

On the brief side...

Press For More Child Health Insurance

Governor Eliot Spitzer and the state's lawmakers in Washington continued to press for more child health insurance coverage after the Bush presidential administration denied the governor's request to expand coverage under the state program.

Under the governor's plan, 70,000 more children would have been covered by expanding eligibility to include higher-income families in the program. Congress had passed legislation which authorized the governor's action, but the Bush administration imposed more stringent guidelines which disallowed the governor's planned program extension.

Spitzer said the administration's action was a "cruel blow to New York's uninsured children and to uninsured families across the country". He urged President George W. Bush to "do the right thing to protect our nation's children" and warned that he was prepared to pursue legal action to challenge the administration's rules.

The governor met with the state's Washington delegation to discuss future strategy. Afterward, the lawmakers appealed to federal Medicaid officials to change their ruling.

Senator Hillary Clinton accused the administration of ignoring parents "who are nervous that their children will get sick and they won't be able to afford costly medical bills".

The state's lawmakers pointed out that the reason for extending program coverage eligibility to higher-income families was that the cost of living is higher in this state than in others.

"Data from the Economic Policy Institute shows that families at 350 percent of the federal poverty level living in New York City and Long Island have no available income after paying for basic necessities such as housing, taxes, child care and transportation to and from work," they argued.

Marshall, Maloney Address Mortgage Crisis

Responding to a staggering increase in the number of foreclosures in Queens, Borough President Helen Marshall held a forum Monday evening to provide critical information to empower home buyers and homeowners.

Meanwhile in Washington, Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney (D-Queens/Manhattan) endorsed proposals by President Bush to provide federal refinancing options to more homeowners who are in danger of losing their homes because of the national mortgage crisis.

Maloney said she agreed with the president's proposals to let homeowners having mortgage problems refinance their mortgages with help from the Federal Housing Administration (FHA).

The lawmaker, a longtime member of Congressional financial services committees, also declared her support of the legislative fix to change tax laws so that cancelled mortgage debt is not treated as income.

In Queens, Marshall cited statistics showing that Queens accounted for 2,783 foreclosures from January 1 to June 25 of this year, approximately 41 percent of the citywide foreclosures.

Marshall said that her borough reflects what more and more homeowners across the country are experiencing. Earlier this month, she reported, federal and state banking regulators advised lenders and investors to restructure the loans of millions of borrowers facing the risk of foreclosure.

At the forum at the Langston Hughes Library and Cultural Center in Corona, she was joined by representatives of the Preserving Assets and Community Equity (PACE) program, which is expanding to Northern Queens.

"We are partnering with a small army of organizations to provide expert advice and information for homeowners on everything from mortgage counseling and affordable refinancing of loans to real estate scams," she stated.

Gov. Signs Anti-DWI Law

Governor Eliot Spitzer has signed into law a bill to increase the judicial use of ignition interlock devices, which prevent vehicles from being started when the driver's breath indicates excessive alcohol consumption.

"This law will help prevent incidents of repeat drunk driving, which sadly occur far too often," the governor said.

The new law will make several improvements to the current anti-drunk driving legal system, such as requiring ignition interlock devices to be used on any vehicle owned or operated by an offender. It also closes a loophole which had allowed offenders to drive business vehicles on personal errands with their employer's consent.

The new law will allow judges throughout the state to restrict certain offenders from driving as a probation condition unless they have received a post-revocation conditional license, which allows driving under specified narrow purposes, such as driving to work or alcohol counseling.

The governor also signed legislation that will reduce air pollution from idling school buses, particularly in school districts with a significant number of children with asthma.

Emissions from diesel engines in trucks and buses contain pollutants that can become lodged deep in human lungs and which have been linked to cancer and asthma and other respiratory diseases.

Mayor Launches 9/11 Health Web Site

Mayor Michael Bloomberg has announced a new 9/11 Web site—www.nyc.gov—which consolidates the latest information about scientific research and services, including where those affected can go for free treatment and medicines.

The Web site also includes treatment options for different groups of affected people: rescue and recovery workers, residents, children, city employees and others. The new site provides, for the first time, a single source for information about the health effects of 9/11.

The mayor said in announcing the new site, "We want people to know more about the potential health effects of 9/11 so that they can reach out for assessment and services."

The World Trade Center health Web site was created and was a key recommendation of the Mayor's Addressing the Health Impacts of 9/11 report. Among the new site's features is a link to financial assistance providers, social service and environmental groups and resources for healthcare professionals.

—Compiled by John Toscano

Council Restores Vallone Scholarship Funding



Former City Council Speaker Peter F. Vallone Sr. (at l. of podium) and City Councilmember Peter Vallone Jr. (at Vallone Sr.'s l.) joined with Queens College students to hail the restoration of funding for the Peter F. Vallone Scholarship, a program that provides financial assistance to thousands of students at CUNY colleges around the city.

City Councilmember Peter F. Vallone Jr. and his father, former City Council Speaker Peter Vallone Sr., joined with elected officials, Queens College faculty and students on September 7 to applaud another successful fight to win funding for the Peter F. Vallone Scholarship, a program that provides financial assistance to thousands of students around the city. The scholarship awards money to students who achieve a B average in high school and throughout their studies in City University of New York (CUNY) institutions.

Surrounded by scholarship winners, Vallone Jr. said, "I just need to look to my left to see how important these scholarships have been to both the students and the future of New York City. I am proud to continue to fight and win funding for this scholarship."

All CUNY students are eligible for the scholarship if they graduated from a public or parochial school in the city with a B average and maintain that grade during college. Currently, the scholarship awards money to approximately 10,000 students, 3,800 of whom are in Queens, the most of any borough.

Funding varies from year to year, but this year the scholarship was able to provide students up to \$1,250 toward a full year's tuition. Since its inception, the scholarship has been cut and restored to the city budget during bureaucratic negotiations, leading Councilmember Leroy Comrie to ask for the program to be permanently baselined.

"It's important to reward students for their hard work, and allow every motivated child in this city to obtain a good education," Vallone Sr. said. "This scholarship goes a long way towards keeping New York City a place where everyone can achieve their dreams."

Cancer Survivors Get Free Spa Treatment



Photo Vinny DuPre

Cancer patients, caregivers and survivors stopped by Riccardo's by the Bridge last Thursday, September 6, for some welcome and well deserved pampering by the Energizer ReTreat Spa in conjunction with SHAREing and CAREing breast cancer support services. Back massages, manicures and encouraging words were offered free of charge.