

Queens Lawmakers Like The Budget

BY JOHN TOSCANO

Queens lawmakers in Albany serving in both houses and affiliated with both parties were solidly on board with their respective leaders in voting for the bipartisan budget fashioned by Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno.

Here's a sampling of comments offered after the budget passed on Friday.



Assemblymember Catherine Nolan (D-Ridgewood), who guided the \$11.2 billion Bloomberg school construction appropriation through as Education Committee chairperson,

said: "This was a big, big, big win for New York City's school kids. It will go a long way toward reducing overcrowding in the classroom. The legislature's budget also includes a tax credit for families with children from four to 17 years old. A tax credit of \$330 per school-age child will enable families to better provide for their children. The legislature did its part, now the governor needs to do his."



Deputy Speaker Ivan Lafayette (D-Jackson Heights), said: "Finally after months of discussions between both houses of the legislature and the New York State and City Departments of

Education, it was realized how many more billions of dollars New York City has available with the new building formula that was put into place last year."

Lafayette estimates that with this new formula now in place and accepted, an additional \$4.5 billion is available in capital funds for New York City schools. This is in addition to the existing capital program that New York City is accustomed to receive. (In the 2005-2006 state budget, Lafayette spearheaded a change in the building aid formula that made possible a 62 percent share of the cost of a new school construction project in New York City payable by New York state, instead of 18 percent under the old formula.)

With the city finally realizing how much more capital money is available to them, Lafayette said he hopes they will immediately apply for funding under the retroactive clause in the formula and expedite the acquisition of property to construct new schools at a much quicker pace to help relieve the tremendous overcrowding New York City schools are now experiencing.



Assemblymember Michael Gianaris (D-Astoria), said: "With this budget, the state Assembly's long-time effort to provide needed funds for New York City schools takes

a major step forward. Hopefully, crum-

bling schools and overcrowded classrooms are on the road to extinction and our children will benefit from improved facilities. Now we must stay hard at work to ensure that operational funds are also increased to provide a sound, basic education for all our kids."

Gianaris noted that fellow Queens Assemblymember Catherine Nolan deserves thanks for her efforts in her new position as chair of the Assembly Education Committee.



Assemblymember Jimmy Meng (D-Flushing), said: many of his Flushing constituents had contacted his office regarding their concern about

potential cuts that would not allow P.S. 244 to be built and would therefore result in a loss of 400 seats.

Meng stated, "I am very pleased that the Assembly and the senate have agreed to give the much-needed \$6.5 billion for capital construction. Now that we in the Assembly have come through in fighting for money for New York City schools, I implore and expect Governor [George] Pataki to sign this agreement into law. Here in Flushing, we excitedly anticipate the construction of P.S. 244, our much-needed school in Flushing, and most importantly, how it will improve the lives of our younger citizens."



State Senator George Onorato (D-Astoria) made the following statement about the \$112.4 billion state budget plan currently being passed by the state senate and

Assembly.

"The state budget recently agreed to by the senate and Assembly improves upon the governor's original proposal in a variety of important ways.

"The legislative spending plan ensures that college students will not face tuition hikes or reductions in tuition assistance, and makes historic investments in New York City public school construction. It rejects harmful cuts to our health care system, and will help to ensure improved access to hospital care for lower-income New Yorkers. On top of this, the senate and Assembly budget will provide significant tax relief to those who need it most by ending the state sales tax on clothing and footwear purchases up to \$110, implementing a new tax credit for families with school-age children, and providing additional savings under the STAR program.

"But as with every state budget, there are disappointments. While I am pleased that the legislative budget addresses multi-year school construction needs in the city and throughout the state, it still falls short of providing adequate operating aid. I am hopeful that this issue will be revised in the future."

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