

Editorials

Cellphones Belong In New York City Schools

Every so often, somebody, somewhere shows they have good sense. The New York City Council did just that last week when the body overrode Mayor Michael Bloomberg's ban on cellphones in New York City schools. By a vote of 46 to two, the council passed Intro. 351-A. Intro. 351-A, according to a news release from City Councilmember Peter Vallone Jr., "legally solidifies the right of students to possess cellphones on their way to and from school, thereby putting the onus on the city to develop a plan dealing with cellphones during school hours. The bill could provide the legal basis for a parent to bring litigation against the city demanding they provide a reasonable means to accommodate a student's right to carry a phone to and from school."

We have several times expressed our agreement with Vallone's and the council's position. Cellphones, especially in New York City, and especially for the city's schoolchildren, are not a frivolous toy. Many students in this city, especially in the upper grades, do not attend neighborhood schools. They travel great distances from neighborhood to neighborhood and from borough to borough to get to schools that best foster and serve their talents and abilities. Of necessity, many

families have both parents in the workforce, some of who must also travel considerable distances, often by several modes of public transportation, to get to jobs that enable them to put food on tables, clothes on backs and lunch money in their children's pockets. And far be it from us to capitalize on the greatest tragedy suffered by this city and nation in recent history, but one outstanding lesson arising from the events of Sept. 11, 2001 was that parents and children need to be able to contact each other in times of crisis. Nor need a situation be a national emergency to demonstrate the importance of parent-child cellphone communication. "Hi, Mom. The subway broke down and I'm going to take the bus. I'll be about half an hour late getting home," be the message received directly or shunted to voicemail, has saved many a parent from gut-wrenching anxiety (and many a child from a scolding, justified or not).

Cellphones equipped with cameras have been used to cheat on several occasions, and there is certainly no excuse for any student—or any teacher, for that matter—to be talking on a cellphone when class is in session. All the schools in the city should establish and enforce

an across-the-board rule: When class starts, the cellphone is off and stashed in pocket or purse, No exceptions, no excuses. Any conversation so long that it cannot be conducted in the five-minute break between classes should be held outside school hours, anyway.

Vallone believes, as do we, that the importance of cellphones to the public safety of New York City's children should outweigh other concerns. The full ramifications of one problem he cites, the [seeming] inability of teachers to control a few bad kids, are the subject of another editorial. We point out, however, that there were disruptive kids in the world's classrooms long before there were cellphones. Simply put, teachers need to be able to enforce rules and deans and principals must back them up, whether those rules concern cellphones or anything else.

Modern technology has provided us with the ability to keep in touch with the people about whom we are most concerned, no matter what obstacles arise. We would be foolish—worse, we would be inexcusably negligent—if we did not allow our children to use that technology, even as they move from class to class in school.

Economy Cannot Afford Internet Access Taxes

Unless Congress acts before November 1, Queens residents will be among millions of Americans who will see new taxes from state and local governments on their monthly Internet access bills. According to Don't Tax Our Web, an umbrella group of Internet service providers and telecommunications company associations, a tax on Internet access would be highly regressive, falling hardest on those who can least afford it.

We agree. An Internet access tax in actuality would tax access to information, to knowledge, to a voice in the democratic process and to economic opportunity. Ours is a market-based economy, and perhaps most important among the tax-free Internet's many benefits is the lower cost to consumers and businesses that allows a single individual with an Internet connection to create a new Web site or grow a business. Democratization of entrepreneurship has resulted in large part from the widespread accessibility afforded by a minimal Internet tax burden.

Internet access in most of the United States is untaxed because in 1998, Congress implemented the Internet Tax Fairness Act, preventing most states and localities from imposing taxes on Internet access. The tax moratorium was extended in 2001 and 2004, but public interest groups in favor of a tax-free Internet worry that the "temporary" part

of the moratorium may be just that. "The problem with a temporary moratorium is that it certainly sends a signal that this may expire," Broderick Johnson, a spokesperson for Don't Tax Our Web, commented.

