

# Lawmakers Caught Up In Surge of Activity As Session Ends

Queens lawmakers, Democrats and Republicans alike, were a busy group, rushing around Albany in the closing days of the recent legislative session to get bills passed and sent to Governor David Paterson, who would then sign them into law.

The bills ranged from establishing an emergency alert system in the public schools and private colleges when a terrorist or other major threat occurs to softening the effects of soaring fuel prices to helping harassed homeowners threatened with losing their homes through mortgage foreclosures.

The Schools Emergency Alert Act was sponsored by Democratic Assemblymembers Rory Lancman (Fresh Meadows), Catherine Nolan (Ridgewood) and Mark Weprin (Little Neck) and Republican Senators Frank Padavan (Bellerose) and Serphin Maltese (Middle Village).

Drafted after deranged gunmen subjected several college campuses to mass killings, the bill calls for establishing an emergency alert notification system using a combination of text messages, e-mails and phone calls to notify staff, parents and the community when an emergency occurs in a school or on campus.

The main focus of the bill is to let parents know what is occurring, lawmakers said.

Maltese and Assemblymember Andrew Hevesi (D-Forest Hills) sponsored a bill to determine automobile tire efficiency so a car could get more mileage and use less gas.

Also looking to keep gasoline prices down, Assemblymember Ellen Young (D-Flushing) put in a bill prohibiting more than one increase in gas prices at any station to prevent price gouging. Young was also the first Asian American woman to be named speaker pro tempore.

Padavan and Maltese were among the sponsors of a bill addressing the subprime mortgage crisis. It calls for immediate assistance to any homeowner facing foreclosure and the loss of their home. The bill had Democratic support and a promise by Paterson to sign it into law.

Another major issue, recycling plastic bags, sparked a fight between Albany lawmakers and Mayor Michael Bloomberg, backed by City Councilmembers Peter Vallone Jr. and Leroy

Comrie.

Vallone (Astoria) was among several councilmembers calling on Paterson to veto a bill passed by the state legislature because the Albany action would preempt and weaken the City Council's plastic bag recycling law by reducing the number of stores covered by the proposed new law. The Albany bill would also reduce the city's ability to enforce a recycling law, they said.

Vallone charged, "Albany cannot take one step forward without taking two steps backward."

He said it was "terrible that they have significantly weakened our law".

Vallone, however, joined the mayor in applauding the state legislature's passage of a bill expanding access to the Family Court. He said the bill would aid many people in need of Family Court protection who are not able to get it.

Another councilmember, Leroy Comrie (D-Jamaica) said many victims of domestic violence would benefit under the provisions of the Family Court expansion law.

**GENNARO ANSWERS GOP:** Responding to charges by Queens' two Republican state senators that the city council had not adequately represented their senior constituents in opposing the Bloomberg mayoral administration's proposed changes in delivering senior services, Councilmember James Gennaro (D-Fresh Meadows) offered the following response:

"On June 12, [Senator] Frank Padavan banded together with the rest of the Senate Republican majority and voted against a Democratic measure that would have protected senior centers and the City Meals-On-Wheels program in New York City by delaying Mayor [Michael] Bloomberg's proposed 'restructuring' of the Department for the Aging. Meanwhile, the city council is fully engaged in active discussion with the mayor's office on this matter and has already won a number of delays that could avert a crisis for seniors.

"I also personally sponsored a \$1.5 million budget initiative last year that saved the City Meals-On-Wheels program from extinction in the first place. But instead of focusing on the facts and going after the source of the cuts—Senate GOP benefactor Michael

Bloomberg—Frank Padavan and his GOP colleagues are just putting forth a desperate smokescreen during what is clearly going to be a most difficult election year for them."

Queens' other Republican senator, Serphin Maltese (Middle Village), had joined Padavan in the attack on the city council. Both are getting serious election challenges this year, Maltese from Councilmember Joseph Addabbo Jr. (Ozone Park) and Padavan (Bellerose) from Gennaro.

