed earlier this year to reach an agreement on expanding the state's sex offender registry of convicted child predators.

"Given the success that these bipartisan committees have had in previous years, they should be employed as a matter of course in government deliberations," Onorato added.

However, senate Republicans did not greet Onorato's bill too warmly, voting not to bring it to the senate floor for consideration by the full senate.

Onorato reminded his GOP colleagues that two years ago, New York State government was labeled the most dysfunctional in the nation, and a reform such as he proposes would go a very long way toward changing the dysfunctional image.

NOLAN AT EDUCATION TOWN HALL: Assemblymember Catherine Nolan (D-Ridgewood), in her first appearance at an education issues event since being appointed to chair the Assembly Education Committee, will head the guest list this Saturday afternoon when the West Queens

Independent Democratic Club holds an education town hall meeting at All Saints Church, 43-12 46th St., Sunnyside.

At the event, from 2 to 4 p.m., Nolan is expected to provide her vision for education in New York, as well as give an update on current issues, such as the simmering battle between Bloomberg, Pataki and the legislature to give New York City the huge amount of funding called for in a court order.

For more information, call 718-786-2413.

GALLAGHER IS HONOREE: Councilmember Dennis Gallagher (R-C, Middle Village) will be the honoree when the Queens Conservative Party holds its spring cocktail party Thursday, March 30 at 7 p.m. at Roma View, 160-05 Crossbay Blvd., Howard Beach. Tickets are \$65 per person, according to the announcement by Tom Long, organization chairman. For more information, call 718-748-6505 or 718-474-3826.

WEPRIN MEETS UKRAINIAN MP: A delegation of Ukrainian Parliament members, headed by Alexander Feldman, visited Councilmember David Weprin (D-Hollis) at City Hall last week, where Weprin presented him with a City Council proclamation to mark the visit.

Besides being the only Jewish member of the Ukrainian Parliament, Feldman also heads a group focusing on inter-parliamentary connections between Ukraine and Israel. He is also a member of the Council of Jewish Parliamentarians of the World, of which Congressman Gary Ackerman (D-Bayside) is president.

LAFAYETTE NOTIFICATION BILL PASSES: A bill requiring utility companies to provide notification on monthly bills about the time and place of hearings on proposed new rate hikes, which was introduced by Assemblymember Ivan Lafayette (D-Jackson Heights), was passed by the Assembly recently.

Many consumers don't find out about utility rate increase proposals until they read about them in a newspaper or hear about them on the radio or television, Lafayette said. Printing the time and place of a hearing on a monthly bill will give the consumer a chance to attend a hearing, he said.

Security Cameras For Middle School



Councilman Eric Gioia joined Principal Judy Lynn Mittler, students, and staff to announce that he's secured \$250,000 in City capital funding to bring security cameras to the Woodside junior high school, enhancing security for students, teachers, and administrators at the school.