



Assemblyman

Jeffrey Dinowitz

Reports to the people of the 81st Assembly District

Winter 2009

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Serving the communities of Kingsbridge, Norwood, Riverdale, Van Cortlandt Village, Wakefield, and Woodlawn.

Dear Constituent:

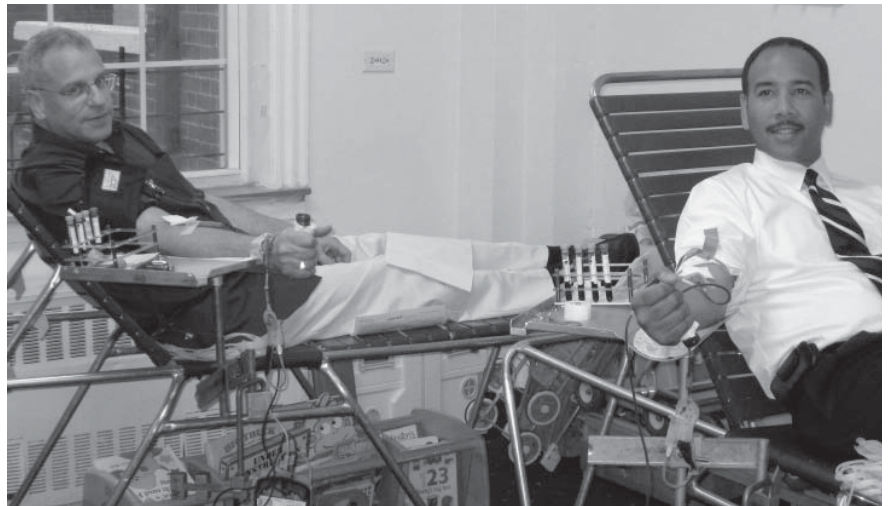
I send this newsletter to you at a most difficult time for New York State. The most serious economic recession in decades has not only resulted in a significant increase in unemployment, but also a huge drop in tax revenue for the state, causing a tremendous budget deficit. While we are taking steps to address the immediate problem of the huge deficit, the state's fiscal crisis is one that will, unfortunately, take some time to resolve – and it means making painful decisions. I believe that it is crucial that we carefully implement any budget cuts and that we be mindful of the potential impact to so many important areas and how such cuts might impact the lives of people, especially those most in need.

We face many challenges locally as well. A number of decisions made by the city administration have hurt our communities. For example, the closing of a firehouse in Woodlawn has raised serious safety questions. The city's obsessive efforts to build the giant water filtration plant in Van Cortlandt Park—instead of at a site in Westchester County—have led to unprecedented waste and a \$1.5 billion cost overrun – that's \$1.5 BILLION! Predatory ticketing of motorists adversely impacts our quality of life. Precious educational dollars continue to be squandered. We dodged a bullet when we were able to stop Mayor Bloomberg's plan to consolidate (meaning close) senior centers. The list goes on, but it's clear we must constantly fight to maintain our quality of life and to keep our community strong. That is what I will continue to do – stand up for every neighborhood of my district.

As always, my district office and my excellent staff stand ready to help resolve constituent problems and complaints. Do not hesitate to call. I will always fight for our neighborhood and its residents. Happy holidays!

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Dinowitz
Member of Assembly



Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz and Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. were among the donors at a blood drive held at the Riverdale Neighborhood House.

AUDIT CONFIRMS ASSEMBLYMAN DINOWITZ'S CLAIMS REGARDING WATER FILTRATION PLANT

NYC Comptroller William Thompson's recent audit of the Croton Water Treatment Plant being built in Van Cortlandt Park illustrated conclusively that the water filtration plant boondoggle is costing taxpayers unnecessary billions. In fact, it's one of the greatest failures of New York City in recent years.

Deputy Comptroller John Graham explained at a meeting of the community members of the Croton Facilities Monitoring Committee, held at the Amalgamated Houses, that the audits found that the Department of Environmental Protection could not account for the astronomical rise in costs as compared with their original budgeting for the project. Many who attended spoke emphatically that the comptroller's findings definitively support their long-held claim that the DEP cooked the books to ensure that the plant was built in Van Cortlandt Park and to create a lucrative bonanza for contractors and engineers—while sticking everyday New Yorkers with an outrageous bill.

Specifically, the comptroller reported that the DEP failed to account for a cost escalation rate above those substantiated by industry indexes, such as the Engineering News-Record Construction index of 5.04%, or the Handy-Whitman Index of Public Utility Construction of 5.73%, or the Prevailing Wage Rates of 4.7%.

I wholeheartedly agree with the comptroller, whose audit stated: “(The DEP's) underlying estimate was unreliable and lacked sufficient documentation to substantiate its accuracy and completeness.” The audit also confirms what we already knew, namely that the construction cost of the project is already \$1 billion over budget and that overall, the costs have escalated by over \$1.5 billion. It was always clear to me that the DEP lowballed the cost of building in Van Cortlandt Park and overstated the cost of building at a city-owned industrial site in Westchester County in order to accomplish their goal of building in Van Cortlandt Park. The audit, in stating “the original estimate was not reliable” all but says that the original cost estimate of building the plant in the park was made up by DEP.

