

Reporters:

Erik Engquist - (212) 210-0745

Daniel Massey - (212) 210-0481

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Today's News Thursday, July 16, 2009

Kirsten Targeted on Guns

Advocacy group New Yorkers Against Gun Violence is asking supporters to pressure Sen. Gillibrand to vote against a Senate bill that makes it easier to carry concealed handguns. Gillibrand opposes the bill, but advocates fear it will be attached to a bill she supports—just as when a measure allowing concealed weapons in national parks was affixed to the credit card reform bill and passed. Gillibrand's spokesman won't say what she would do in such a circumstance, calling it hypothetical.

Deferring to Dad

Ex-Councilman Miguel Martinez's Democratic club initially sought out Mayra Linares, who runs another Democratic club, to substitute for their scandal-plagued candidate. But rather than replace Martinez on the ballot, Linares suggested club members ask her father, former Councilman Guillermo Linares, who agreed to run. Last week, he hired the Mirram Group, whose Frank Sobrino is managing his campaign. Linares resigned as immigrant affairs commissioner, forsaking a \$178,000 salary. Council members' base salary is \$112,500.

Spinning the Stalemate

State Sen. Eric Adams, D-Brooklyn, says voting all 62 state senators out of office, as critics called for when the Senate ceased functioning last month, would be like destroying a garden with weed killer. Voters should remove "undesirable weeds [who] use their power to be served and not to serve," he wrote in a constituent mailing, adding, "I am not a weed." He took credit for persuading colleagues to return to the Senate chamber during the stalemate, but omitted that they failed to pass any bills.

Wooing Liu

Supporters of a bill to allow bikes in city buildings are perplexed that City Council Transportation Committee Chairman John Liu is withholding support, since it's been repeatedly changed to satisfy his requests. Liu says he opposed a loophole allowing building owners to ban bicycles by "filing a piece of paper saying, 'We can't do this.'" So exemptions were required to be based on "substantial safety risks" to cyclists using freight elevators. The Department of Transportation was empowered to reject exemption requests. Liu says the Department of Buildings should make those decisions. A more pro-bike bill he supported died in the buildings committee last year.

Congestion pricing gets a new weapon

Traffic engineers Charles Komanoff and Sam Schwartz are unveiling a new traffic modeling system that Komanoff says better predicts the impact of tolls and transit fares and of driving into Manhattan.

It sounds wonky, but it could have a significant impact the next time congestion pricing, toll hikes and fare increases are proposed, which is likely to happen when the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's capital plan begins running out of money.

The model, almost two years in the making, "is encyclopedic yet transparent," Komanoff says, and "could point the way toward new congestion pricing proposals, incorporating time-of-day pricing, that just might be politically salable."

What they're calling the Balanced Transportation Analyzer—hey, they're traffic engineers, not marketing mavens—will be unveiled next Wednesday morning to invited guests at Schwartz's Manhattan office. The model's developers believe it will offer compelling evidence that will generate support for measures to reduce congestion on roads and subways. For instance, it will show how much traffic is slowed by each car trip into a congested area, and how crowding on trains would be eased if fares were higher at rush hour than during other times. It will also demonstrate the environmental benefits of various schemes and identify which toll hikes would have the greatest fiscal and traffic-reducing benefits.

A congestion-pricing plan that failed in 2008 relied on older traffic modeling software used by the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council. The plan was corrupted by political considerations, according to some traffic engineers, as was an MTA bailout plan that passed this spring.

At A Glance

25-YEAR PLAN: Public meetings to review a draft regional transportation plan for 2010 to 2035 will be held today from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. and from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at 199 Water St., 22nd floor. The first meeting will be webcast at www.nymtc.org. RSVP to Lisa Daglian at (212) 383-7241 or Ldaglian@dot.state.ny.us.

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