



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Malcolm Smith

Smith 'Listening Tour' Hits Rockaway Speaks With Residents, Organizations During Two Day Tour

MALCOLM A. SMITH April 15, 2007

State Senator Malcolm Smith held a two-day listening tour throughout the Rockaways last week in what he termed an attempt to "better assess the needs of this growing community."

During the two days, April 2 and April 5, Smith listened to members of local organizations and community residents as they addressed concerns in their areas. The Wave joined the senator during his afternoon stops on April 5.

"Between Monday and today we stopped at 15 different locations [speaking directly to] the population in Rockaway," Smith told The Wave. "I want to make sure I get a sense of what the needs are."

Smith said the needs of the residents have changed since he took office six years ago.

"If I don't take the time to talk to organizations and people, I don't know the changing needs," he said.

Joining Smith for the day was Assemblywoman Audrey Pheffer and her chief-of-staff Joanne Shapiro.

A JASA Social Adult Day program on Seagirt Boulevard, which serves patients with Alzheimer's and Dementia, was Smith's first afternoon stop on Thursday.

The program, which provides arts and crafts, music therapy, hot lunches and exercise to its patients, is funded by JASA and private donations. It is a program both Smith and Pheffer have helped fund.

Mary Correll is grateful for that. She attends the program. Without it, her daughter Caroline said her mother would be at a loss.

"She would be sitting home doing nothing," said the younger Correll about her mother.

Smith and Pheffer also received a warm reception as they stopped by the JASA home on Beach 19 Street. It was apparent that those in the dinning room did not mind their lunch being interrupted.

"We just finished the budget and there are good things for mature adults," Smith told the JASA residents.

Joining Smith and Pheffer during their stop at Ocean Bay Community Development Corporation (OBCDC) at the Ocean Bay Houses was New York City's Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum.

Pat Simon, the executive director of OBCDC, explained some of the needs of the area to the elected representatives. Simon did her own survey in advance of the meeting to discover what concerns are at the top of the list for some of Rockaway's newest residents. Among the issues were education, transportation and public safety.

"Sometimes we're treated like step-children. We are a part of the borough," Simon said.

Simon started her list of problems with the Access-A-Ride program.

"The Access-A-Ride is poor [out here] in taking people back and forth," said Simon. "People are at their mercy."

Gotbaum replied by saying she is "looking to put together an Access-A-Ride task force. I want someone from out here to be on the task force."

In addition, Smith said he was putting together a group to look into transportation.

"I want to do a major study for different transportation systems out here," said Smith. "I already have a consultant. I'm using the same organization that did downtown Brooklyn. I wanted somebody to look at mass transportation, roads and take another look at the Long Island Railroad at 116 Street."

As for education Simon said "New homeowners are still taking their children to school on the mainland."

Smith spoke about the money for education in this year's state budget.

"There is a record amount of money for education," said Smith. "Our challenge is making it come down to where it should be."

Simon also said that the Department of Housing Preservation and Development was interested in doing training in the Rockaway, but she had one problem - finding the 2,500 square foot space that is required.

"I can't find a place," Simon lamented. "You need a classroom and a work space."

Pheffer offered one solution.

"RDRC has the top of a building, the old pawn shop," Pheffer told Simon. The assemblywoman suggested Simon reach out to Kevin Alexander, who is the executive director of RDRC.

"You have to have tutoring," OBCDC's executive director said. "It's not because people don't want to work."

Along that line, Smith announced there would be a Trade Union Town Hall for all building jobs later this spring.

"Get ready for jobs out here. This apprenticeship program is real," he said.

As Smith and Pheffer stopped at the Redfern complex, Lieutenant Gary Messina of the 101 Precinct met them.

While Smith has already promised funds to purchase security cameras for the apartment buildings, Messina said more is needed.

"You need manpower to monitor them," said Messina, who told the representatives that shots were fired there the previous night. "Officers have to be assigned to watch."

While the complex has new game and exercise rooms, an after school program for children and other amenities it didn't have before, safety is still the number one issue.

Doris Jacobs, the tenant's association president, told Smith just how dangerous Redfern Houses could be.

"They used to shoot at night," said Jacobs. "Now it's anytime they feel like it."

Smith didn't come just to listen over the two days, he also came bearing \$49,000 in gifts. The following organizations received funding from the senator: Arverne Houses Residents

Council - \$2,000, Deerfield Area Association - \$5,000, Jewish Community Council of the Rockaway Peninsula - \$5,000, Ocean Bay Community Development Corporation - \$5,000, Point Breezy Volunteer Fire Department - \$3,000, Rabenstein Learning Center (Yeshiva Darchei Torah) - \$5,000, Redfern Houses Resident's Council - \$3,000, Rockaway Artists Alliance - \$5,000, Rockaway Chamber of Commerce - \$5,000, Rockaway Music and Arts - \$3,000, Rockaway Sports Association - \$3,000 and the Rockaway Theater Company - \$5,000.