

Editorial

Closed Firehouses Put Queens Residents In Danger

An analysis of Fire Department (FDNY) response times in Queens for 2007 recently issued by the Uniformed Fire Officers Association (UFOA) shows an average response time to structural fires of 4 minutes and 58 seconds, significantly higher than the citywide 2007 average response time of 4 minutes and 27 seconds. Response times in Western Queens, where the city shut down Engine Company 261 in Long Island City in 2003, are slower and worse than during the years prior to the elimination of Engine 261, when response time to structural fires during the three years prior to the engine company's closing averaged 4 minutes, 28 seconds, better than the borough average. In the four years since the closing, average response time has risen to 5 minutes, 5 seconds, worse than the borough-wide average.

Engine Company 261 was closed in May 2003. Almost two years later, in April 2005, a fire started in an apartment shared by two brothers at 32-50 38th St. Try as it might—and it did try valiantly—the nearest fire company, Engine Company 262, needed more than seven minutes to reach the scene from its quarters at 30-89 21st St. Minutes count in a fire situation, and in this case, the delay occasioned by closing Engine 261, which had been quartered at 37-20 29th St., was in large part responsible for the fact that one of the two brothers died at the scene and the other was severe-

ly injured.

Closed firehouses are one part of the problem. According to UFOA Lieutenants' Representative Stephen Carbone, "The population is through the roof in that borough." Carbone speculated that Fire Department administration views Queens as it was 50 and 60 years ago—a sparsely populated suburban community. One need only walk down a street, any street, especially in Western Queens, to find irrefutable evidence that this is no longer the case. Many neighborhoods have been experiencing more development of large apartment buildings. Not only do these buildings have many units, but also the individual units house many people. This is especially true in Astoria and Long Island City. And yet, even though neighborhoods in the western part of the borough are seeing more high-density buildings being built, the area has seen no improvement in fire response since Engine 261 was closed, according to a statement from Borough President Helen Marshall's office.

"I believe that without additional fire resources in Queens—particularly in Western Queens—we will never reach the Fire Department response time goal of [4 minutes 27 seconds] to structural fires," Marshall said last month during her State of the Borough address.

We appreciate the city's need to save

money. These are not the most affluent of times, but even if they were, fiscal prudence never comes amiss, either for municipalities or for the people who dwell therein. However, fiscal prudence should not include putting lives and property at risk. At bottom, government has two functions—protecting the people and maintaining the infrastructure. New York City firefighters do both in the course of carrying out their duties. In closing Engine 261, lengthening response times and increasing the workload on the fire companies remaining, to the peril of those working extended hours while fatigued and consequently at risk, the city government failed at both objectives. Certainly the safety of the people of Western Queens—indeed, the rest of the borough—is at risk, and certainly the borough infrastructure is in danger.

The response time statistics were provided by Assemblymember Margaret Markey as a basis for her calling for the reopening of Engine 261. We join with her in calling for the reopening of Engine Company 261—and for the reopening of every one of the six fire companies throughout the five boroughs closed by the city some five years ago. If they remain closed, the city will have failed in its duty to protect the people who live here and whose taxes pay to keep it functioning.

that would have little or no impact on school operations or our children's education if you used your clout in Albany to secure unfunded mandate relief that would allow your principals added discretion within their budgets. You have routinely pressed the state legislature and the governor on issues near and dear to your heart and quite effectively at that—what could be more important than our children's education?

As it is, your Chancellor has implemented the cut ordered by you in a manner that largely spares the Tweed bureaucracy while shifting most of the pain to local school budgets, raising the specter of cutbacks in after-school and tutorial programs that have likely helped lift grades and graduation rates that were touted as part of your success in your re-election.

Indeed, it has been reported that the \$80 million cut to the agency's central bureaucracy was mostly smoke and mirrors, while it is plain to see that the \$100 million cut to our local schools could have material impact.

In short, as a parent and as a Community District Education Council member, I am writing you today to implore you to have your Chancellor revisit the manner in which these cuts have been implemented and encourage him to dialogue with the principals who you have consistently indicated you would hold accountable for results. I believe they will be able to put their heads together to

give you useful feedback so that if cuts must be made, they can be done in a manner that minimizes their impact. Unfunded mandate relief has to be part of any intelligent planning.

Sincerely,
Vincent J. Tabone, Esq.
Member,
Community District Education Council 26

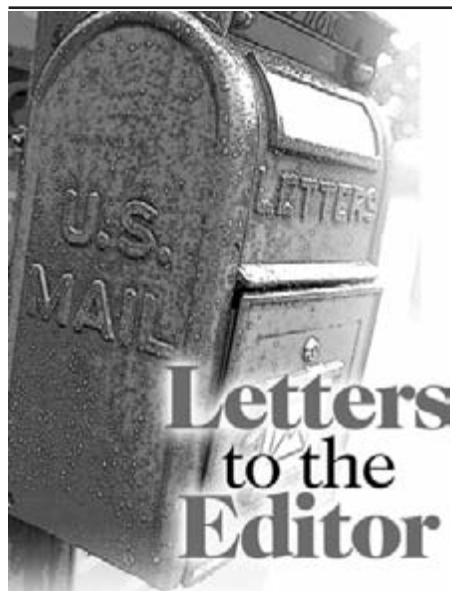
It's GOP's Fault

To The Editor:

Republicans are preparing to battle the Democratic candidate for president. Having lost the White House to Bill Clinton's mantra, "It's the economy stupid", the Republicans will attack Democrats as tax-and-spenders while claiming that the sorry state of the economy is the result of Democratic mismanagement.

Republican operatives are anticipating questions of what happened to the surplus bequeathed to G.W. Bush. The response by the Republican pundits is that the war(s) cost the surplus and resulted in the nation's deficits and staggering national debt. With Congress reverting to Democratic majority last year, Republicans will claim Democrats spent the nation into the red. It would be refreshing for a Ross Perot type to shatter this myth.

The surplus left by Clinton was spent by Bush before the end of [his] administration's first year in office. During seven



Challenges Chancellor

An Open Letter to the
Honorable Michael Bloomberg
Mayor of the City of New York
Dear Mr. Mayor:

I would ask you to give due consideration to instructing Chancellor Joel Klein to revisit the manner in which he has chosen to comply with your cuts to the Department of Education's budget.

I personally believe you, or at least your Chancellor, should have met with your school administrators and other stakeholders before summarily cutting \$180 million from the schools budget. I've no doubt your school administrators would be able to identify areas for savings

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