



Western Queens Gazette

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Hevesi's Fall Took Just 93 Days

BY JOHN TOSCANO

It took Alan Hevesi 35 years to build a career that brought him into the 2006 election campaign as a sure bet for re-election to a second term as state comptroller. It took just 93 days to destroy that career and force him to give up the post as the second highest-ranked statewide elected official.

Ironically, it was Hevesi's pushover opponent, Christopher Callaghan, an obscure upstate office holder, who started Hevesi's downward spiral on September 21 by revealing that Hevesi had a state worker chauffeuring his ailing wife, Carol, while collecting his state salary.

Then, like bricks falling from a collapsing wall, events unfolded through October. The Albany District Attorney launched a criminal probe on October 12 and the State Ethics Commission made a devastating finding on October 23 that Hevesi had violated state law. Finally, on December 21 the Forest Hills pol copped a plea to defrauding the state and also agreed not to take office to start his second term as state comptroller on January 1.

Besides the DA's investigation, which provided the most serious blow to Hevesi's cause, he was left with virtually no support through that disastrous period from September 21 to December 22.

The only weapon he had in trying to salvage his career was his impressive re-election victory November 7. He insisted "the people had spoken" and he would not resign his office.

But officials in Albany and the rest of the state waited while Albany County District Attorney David Soares and a grand jury concluded their work, clearly leaving Hevesi no escape route.

The final chapter in the Hevesi drama will take place on February 9 when he will be sentenced. He is not expected to serve any prison term. As part of the plea deal, he agreed to pay a \$5,000 fine in addition to the

\$206,000 he was forced to pay the state as reimbursement for the salary paid to the state worker turned chauffeur.

Replacing Hevesi as comptroller is first Deputy Comptroller Thomas Sanzello, who will serve until the state legislature, acting as a single house, selects Hevesi's replacement to serve a full four-year term.

The selection will require a two-thirds vote which gives the 150-member, Democrat-controlled Assembly a decided edge over the 62-member state senate in choosing Hevesi's replacement. Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver will play the key role in choosing Hevesi's successor, virtually assuring that a Democrat will be chosen.

However, governor-elect Eliot Spitzer is sure to play a major role in the decision. Silver has stated he intends to work with the governor-elect "to the best of my ability".

Silver hasn't given any clue as to which way he's leaning, but the candidates speculated to be the favorites for selection are Democratic Assemblymembers Michael Gianaris (Astoria), Richard Brodsky (Westchester), Tom DiNapoli (Long Island), Alexander Grannis (Manhattan) and Joseph Morelle (Rochester).

Others being mentioned are Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrion, former Buffalo federal prosecutor Denise O'Donnell and 2002 comptroller candidate Bill Mulrow.

Mulrow has past experience in the financial community, which helps because of the comptroller's function as the state's chief fiscal officer and sole investor in the state employees' pension fund.

The state legislature is not expected to get around to choosing Hevesi's replacement until about mid-January.

Hevesi, 66, rose to a prominent position on the Queens political scene in his 35-year political career. He also made his presence



felt in the Assembly, where he served as the Majority Leader for many years.

The Queens College graduate, who earned his doctorate in political science at Columbia University, became a dominant force in Forest Hills, serving simultaneously as the Assemblymember and Democratic district leader.

After serving two terms as city comptroller from 1994 to 2001, he emerged as the leading Democratic candidate for mayor in the 2001 campaign. However, he lost his momentum after a dispute arose with the Campaign Finance Board and he ran a poor third in the primary.

He recouped quickly after that setback, winning election as state

comptroller in 2002 over John Faso and setting the stage for his fateful run against Callaghan earlier this year.

Hevesi started his political career in 1971 after getting his doctoral degree at Columbia. The Forest Hills/Rego Park Assembly seat became available that year when incumbent Emanuel Gold won a special election to fill a vacancy in the state senate.

Hevesi would also become an adjunct professor of political science at his alma mater, Queens College.

In time, Hevesi moved up through the Democratic ranks in the Assembly to become the number two man in the hierarchy as Majority Leader, immediately subordinate only to the Speaker.

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