

Shouldn't Include Cops In Budget Cuts

Mayor Michael Bloomberg has made a wise move in calling upon every government agency in his administration to tighten belts for several years to get the city's books out of the red and into the black while the economy gets back on track.

But clearly there's one exception that should be made to the belt-tightening order, and that's the NYPD which is entrusted with keeping the peace.

Police Commissioner Ray Kelly has shown he can do the law and order job as well as anyone as long as he's got the right number of officers pounding the beat throughout the city.

But the mayor has taken the wrong tack in shrinking the police force by about 1,000 members in future years in an effort to close the budget gap by 2010. That's what his recent executive order is aiming at—saving about 90 million bucks by shrinking the force to its lowest level since then Mayor David Dinkins and then City Council Speaker Peter Vallone Sr. devised the Safe City, Safe Streets crime fighting program.

Not surprisingly, one lawmaker who has gone on record to stop the reduction in the NYPD's numbers is Councilmember Peter Vallone Jr., (D-Astoria), chairman of the council Public Safety Committee, who clearly

sees the mayor's policy as "a huge step backwards" in the fight against crime.

The councilmember has consistently advocated maintaining a high police presence in the city's neighborhoods and communities, which can only be achieved if the mayor revises his present plans.

It's for sure that Bloomberg's plans to reduce the force by attrition will succeed, since his low-pay-for-rookies policy isn't attracting many recruits these days. The Patrolmen's Benevolent Association gets an assist on this misguided policy, too.

Vallone is thinking along the same lines. He said that the mayor's present plan regarding the NYPD is flawed because, he said, among other reasons, "Even if we were to begin in 2011 to replace cops we lost by attrition in previous years, it would take years and years for us to reach the membership levels in the NYPD that we must be at to be an effective force—and that is completely unacceptable."

Vallone says, in effect, the mayor must change direction vis-a-vis the NYPD force levels, and the PBA, too.

"The first thing to do is for the mayor and the PBA to sit down again

and settle or change the arbitration agreement in effect now, and do what they have to do to pay recruits a higher starting salary, a realistic salary that would attract new recruits and keep them here.

"Secondly, start now to hire more police officers and increase the force to the point that it will be the effective force New York City should have on the street everywhere and every day. The mayor's budget, as presently submitted, will not allow PC Kelly to have that kind of a force."

Vallone said he's planning public hearings on this issue and around May 26, Kelly will appear before the Public Safety Committee and be given the chance to go on record, to state publicly the numbers he needs to fight crime in this city.

'SAVE OTB' CAMPAIGN ON TRACK: It appears there are so many city and state officials that are betting on the city OTB to win its race to stay in business that we may as well declare it a winner.

But the "official" sign still hasn't been flashed, so Councilmember David Weprin and the others working so hard for the betting corporation to continue in business should be patient for a while longer so Albany can get the paperwork done and approved.

Governor David Paterson, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno have already said publicly they're in favor of OTB continuing to do its job. Since this trio rules the

roost upstate, it looks like a done deal, and well it should be.

We've been tracking Weprin (D-Hollis) on this matter, and he's made it abundantly clear that OTB has been a profitable operation, but profits were drained away from it by the same Albany leaders now vouching for it, so they should put it back on a sound footing and let it do the job it's capable of.

OTB has shown it can put some money in the city treasury, provide more than 1,500 jobs for municipal union workers, and handle 40 percent of all the racetrack wagers in the state, according to union sources. Beside Weprin's efforts in the campaign to keep OTB in business, Councilmember Joseph Addabbo Jr. (D-Ozone Park) and his Parks Committee have also called for—and worked at—keeping OTB up and running. City Comptroller William Thompson Jr. and DC 37 officials have been pulling hard for OTB also, and the betting public has always shown its loyalty by putting its money where its mouth is.

Paterson, Bruno and Silver have until June 16, the date set by OTB officials when the betting windows are set to close, to get the Assembly and senate to vote out the bills to put the OTB on a sound footing so it can continue operating.

END ALL COUNCIL SLUSH, SAYS WEINER: Congressman Anthony Weiner, a likely candidate for mayor in 2009, as is Council Speaker Christine Quinn, got right to the heart of the matter now known as "the Council slush funds" last weekend as he told Quinn: "I have come to the conclusion we should get rid of earmarks altogether, get rid of these member items altogether."

Three days before, on Wednesday, May 7, Quinn had already given her answer: "Fuggetaboutit."

The answer was contained in an announcement headlined, "Speaker Quinn, Council Budget Team Present Best Practices for Budget Allocation Process." They said nothing about getting rid of all earmarks or member items, or slush funds.

What Quinn released was "extensive and unparalleled budgetary practices" which "significantly raise existing standards for legislative fiscal practices through strengthening government transparency and accountability".

So I guess we'll hear much more about this issue on the 2009 campaign trail if both Weiner and Quinn are still running for mayor.

Incidentally, Weiner didn't say he was also advocating getting rid of member items for congressmembers or state legislators, which is something he might get around to in due time.

Police Investigating Statue Desecration

Following the recent theft of a religious statue from a Catholic spiritual center in the Jamaica Hill section of Queens, City Councilmember James Gennaro was joined by religious leaders in calling for increased police vigilance in the area.

Gennaro said the NYPD Hate Crimes Unit and detectives from the 107th Precinct are investigating the incident that occurred on May 5 in which a statue of San Lorenzo Ruiz de Manila, the first Filipino Catholic martyr and saint, was chopped off at the ankles and stolen from a spiritual center named after the saint.

Gennaro called for the police investigation when informed of the theft.

"There is no place in this or any other community for any kind of religious intolerance and hatred," Gennaro (D-Fresh Meadows) declared.

"This entire community is standing united against vandalism and hate. We look forward to the Hate Crimes Unit and the District Attorney's office solving this case and bringing the perpetrators to justice."

Assemblymember Rory Lancman (D-Fresh Meadows) issued a statement saying, "We completely reject intolerance or hatred toward any Queens community and we know we can count on the NYPD and the Queens District Attorney to vigorously investigate and prosecute the perpetrators. The only thing this otherwise senseless act accomplished is to unite the entire Queens community in support of those who cherish the sacred statue of San Lorenzo Ruiz."

San Lorenzo Ruiz de Manila died in 1637 during a missionary expedition in which anti-Christian authorities hanged him by his ankles and let him bleed to death from his temples. At the spiritual center in Jamaica Hill all that remains of the statue is its feet and the stumps of its ankles.

Nick Libramonte, executive director of the center, said, "We feel that this area is sacred because we are the devotees of San Lorenzo Ruiz and we are all saddened by this incident."

Libramonte thanked Gennaro for taking immediate action to investigate the incident.

—John Toscano

I On Politics
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Markey Gets WWI Symbol

On May 8 Assemblymember Margaret Markey (D-Maspeth) received an American Legion symbolic poppy from Joan



Nekoloff, (c.) president of Maspeth Unit 783, that was handmade by a veteran. Tenth District President Evelyn Taolutis looks on. May is officially poppy month for the American Legion. The symbolism of the poppy dates back to World War I and the battlefield at Flanders Field. Funds raised by the Maspeth 784 Auxiliary go to hospitalized veterans and children at St. Albans Hospital and St. Albans State Home. Markey presented Nekoloff and Taolutis with an Assembly proclamation at the ceremony.