

Democratic Takeover In D.C., Albany

Happy New Year!!

The wish for happy tidings throughout 2007 permeated the atmosphere in Albany Monday as Eliot Spitzer was sworn in as the state's 54th governor along with Lieutenant Governor David Paterson and Attorney General Andrew Cuomo.

In his inaugural address, the new 47-year-old governor came out swinging, as expected.

After a warm welcome and pleasant comments directed to Governor George Pataki, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and state Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno—whose activities were often stalled over the past 12 years because of sharp disagreements—Spitzer leveled a critical blast at the trio, declaring his intention to establish a different tone for his administration.

Spitzer stated, "We chose pragmatism and ethics over partisan politics and dysfunction, and we demanded an end to gridlock."

Later on, taking note of the scandal-scarred state capital, the reform minded former state attorney general stated, "We must change the ethics of Albany and end the politics of cynicism and division in our state."

Spitzer has also spoken of the challenges the state faces in improving the schools and the economy and addressing healthcare problems, including insurance coverage for millions presently without it.

In another slap at Pataki, Silver and Bruno, Spitzer said, "Over the last decade, we have seen what can happen when our government stands still in the face of great challenge. Today is the day when all of that changes."

The Spitzer era actually began with his two-term stint as attorney general where, with his impressive crackdown on the Wall Street investment community, he compiled the record that paved his way to the governor's mansion.

Also notable was Paterson's swearing-in. Paterson is the first black elected official to reach such a high level in New York

state government. His proud father, Basil Paterson, who had aimed for that goal but missed, looked on.

Cuomo's swearing-in drew great interest as it marked the return to the state capital of former Governor Mario Cuomo, his wife, Matilda and their family. Albany

was also the place where the state's top law enforcement official started his career in government. He will be watched closely in his new post, where he will find huge shoes to fill.

Conspicuous by his absence was former state Comptroller Alan Hevesi, who would have been starting his second term as the state's chief fiscal officer, except that he was forced to resign recently as an outgrowth of his brush with the law.

Meanwhile, no sooner had Hevesi escaped the limelight that held him captive for almost

four months, than the spotlight was aimed at another star on the Albany scene, state Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno.

The powerful Republican leader, who is the subject of an FBI probe, today could be facing a possible challenge for the legislative leadership post he has held for the past 12 years.

On the Democratic side of the aisle in the senate, Senator Malcolm Smith (D-St. Albans), became Democratic Minority Leader, having been elected to succeed David Paterson.

2 QUEENS NEW FACES SWORN IN: Flushing residents elected two new Assemblymembers last November 7, Ellen Young (22nd Assembly District) and Rory Lancman (25th Assembly District). Both were among the Assemblymembers sworn-in yesterday.

Young replaces Jimmy Meng, who retired. She is the first Asian woman to serve in the Assembly. Lancman, an attorney, replaces Brian McLaughlin, who also retired from the seat he held for almost a decade. Like Bruno, he is the subject of an FBI probe. In that respect, it was a bad year for Albany.

BIG DAY FOR DEMS IN WASHINGTON, TOO: Monday's festivities in the state capital marked the Democrats' return to power in the state after a 12-year absence. As part of the new order, all Queens lawmakers—Gary Ackerman, Joseph Crowley, Anthony Weiner, Carolyn Maloney and Gregory Meeks—won appointments to key committee posts and hold the promise of bringing home some of the bacon to their Queens districts.

Among them, Crowley, the Queens Democratic leader, continues to serve as Chief

Deputy Whip in the Democratic hierarchy.

Maloney was named co-chair of the Joint Economic Committee two weeks ago, making her second in command to Senator Charles Schumer, the chairman.

Then last Wednesday, it was reported that the Queens/Manhattan lawmaker will be named to head the Subcommittee on Financial Institutions and Consumer Credit of the House Financial Services Committee. The subcommittee oversees the billion-dollar banking industry and deals with legislation covering terrorism insurance, predatory lending and bank overdraft fees.

2008 PREZ CAMPAIGN MARATHON: This year will serve as the run-up to the 2008 presidential campaign, and from the look of things it will take quite a bit of time to shake out the Democratic candidate.

On the Republican side, it looks like a two-way battle between former Mayor Rudy Giuliani and Arizona Senator John McCain. But there are several others who have filed with the Federal Election Committee—former Wisconsin Governor Tommy G. Thompson, former Virginia Governor James S. Gilmore and U.S. Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas.

Others mentioned include ex-New York Governor George Pataki, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney.

On the Democratic side, U.S. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and Illinois Senator Barack Obama top the list, although neither has formally announced they are running.

Also widely mentioned are: Senators Joseph R. Biden (Delaware) Christopher Dodd (Connecticut), and John Kerry (Massachusetts), Al Gore and John Edwards, the former North Carolina Senator who was Kerry's running mate in 2004; Governor Bill Richardson, of New Mexico and General Wesley Clark.

This list will probably be added to during this year and into early 2008 before we get many defections.

The surprise thus far has been Obama, a freshman Senator from Illinois who only came on the scene during the year of his successful Senate campaign. Since thrusting himself into the early presidential field, he has done surprisingly well in some polls in early primary states.

Clinton, however, has a considerable war chest and the prospect of hogging the money field for the foreseeable future.

In the McCain/Giuliani camps thus far the emphasis has been on building up and tapping new financial resources. The former New York City mayor appears to have the edge now, but McCain challenged Giuliani in his New York City base recently and did very well.

Long range, it appears to be a good bet that these two will still be fighting tooth and nail when the Republican presidential convention rolls around next year.

In the Democratic race, we see it as Clinton and probably Obama. A freshman Senator, not widely known before his speech at the Democratic convention at Madison Square Garden in 2004, has made giant strides in making his name and background recognizable over just the past two years. He can't go any way but up. As we see it, the question is how far up?



Weprin Praises Local Hero



Assemblymember Mark Weprin (D-Little Neck) was at Public School 205Q, the Alexander Graham Bell School, to honor Andrew Ferdinandi, who saved the life of one of the students in the school.

Mr. Ferdinandi happened to be walking by the school when a child suddenly collapsed outside the building. He performed CPR and helped the child back into the school.

In recognition of Mr. Ferdinandi's good deed, Assemblymember Weprin presented him with a New York State Assembly Proclamation at a special school assembly. "Andrew Ferdinandi is a true hero," said Assemblymember Weprin. "He deserves recognition as an outstanding citizen who did the right thing at a critical moment."

**Left to right:
Assemblymember Mark Weprin, Andrew Ferdinandi, PS 205 Principal Susan Sherer.**