

Mayor's Ambitious Policy Agenda Grows

Although Mayor Michael Bloomberg has a little more than two and a half years left in his final term, he continued to build on the huge and difficult agenda he has set for himself in that limited period of time when he announced his congestion pricing plan several days ago.

From all indications, the plan to try to restrict automobiles coming into the heart of Manhattan from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., except if a motorist is willing to pay \$8 for the privilege, will be very difficult to enact into law.

Already on the mayor's agenda is winning state legislative approval for extending mayoral control over the public school system, another major challenge for the lame-duck mayor.

The plan's chances got a boost last week when Governor Eliot Spitzer announced support for extending controls, but the governor is not on the best terms with legislative leaders, so it's questionable what benefit the mayor can derive

from that support.

The legislature's two powerful heavyweights—Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno—have given no indication about where they stand on extending schools control beyond 2009.

But one strong opponent—the city teachers' union—has been leading school parents in fiercely opposing the administration's latest school reorganization plan. That could do a lot to upset the extension.

Last week, there were reports that talks with the teachers' union seemed to be making some headway in eliminating some differences. That would be helpful for the embattled city chief executive.

Besides these two issues of major importance which, if defeated, would seriously deflate the Bloomberg administration's legacy, the mayor is still pursuing ambitious plans for major new affordable housing programs, parks improvements and environmental advances within the

city.

He has also been relentless in his efforts to impose gun sale restrictions in several states as a means of preventing guns from coming into New York City to be used in murders and crimes.

Although few mayors in recent years have pursued such a lofty and difficult agenda in the final years of their administrations, in this mayor's case it has triggered more than the usual talk that this incumbent may be harboring serious ambitions of seeking higher office, such as president of the United States.

While the mayor has dismissed this speculation as baseless, some of his activities have fed the presidential rumors expressed by some observers.

These grew out of his recent frequent trips to Washington to address issues before Congress and his appearances in several cities in connection with his anti-gun campaign.

Taking a possible Bloomberg presidential campaign out of the realm of speculation, this past Monday it was reported that according to Independence Party sources, a "top aide" to the mayor had met in recent months with New York State Party Chairman Frank MacKay "to discuss a national ballot access strategy for the 2008 presidential race.

The top aide, the column by Elizabeth Benjamin stated, was Kevin Sheekey, the mayor's top political strategist.

Benjamin noted, "Bloomberg aides declined to comment, but did not deny the meetings took place."

The mayor, the column added, had twice run on the Independence line "and it provided enough votes in 2001 to win him City Hall".

One important aspect of a possible Bloomberg presidential candidacy is that the funds for the race would not face any time constraints to raise—they are ready and waiting in the billionaire mayor's personal bank account.

REDISTRICTING CHANGES: Fulfilling a campaign promise, Governor Eliot Spitzer said last week he plans to propose changes on how legislative district lines throughout New York state should be drawn.

Presently the sitting state legislature—the Assembly and senate—redraw the lines every 10 years following the census count. For many years, this system has been severely criticized because the new lines are generally drawn to protect the interests of those who map the districts.

In the process, the incumbents avoid any meaningful challenge to their being re-elected.

In announcing his promised action, Spitzer said his aim was to do the redistricting in a non-partisan manner so that the procedure does not continue to be just a way "to ensure incumbency protection".

Among incumbent lawmakers, Assemblymember Michael Gianaris (D-Astoria) has been one of the most outspoken officials call-

ing for an independent agency to redraw the lines.

In order to amend the state constitution, two consecutive legislatures must pass the proposal, which must then also be passed by the voters statewide. If the present and next legislatures pass the governor's proposal, the amendment would then appear on the ballot in 2010.

Meanwhile, senate Republicans, led by Majority Leader Joseph Bruno, also offered a constitutional amendment that would impose term limits on three statewide elected officials, the governor, comptroller and attorney general. Under the proposal, the officials would be limited to two four-year terms, or eight years. If passed, the new constitutional provision would not apply to those currently holding those offices, and if two legislatures passed the amendment, it would be voted on by the electorate in 2010.

Passing either Spitzer's or Bruno's amendments might prove difficult. The reapportionment change would seem not to be very popular with lawmakers because the current system virtually assures those now in office of re-election since they dictate how the remapping is done. It would not seem to be a pressing issue for the public as a whole, so that there would not be a good chance of rallying voters to support it.

Also, there has not been a serious outcry for term limits, among reform organizations or the public.

NOLAN CLUB HONORS WEINER: Congressman Anthony Weiner (D-Queens/Brooklyn) will receive the Public Service Award from Assemblymember Catherine Nolan's Ridgewood Democratic Club at the club's annual dinner on June 9 at Gottscheer Hall in Ridgewood. Tickets are \$75 per person.

Other honorees include Jimmy van Bramer as Man of the Year and Joseph Conley, chairman of Community Board 2 in Sunnyside/Woodside, who with Tran Nguyet, will share the Community Service Award. Marlene Cueto as Woman of the Year; John R. Durso and Barbara Silberman, Labor Leaders of the Year; John G. Vogt and Theresa Facciuto, Business People of the Year, and Alice Cardona, Lifetime Achievement Award.

YOUNG REPUBS' FETE: Queens' veteran Republican state Senators Frank Padavan (Bellerose) and Serphin Maltese (Middle Village), will head the distinguished visitors' list at the Queens County Young Republicans' bash on Thursday evening, May 3.

The event, at the Bourbon Street Restaurant at 40-12 Bell Blvd., Bayside, signals increasing efforts by young GOPers to be more active since Philip Ragusa of Beechhurst took the reins of the county organization.

In the flyer announcing the event, the organizers stated twin themes—improving the environment and paying homage to Maltese and Padavan for their legislative records. The event will benefit the City Parks Foundation.

I On Politics
By John Toscano

Crowley Meets With British P.M.



Congressman Joseph Crowley (D-Queens/The Bronx) recently met with British Prime Minister Tony Blair (r.) at Blair's official London residence, 10 Downing Street, during a recent visit of a Congressional delegation to Ireland and England on the Irish peace process. The delegation included Congressman Carolyn McCarthy (D-Long Island). During the meeting with the Prime Minister, Crowley discussed progress of the Irish peace process and recent events, including the meeting of Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern and DUP Leader the Rev. Ian Paisley.

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