

Quinn: Chambers, Council Should Work On Health Plan

BY THOMAS COGAN

A group of pipers and fiddlers from the Acosta School of Irish Music, a group of step dancers from the Petri School of Irish Dancing and a brief address by City Council Speaker Christine Quinn were, apart from corned beef and cabbage and quickly consumed soda bread, the highlights of the Queens Chamber of Commerce St. Patrick's Day luncheon at Terrace on the Park, in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park.



City Council Speaker
Christine Quinn

Quinn, who has been in the council since 1999 but has been Speaker only since being elected to the post this past January 4, did not use the QCC luncheon to bring up the controversy that she revived next day, March 17, when she made one last attempt to win acceptance for gay and lesbian marchers in the Fifth Avenue parade, and declining once again to take part in the parade when the attempt failed. She did tell her audience, however, that on that day she would be at an early evening reception at City Hall honoring a prominent Fifth Avenue marcher: Thomas Manton, former member of Congress and Queens County Democratic leader. At the luncheon, she spoke of being on a chamber of commerce tour of sorts, having addressed the Manhattan chamber the previous day. To her Queens audience, she spoke of making her legislative body a "five-borough council," a "people's council" that would work to build the economy and small business. She spoke of an economy that is not simply an abstraction but a real force in the neighborhoods. "My plan could sound great on paper but be com-

pletely useless" without the aid of the people, she said. She believes that the chambers of commerce and the council could work together, for instance, to construct an adequate citywide health plan for employees. Health care has been perhaps the prime issue on her political agenda during her time as a councilmember, and she wound up her address with a denunciation of Governor George Pataki's plan for further hospital closings, which, she said, would diminish health services and, into the bargain, leave many hospital workers unemployed.

She hailed building development in Long Island City and Willets Point and was presented with a Queens flag by the chamber, then headed to the next station on her busy schedule. Those at the luncheon then heard and saw the music and dancing. The Acosta School of Irish Music has facilities on Long Island and in Staten Island and Rockland County, in addition to its Queens chapter in Middle Village. The Petri School of Irish Dancing is a Long Island entity, being established in Franklin Square and Northport. Its dancers at the luncheon were middle school girls, most of them crowned with curly hair of Restoration abundance. Teams of them entered and exited the floor space between dais and diners in a well-paced show that lasted about 10 minutes. The spectators were charmed, and the Queens Chamber of Commerce was able to reflect that it had achieved another success.

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over the city's ultimate expenditure.

One concern is that several recipients of the city benefit, such as "The Sopranos" and "Law and Order" are getting too much of the pie. But in trying to rein in these major players, the city must be mindful that it can lose them to other cities.

Gianaris, one of the original sponsors of the program, declared he is still a big advocate for continuing and expanding it.

Noting that it had created "so many jobs," the Astoria lawmaker, a sponsor of the original legislation, said he was concerned, "If we don't take action to continue the program, [the shows and films] will run away from us."

Echoing Padavan's remarks, Gianaris predicted, "The state is going to expand it, I'm sure of that, even if the city doesn't go along with it. But I think it will."

He noted, "It's basically a state program. We set the rules and the city can choose to join it, but it can't change the rules."

Nolan stated, "The program has been very good for Queens, so it should be con-

tinued and perhaps expanded. It has been great in expanding jobs for young people and many schools are beginning to offer film and TV courses."

Weprin also cited the program's economic benefits for the city and noted that for a relatively modest expenditure, we're getting a lot out of it.

The Hollis lawmaker said the Bloomberg administration will have its own decisions to make, "but I'm sure the city council will be ready to renew it if the mayor decides not to. That certainly would be my position, and I think the council will back me up on it."

Avella said the city should continue to expand it. "In the end, even though the industry is getting a benefit out of this, the city also gets a big benefit, too."

This is a way for the city to continue rebuilding its economic base, which has been hurting and is still trying to recover from losses the city experienced in the past, Avella explained.

"We should be doing more to attract industry, and the tax rebate program is a proven example of what we should be doing," Avella added.

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