

Maloney Gets Top Committee Spot

Ending the year on a bright note, Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney announced that she has been named vice chair of the Joint Economic Committee (JEC), which is chaired by United States Senator Charles Schumer. The key panel now has a distinctly New York flavor.

Maloney's appointment is another in a series of committee appointments of Queens congressmembers which followed the Democratic Party's assuming control of both houses of government in last November's elections.

The appointment makes Maloney (D-Queens/Manhattan) the top ranking House member on the committee. Maloney, who has previously served on the JEC, will collaborate closely with Schumer. She has consistently advocated for economic policies that benefit working Americans and the middle class and promises to continue to focus on these issues.

Commenting on her appointment by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Maloney said she looks forward to "working closely with my Senator and good friend Chuck Schumer. He is a tremendous leader who works hard on behalf of the American people".

Maloney added: "It has become evident that over the past few years that working Americans have been left behind in this economy, and they need a strong voice representing them. I plan to work closely with the others on the committee to examine why our economic policies haven't been working and how we can ensure that all Americans share in the prosperity."

In her announcement, Pelosi stated that Maloney "has been an aggressive voice in ensuring that strong U.S. economic growth will benefit all of American families, not just the wealthy few".

VELAZQUEZ NAMED PANEL CHAIR: Another major committee appointment announced recently was that of veteran Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez as chair of the Small Business Committee, another New York-oriented panel. The appointment has major significance because Velazquez is the first Hispanic woman to chair a full congressional committee.

For many years, parts of Ridgewood and other Western Queens areas have been included in Velazquez's bi-county or tri-county districts, which covered part of Brooklyn and/or Manhattan.

Also significant is the fact that since 1998, Velazquez has been the ranking Democrat on the Small Business Committee, so she's well versed in the ground it covers.

Velazquez sees the nation's 26 million small businesses as suffering from paying too much for regulatory and tax compliance and for business loans and beset by high energy and healthcare costs, or no healthcare coverage at all.

She stated: "Giving the myriad of challenges facing entrepreneurs today, it is more important now than ever that these firms are able to access the tools they need in order to be successful. That is why modernizing and revamping the Small Business Administration, and its programs, is so critical."

She pointed out that the SBA has had its budget cut sharply and has fallen victim to mismanagement. This has resulted in smaller loans to small businesses. She promises to change much of this to enable small businesses to become the economic engines they should be.

Velazquez has also been appointed to the Democratic Steering Committee, which makes policy for the House-controlling Dems.

HOLIDAY TRAGEDY: A tragic accident struck Congresswoman Joseph Crowley, the

Queens Democratic Party leader, and others of the organization last week when, following Crowley's annual office holiday dinner in Woodside, Eileen Gillespie was driving her friend, Margaret (Peggy) Bartichek home. They were involved in an accident and Bartichek died in the crash.

Crowley stated that he was "deeply shocked and saddened to learn of Peggy's death".

Crowley said Bartichek, 74, had worked for him for 18 years and was "a dedicated employee and dear, personal friend".

"Peggy dedicated her life to public service, was a strong presence in the lives of so many people she helped through her work, until her retirement last year," Crowley related. "Peggy's friendship made her a special part of my life."

Crowley recalled that Bartichek had attended his wedding and the baptisms of his three children.

Gillespie, 69, who also was a Crowley employee, was reported in stable condition after the accident at Elmhurst Hospital.

KATZ CALLS FOR RACCOON ROUNDUP: City Councilmember Melinda Katz (D), the Forest Hills representative, recently sounded like those hills are out in the wide open spaces as she called for a raccoon roundup.

Alarmed by numerous reports of raccoon sightings, Katz wants to put a law on the books authorizing "the prompt removal of raccoons from any outdoor public and private property upon receiving a request from a member of the public".

Katz said the city should provide a procedure for "the humane capture and release of these animals to any area where they will no longer pose a threat to people".

WEINER SCORES 100%: The Leadership Council on Civil Rights (LCCR) has given Congresswoman Anthony Weiner (D-Queens/Brooklyn) a 100 percent rating for consistently voting to protect civil rights. Weiner has cast votes to reauthorize the

Voting Rights Act, advocated tougher federal hate crime laws, opposed the Federal Marriage Amendment, and has fought unfair voter ID laws.

Weiner stated, "New York City's many diverse communities make our city the envy of the world. It's essential that we pass smart legislation to expand and protect our civil rights."

GIVE GIFT OF FREQUENT FLIER MILES: That's a suggestion from state Senate Minority Leader Malcolm Smith (D-St. Albans), who says frequent flyer miles would be a great gift to members of the country's armed forces. That's especially true during this year-end holiday season.

Smith said this act of kindness can be performed through a program called "Hero Miles," which was begun in 2004. Participating airlines include AirTran Airways, Alaska Airlines, American Airlines Continental, Delta, Midwest, Northwest and United Airlines. Nearly 7,500 tickets have been given to hospitalized servicemen and women and their families, Smith said, at a value of more than \$10 million.

HEALTH FUNDS RUNNING OUT: Warning that 9/11 health treatment funding is running out and programs may have to be scrapped, a bipartisan coalition of elected officials and responder advocates called on the Bush Administration to provide additional comprehensive funding in next year's budget.

Among the lawmakers, Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney (D-Queens/Manhattan) pointed out: "Secretary Michael Leavitt of the Department of Health and Human Services called the original release of federal treatment funding a 'down payment', but unless the Bush Administration acts now, some 9/11 treatment programs are going to get foreclosure notices.

"We need a commitment that the president will make 9/11 health a priority and include comprehensive funding in the next budget."

U.S. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton declared, "Time is passing and people are getting sick and dying."

Clinton stated, "This has to be one of the president's top priorities in his upcoming budget. We are all in agreement that there is a serious problem at hand, but the buck now stops with the president."

Adding his voice to the call for the Republican president to act in the matter, Republican Congressman Vito Fossella (Staten Island) stated:

"It is essential [that] funding is provided in the president's budget to help treat individuals suffering from 9/11 illnesses. We're facing the very real possibility current funding for treatment could run out in the first half of 2007, leaving our first responders without the health care they need."

This past October, the very first federal outlay—\$40 million—for the treatment of Ground Zero first responders suffering from 9/11 illnesses was released by the federal Department of Health and Human Services. Leavitt has acknowledged that this was only a down payment. "Doctors who have monitored these patients have told Congress that the crisis must be viewed as a long term problem," Maloney said.



Vallone Rocks

The former Immaculate Conception Folk Group featuring Peter Vallone Jr., at right with bass, and his brother Paul, in hat, plays Christmas carols for the residents of United Cerebral Palsy Home located at 21 St. and 30th Avenue, carrying on a 22-year tradition.