The 1998 Internet Tax Fairness Act and the 2001 Internet Tax Freedom Act prevented localities from imposing new taxes on Internet service providers, except for several states that already had taxes on Internet use in place. Congress left them alone. However, organizations such as the National Governors Association (NGA) and the U.S. Conference of Mayors have expressed concerns that the changing nature of the Internet prevents states and municipalities from collecting revenue due them. Of particular concern is the definition of "Internet access", which determines whether a technology can be taxed locally. States are also concerned that they are losing money because e-commerce transactions are typically not subject to sales taxes. (This is not the case if a merchant has a store in the state where the item is being purchased or delivered.)

The possible imposition of such taxes is a major concern for Web-based companies, as well as some of their counterparts with actual stores. "Companies have to be able to plan, they have to have a sense of what their costs will be," Johnson noted. Allowing the imposition of Internet-use taxes would constitute a

major blow to companies that conduct many, if not all, of their transactions on the World Wide Web.

Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson and Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez have sent a letter to key leaders of Congress, notably House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-California) and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nevada), urging them to support the permanent Internet tax ban. Keeping the Internet tax-free, it said in part, will "help ensure that consumers have affordable access to the Internet ... and strengthen the foundations of electronic commerce as a vital and growing part of our economy".

Tax-free Internet access plays a part in almost every aspect of American life. Even people who do not use computers and think the Internet is some sort of newfangled way to catch fish indirectly participate in Internet business transactions, whether they know it or not. In only a few short years the Internet has become a major factor in the economic outlook of the United States. Taxing the Internet would impose a heavy burden on those least able to sustain it and seriously damage a flourishing segment of the American economy. We urge our representatives in both houses of Congress to renew the present moratorium on Internet taxes—better yet, make the ban permanent. We cannot afford to do otherwise.

The Queens
Gazette



**PUBLISHED BY THE
SERVICE
ADVERTISING
GROUP INC.**

Publisher/EditorTony Barsamian
Community LiaisonJulie Wager
Production ManagerDenise Gallo
Art DirectorEd Husser
General ManagerVinny DuPre
EditorLinda Wilson
Editor EmeritusJohn Toscano
Assistant To The PublisherMelissa Cipolla
Classified Ad DirectorRose Albergo
Restaurant Of The WeekTeresa Barile

Display Advertising Sales

For your sales rep. call

(718) 361-6161

Fax (718) 784-7552

E Mail Address

QGazette@AOL.COM

Business Office and Display Advertising
42-16 34th Avenue, L.I.C. N.Y. 11101
(718) 361-6161

Display Advertising Copy Deadline
Friday 5 p.m.

Camera Ready Deadline Monday 4 p.m.
Editorial Copy Deadline Friday 12 noon

All items for the Queens Gazette must be submitted in writing. Pictures cannot be returned. The Queens Gazette reserves the right to edit or reject any material, including advertising, submitted for publication. Send your news, bulletins, photos, calendar listings, etc., to: The Editor, The Queens Gazette, 42-16 34th Avenue, Astoria, NY 11101. Entire contents copyright © 2007 The Service Advertising Group Inc. No part of the publication may be reproduced without the written consent of the publisher. Any copyright infringements will be pursued to the fullest extent of the law. The Gazette is not responsible for the content of any advertisement nor is it responsible for opinions expressed in this publication.

We welcome your correspondence.

Address your letters to: The
Gazette 42-16 34th Ave., Long
Island City, N.Y. 11101. Or EMail
us at: **QGazette@AOL.com**.

While you're on line check us out at
www.qgazette.com Please include

a name and address on all
correspondence, names will be
withheld on request.

The Queens Gazette ISSN: 1547-3538 is
published weekly on Wednesday for \$20
per year by Queens Gazette
Newsprinting Service Advertising
Group Inc. 42-16 34th Avenue. Long
Island City, N.Y. 11101. Periodical
postage paid at Long Island City. POST-
MASTER: Send address changes to
Queens Gazette 42-16 34th Avenue
Long Island City N.Y. 11101.

The Gazette is not responsible for the opinions expressed in the letters or op-eds contained on these pages.