



Early in the year, when budgets are being prepared, talk of taxes is everywhere. On the federal level, Democrats in Congress, who just became the majority party in the House of Representatives, are talking about giving some tax relief to the middle and lower tax brackets at the expense of the country's top wage earners.

Here in the city, where higher real estate taxes are a prospect because of higher property assessments, Mayor Michael Bloomberg indicated he wasn't too keen on cutting real estate taxes, despite a possible \$2 billion surplus this year.

From Washington, Congressman Anthony Weiner (D-Queens/Brooklyn) said several years of tax cuts by the Bush presidential administration had put more money in the pockets of the wealthy, but "actually raised the middle class tax rate".

"Just about every new Democratic member of Congress came to Washington vowing to help ease the middle class tax burden, Weiner declared. "Now's the time to act."

Under the Democrats' plan, families making \$150,000 or less should get a 10 percent tax cut and the tax credit for those families should be doubled from \$1,000 to

## Talk About Taxes Takes Center Stage

\$2,000 per child. Also, the adjustment to the Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT) should be extended so that it doesn't apply to middle class taxpayers.

Finally, Weiner said, "Create a simple 'zero' tax bracket for anyone making less than \$25,000 a year income."

This tax decrease would be paid by placing a small surcharge on annual income of more than \$1 million a year and slightly increase the tax rate for annual incomes over \$1 billion.

"All told," Weiner, said "79 percent of New Yorkers would get a tax cut while less than 1 percent would pay a little more."

The Democrats should have no problem passing these changes, but President George W. Bush hopes to make permanent the tax benefits for the wealthy that were previously enacted.

Locally, Mayor Bloomberg will probably reveal his budget plans today when he delivers his State of the City address at City Hall.

If he stands by the "no real estate tax increase" statement he made last week, we think the City Council will disagree with him and will try to push through a property tax cut. Some councilmembers have already hinted at this.

However, the mayor has already

announced plans to extend his \$400-a-year real estate tax rebate to property owners who got an \$18.5 percent tax increase in 2003. This helps only property owners; low- and middle-income wage earners will still be looking for some tax relief.

**THOMPSON TOPS:** City Comptroller William Thompson is far out in front in building a war chest for a campaign for mayor in 2009, according to media reports.

Thompson already has about \$2.5 million in the bank after raising \$500,000 in the past six months.

Other possible candidates are far in the rear as far as money to run a race is concerned. Congressman Anthony Weiner, who ran second to Fernando Ferrer in the 2005 Democratic mayoral primary, hasn't raised any funds for the 2009 race, although most political mavens expect him to run. City Councilmember Tony Avella (D-Bayside), who says he's a candidate, hasn't even reached the \$100,000 mark yet.

Other possible candidates are Council Speaker Christine Quinn and two borough presidents—Adolfo Carrion of The Bronx and Marty Markowitz of Brooklyn.

**PIRRO TV TALK SHOW HOST?** Former Westchester DA Jeanine Pirro may be popping up on your TV screen in the near future as a talk show host according to published reports. Pirro, 55, lost the race as

the Republican candidate for state attorney general last fall after a bumpy race. She has always shown good stage presence in her public appearances, and reportedly Warner Brothers has been talking to her about doing a show.

**NIX N-WORD, SAYS COMRIE:** Fed up with widespread use of the derogatory N-word, Councilmember Leroy Comrie (D-Jamaica) who is black, says he plans to introduce a resolution on February 1, the first day of Black History Month, to impose a "symbolic moratorium" on use of the word in New York City. "It's racist, it's negative and it's demeaning. It boils my blood, the usage, even in a personal tone between people," Comrie said.

**CUOMO ON THE ATTACK:** Within a week recently, New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo set in motion programs that will focus his office on Medicaid fraud, member items in the state legislature and investigations of corruption in state government.

About two weeks ago, Cuomo announced that his office would review 6,000 member items approved last year by the state legislature to make sure they meet legal requirements for spending of taxpayers' money.

Member items, which are pet projects of legislators and governors that do not come under public review, totalled about \$2 million last year. They have come under sharp scrutiny at all levels of government.

In Albany, recently state Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno's grants to a business in his district that is owned by a friend of his have come under scrutiny.

Many such grants also go to civic groups and senior centers in legislators' districts.

Addressing Medicaid fraud, which costs the state billions of dollars, Cuomo tapped Brooklyn District Attorney Joe Hynes to conduct a thorough review of the attorney general's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit. Cuomo's predecessor, now Governor Eliot Spitzer, had often been criticized for not doing enough to uncover fraud in the healthcare program for the poor.

Cuomo appears to have made a good choice because Hynes decades ago served as the state's first special prosecutor for nursing home and Medicaid fraud.

Then last Thursday, Cuomo announced that his office and that of Albany District Attorney David Soares would collaborate on a plan to carry out investigations of corruption in state government by combining the resources and authority of their offices.

Soares' office can convene grand juries and bring criminal cases in Albany, but does not have the manpower to devote to the probes. Cuomo's agency can only pursue civil cases, but has staff sufficient to be assigned to Soares' office as special prosecutors.

Soares was recently in the spotlight in the case of former state Comptroller Alan Hevesi. Hevesi copped a plea to a charge that he employed a state worker as a chauffeur for his wife.

## Ackerman Asks Spitzer To Block Sanit Facility Close To LaG Airport

Plans to build an 11-story Marine Transfer Station fewer than 2,000 feet from LaGuardia Airport were blasted last week by Congressman Gary Ackerman as colossal stupidity and a potential disaster for Queens.

The veteran lawmaker called upon Governor Eliot Spitzer to intervene and stop the city Department of Sanitation's plan, which must have the approval of the state Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). That appears to be "the final step needed for this ill conceived project", Ackerman said.

In his appeal to Spitzer, Ackerman stated, "Governor, I am sure that even you and I could understand why one should not put an 11-story structure seconds away from the end of a runway.

"But on September 18, 2006, after an extensive lobbying effort, which included the city of New York and whoever else you might discover, and without any change in the proposal, the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] curiously and mysteriously reversed its previous determination and concluded that the Marine Transfer Station posed 'no hazard to air navigation.' Duh?"

Ackerman, (D-Bayside) said the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which operates the airport, is "the only player which seems to have its head

screwed on right"—it has appealed the FAA decision.

"Absent that," Ackerman continued, "the last remaining barriers to the construction of the Marine Transfer Station are permits issued by NYSDEC, required by New York State law, for the erection of a tower at this location."

According to Ackerman, New York City first submitted a proposal to construct the transfer station in the winter of 2004. On Jan. 28, 2005, the lawmaker said, the FAA determined that the placement of the project was presumed to be a hazard to air navigation, a position that was firmly echoed by the Port Authority.

"That decision, which in effect says it is dangerous to put an 11-story structure only seconds away from the end of an active runway, was very easy to understand, it was appropriate," Ackerman said.

Subsequently the FAA changed its position for reasons unknown.

In closing his letter to Spitzer, Ackerman pleaded with the state's newly installed chief executive: "in the interest of ensuring the safety of the flying public and the communities surrounding LaGuardia Airport, to support the appeal made by the PA and to work with it and me" to get the city Sanitation Department to place the transfer station at a less hazardous location.



As an alternative Spitzer could also make clear the unlikelihood of the NYSDEC approving the various permits needed to continue this project, Ackerman said.

Efforts to reach the Sanitation Department to comment before yesterday's deadline was unsuccessful.—**John Toscano**