



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas K. Duane

## January 2009 Community Report

THOMAS K. DUANE January 30, 2009

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Dear Neighbor:

The following is a summary of some of my office's activities since my last community report:

#### **Celebrating the New Democratic Majority in the New York State Senate**

For the first time in more than four decades the New York State Senate now has a Democratic majority. It is an exciting and historic time, which brings with it even greater responsibility. I look forward to working with our new Majority Leader Malcolm A. Smith and my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to reform New York State government and ensure the best possible representation for all of our residents.

I am further privileged to have been named Chair of the Senate Health Committee. In this position I pledge to promote sound health care policy and quality, affordable health care for all New Yorkers.

Although these are challenging times, I am confident that we are entering a new era of cooperation between the houses of the Legislature and Governor Paterson that will enable New York to emerge from the current fiscal storm a stronger, fairer and healthier state.

## **Advancing Senate Rules Reform**

On January 12, the Democratic-led State Senate passed a series of rules changes that are the first steps in reforming how the body conducts business and increasing accountability and transparency for the public. These changes include restoring the ability of Senators to use "Motions to Discharge" to attempt to force a bill out of committee; restoring the practice of recording votes on discharge motions and non-sponsor amendments; allowing for open bill sponsorship by any Senator who chooses to support a piece of legislation; and implementing the practice of dual reference of bills in cases where legislation is affected by more than one committee.

Most significantly, following passage of these reforms, New York State Senate Majority Leader Malcolm Smith announced the formation of a Temporary Senate Committee on Rules and Administration Reform that will make a proposal to the full Senate no later than April 13, 2009 to build on these changes and continue to create a more transparent open legislative process to address the serious issues facing New York State.

## **Fighting the Proposal to Eliminate the M8 Bus**

Like many of you, I was deeply concerned about the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA) proposal to eliminate the M8 bus and I have spoken out both publicly and directly to the MTA since the proposal was announced in late November. As you may recall, in early December, I and other local elected officials wrote to the MTA to urge the authority

to consult with those who would be impacted and consider alternatives and potential mitigations before making such a drastic decision.

On January 12, my colleagues and I convened a meeting with representatives of the MTA, CB2, CB3 and other key M8 stakeholders in order to engage in just such a conversation. While the MTA representatives did not commit to preserve the M8, they admitted that the authority's initial proposal was strictly based on numbers and didn't drill down to the profile of riders, purpose of their trips, or other considerations which were raised by elected officials and community members before and during the meeting. The MTA representatives also noted the overwhelming feedback they had received from the M8 constituency, which speaks to the remarkable ability of our community to organize and demonstrate that this bus is a crucial lifeline connecting the Lower East Side and the Village.

I was also pleased to join CB3 in partnering with CB2 on their online survey about M8 bus usage, which confirmed the points we have been making about how essential this bus line is for so many community members, including seniors and the disabled. Additionally, I am encouraging my colleagues to join me in supporting the Ravitch Commission's rescue plan for the MTA, which will limit fare hikes and the need for service cuts.

As we continue to push the MTA to reconsider this ill-advised proposal, I encourage you put your thoughts in writing if you haven't already. Even though the MTA's Manhattan public hearing on its proposed fare hikes and service cuts has passed, the MTA is accepting written comments until February 15th through the MTA website (<http://snipurl.com/aaz3z>) or by mail to: Douglas Sussman, Director, MTA Community Affairs, 347 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10017. Even if your comments are brief, it is important to have as many M8 riders as possible on record against this service cut.

## **Calling on Congress to Include Public Housing in Stimulus Package**

On January 14, I sent a [letter](#) to Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, and Harry Reid, Majority Leader of the U.S. Senate, to request that the new economic stimulus package being considered by Congress include \$5 billion in supplemental assistance for the Public Housing Capital Fund. I was pleased to learn from Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez, who has been a leader in the fight for this funding, that the House version of the \$825 billion stimulus package, which passed on January 28, includes money for public housing, and that between \$500-600 million is set aside specifically for the New York City Housing Authority. The bill is now awaiting passage in the Senate.