Meanwhile, Maltese has sponsored a bill which would subject the mayor's senior services reform plan to more stringent state controls, and Assembly Democrats introduced legislation to block the mayor's plan from advancing. But neither measure was acted upon, so the mayor's plan will probably go forward.

**GIANARIS BLISTERS CON ED:** Commenting on the threatened strike against Con Edison, Assemblymember Michael Gianaris stated:

"It is an absolute disgrace for Con Edison to grant its CEO a 24 percent raise while offering less than 1 percent to the people who actually do the work. How long will this nonsense continue before this unaccountable monopoly is reformed once and for all? Con Edison's management must change if the public is ever to get relief from its insulting and offensive actions."

Gianaris (D-Queens) is the leading advocate for reform of Con Edison's management structure, following increasingly fre-

quent blackouts, electrocutions and explosions that have threatened the safety of New Yorkers.

At this writing, Con Ed workers and management were still trying to negotiate a new contract and head off a strike, but the union said there could be a strike by this morning.

**ONORATO APPLAUDS:** After both houses of the state legislature approved the extension of the current partial real property tax abatement for co-op apartments and condominiums in New York City, state Senator George Onorato (D-Astoria) stated;

"I was delighted to support this legislation when it came to the senate floor for a vote, and I am even more pleased that Governor [David] Paterson has signed this tax relief bill into law. Prior to its passage, I received many letters from constituents in support of the bill, and the legislature and the governor did the right thing by ensuring continued property tax relief for New Yorkers living in co-ops and condos. Given the rising costs of food, gasoline, and other basic necessities, I'm glad we were able to take this action to help local families make ends meet."

**JOUSTING FOR MONSERATE'S SEAT:** City Councilmember Hiram Monserrate is pretty well set to ascend to state Senator John Sabini's seat via an uncontested election in November, so the scrambling has begun to fill the council post Monserrate has held since 2002.

There are reports that Julissa

Ferraras, Monserrate's chief of staff, will make a run to succeed her boss, but may get an argument from Assemblymember Jose Peralta. All three seats in question cover the Jackson Heights/Corona/East Elmhurst area.

Sabini started the musical chairs when he got appointed by Paterson to the Racing and Wagering Board as part of Paterson's save-OTB effort. Sabini dropped his re-election plans and is awaiting confirmation by the senate, which should come soon, we are told. In the meantime, Monserrate, now the top Democrat in the Jackson Heights/Corona area, will work out who his successor eventually will be.

**WEINER TALKS TO CRAIN'S:** Congressman Anthony Weiner will be the featured speaker at the Tuesday, July 22 *Crain's Business* Breakfast Forum, where he'll discuss how the job market in New York City is affected by the tax policies that come down from Washington, Albany and City Hall.

The business community that will likely pack the room at the Grand Hyatt Hotel will be all ears, since Weiner is one of the frontrunners in the 2009 mayoral race after his fine showing in 2005 when he almost snatched the Democratic nomination after starting out at the bottom of the pack.

At the Business Forum, the Queens/Brooklyn lawmaker, now a Forest Hills resident, will be grilled by *Crain's* editor, Greg David.



## Young Serves As Speaker Pro Tempore

Recently Assemblymember Ellen Young acted as the first Asian American to officiate over the New York State Assembly during legislative session as Speaker Pro Tempore. In this capacity, Young led her Assembly colleagues through the rigors of the day, including voting, debates and the passage of bills, and guided them toward the close of this year's session. She also officially welcomed visitors to the chambers. Young stated, "To preside over the chambers as Speaker Pro Tempore is an honor normally bestowed only on senior members of the Assembly. As a freshman member, and the first Asian American woman in the legislature, I feel enormously privileged that my colleagues have placed their confidence in me to share in this tradition. I look forward to working with the leadership on many more important issues that affect us daily and making many more strides forward for my community." As Speaker Pro Tempore, Young officiated over the Assembly session proceedings in the place of Speaker Sheldon Silver.