## **Addressing Helicopter Traffic on the West Side**

Recently, my office has received many complaints about escalating helicopter traffic on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Helicopter noise and pollution are issues that I have been working to resolve since I was a New York City Councilmember, but unfortunately there is still much work to do. I will continue to work with other elected officials and the Upper West Side community to stop the excessive and inappropriate helicopter flights that are disrupting West Siders' lives and contaminating our environment. You may have heard that last year, the Friends of Hudson River Park and a coalition of other community-based organizations settled a lawsuit with the Hudson River Park Trust, which leases the heliport on West 30th Street, stipulating that half of all tourist flights leaving this heliport will be eliminated by July of 2009 and that all such flights will be eliminated by April of 2010. You should also know that the settlement stipulated that helicopters departing from this heliport (though unfortunately not others in the region) follow a flight path along the middle of the Hudson River, rather than over land. To help catch violators and enforce this settlement, please send any documentation, such as photographs or video footage, of illegal

helicopter flights to Jared Chausow in my office at [jared@tomduane.com](mailto:jared@tomduane.com).

## **Seeking to Preserve Affordable Housing at East Midtown Plaza**

On January 14, shareholders of East Midtown Plaza (EMP), a 748-unit, middle-income Mitchell-Lama Co-op in Community Board 6, voted on whether to remain in the Mitchell-Lama program or to become a private, market-rate cooperative. While there is always a strong moral rationale for Mitchell-Lama shareholders to stay in the program, at EMP there is a strong financial rationale as well. Please see my January 10 [letter](#) to EMP shareholders detailing the generous government support available if EMP stays affordable and the very risky nature of the privatization plan. New York City Councilmember Rosie Mendez has been a critical partner in the effort to retain the affordability of EMP, and although the vote has not yet been certified, preliminary results suggest that fewer than the requisite two-thirds of eligible apartment owners voted to privatize.

## **Sponsoring a Town Hall Meeting on the New York Budget Crisis**

On January 8, I co-sponsored a town hall meeting hosted by New York State Assemblymember Dick Gottfried regarding New York State's budget crisis and how we can best address it. For more than two hours Assemblymember Gottfried and I listened to and engaged in a give-and-take with constituents and representatives of non-profit organizations who shared their opinions on which programs should or should not be cut and whether to increase taxes on high-income New Yorkers. I appreciate the insights of all who participated and pledge to do all that I can to ensure that New York's most vulnerable are not the hardest hit in the budget.

## **Calling on DOE to Consult Community on I.S. 44**

On December 18, I joined Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer and other local elected officials in sending a letter to the New York City Department of Education (DOE) to object to the agency's failure to consult with the community – and particularly with the District 3 Community Education Council (CEC3) – before announcing the closings of I.S. 44. We call on DOE to work with us, CEC3 and the wider community to collectively determine the educational needs and priorities of District 3, to consider models for successful middle schools that would inform the curriculum and mission of a new I.S. 44. and to ensure that the new school reflects the diversity of the Upper West Side.

### **Testifying in Opposition to Fordham's Master Plan**

On December 16, I joined U.S. Representative Jerrold Nadler and Assemblymembers Linda Rosenthal and Richard Gottfried in submitting testimony to Manhattan Community Board 7's Land Use Committee hearing in opposition to Fordham University's Lincoln Center Master Plan.

### **Supporting America's Auto Workers in Call for Bridge Loan**

As you may recall, in early December, I joined hundreds of Metropolitan New York auto dealership workers, United Auto Workers (UAW) members and community supporters in rallying for an emergency Federal bridge loan for domestic automakers. I was pleased that the U.S. Congress and the President ultimately approved a \$17.4 billion dollar federal loan to automakers General Motors and Chrysler LLC, which will sustain crucial jobs in New York and throughout the nation.