Unfortunately, being right doesn't change the reality that this giant facility is being built in Van Cortlandt Park. While Mayor Bloomberg has remained strangely silent on these massive cost overruns, it is my hope that he will support the recommendations of the audit and that he will take a much more active role in overseeing and reigning in the costs of this massive boondoggle.

WEST 230TH STREET PARKING LOT

Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr. and I called on the New York City Economic Development Corp. to reopen the parking lot on West 230th Street and Broadway that has been closed for months.

As many who live in or frequent the Kingsbridge area know, the once-public parking lot was closed in advance of construction that was to begin on a Broadway shopping mall. Since the closing, no construction has begun, though the lot remained closed to local residents and shoppers.

Parking is already extremely tight in the Kingsbridge neighborhood—as it is throughout my district—and I find it absurd that an entire parking lot would be closed while plans to begin construction remain stalled. Thanks to cooperation among myself, Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., Councilmember Oliver Koppell, Congressman Eliot Engel, and Community Board 8, the NYCEDC has reopened this important lot. I will continue defending our precious parking throughout my district.



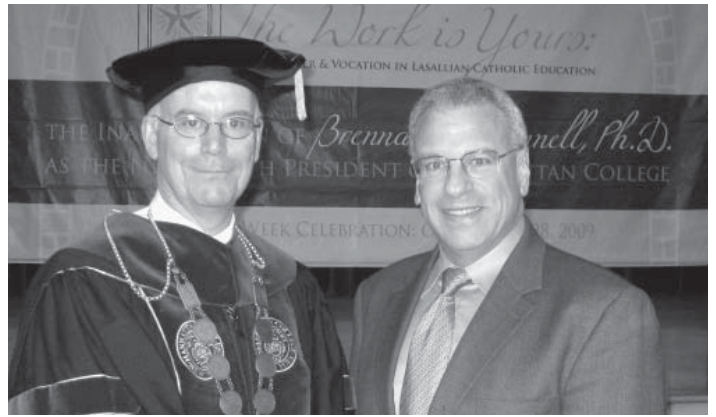
Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz attended a rally in support of Stella D'Oro workers and is shown here with New York City Comptroller Bill Thompson and union leaders Joyce Alston and Bob Master.

ALTERNATE SIDE SUSPENSION

The Department of Sanitation recently decided to change alternate side of the street parking regulations on the non-commercial streets throughout Community Board 8, something I advocated many years for. Once fully implemented, the regulations which currently provide for twice-a-week street cleaning on each side of the street will become once-a-week. While I am concerned over the possibility that some streets will not be as clean as they have been in the past (something which we must carefully monitor), I am pleased that a four-times-a-week nuisance for many people will become only a twice-a-week nuisance. The street cleaning rules have been temporarily suspended on Broadway and the area west of Broadway, at least through Christmas. Then the rest of the community board will see suspension of the regulations to allow the DOT to change the street cleaning signs. Ultimately, we hope to have more parking freedom in our neighborhoods. The onus is on property owners to keep the streets adjacent to their property clean, but I have also asked the DOS to keep an eye on our streets to see that garbage does not accumulate and to use foot sweepers where necessary. If you do notice garbage piling up in any area, please do not hesitate to contact our office, and we will be happy to work with you and the DOS to resolve the issue.

DIRTY DEEDS ON PHANTOM STREETS

It should come as no surprise that some New York City Parking Enforcement Agents continue to scam local residents out of their money, sometimes issuing parking tickets for bogus reasons. In one scam that I've fought recently, an agent issued a parking summons to a Broadway resident for "blocking a traffic lane" on an unnamed street "120 feet west of West 261st Street"—a street that, simply put, does not exist. Shockingly, the agency defended their actions despite the reality that this "street" is, in fact, a fenced-off, tree-and shrub-covered hill between Broadway and Huxley Avenue. I will continue fighting such nonsense—unfortunately perpetrated by a governmental agency—but I also want my constituents to take note of the area so they might avoid such outrageous traps.



Assemblyman Dinowitz congratulates Dr. Brendan O'Donnell upon his installation as the 19th President of Manhattan College.

THE CHANGE TO MUNI-METERS

We've all noticed the disappearance of traditional parking meters from our community's commercial streets lately—and the emergence of big blue Muni-Meters. Though the city claims—unconvincingly—that Muni-Meters create significantly more parking by eliminating parking spaces' standardized borders, I have already heard constituents complain of inappropriate behavior on the part of some Traffic Enforcement Agents taking advantage of the new system. Some neighborhood residents have complained of broken meters, others of being ticketed while they walked the distance between their car and the meter—in order to pay in the first place! Sadly, many Traffic Enforcement agents squandered their allotment of good faith long ago, so it is no surprise that so many people view their every move with trepidation. I encourage my constituents to contact my office if they believe they have been ticketed unfairly because of a Muni-Meter.

On a more positive note, I was successful in getting the DOT to remove the newly-installed Muni-Meters from the residential spots on Fieldston Road, between West 236th and West 238th Streets, saving our community another headache.



Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz spoke at Memorial Grove in Van Cortlandt Park on Veteran's Day. He is pictured here with Herb Barret and Donald Tannen, who have led the effort to restore the Memorial Grove, and local boy scouts.

IMPROVING TRAFFIC SAFETY IN OUR COMMUNITY

"PART-TIME" ALL-WAY LIGHT AT WEST 235TH STREET AND INDEPENDENCE AVENUE

I have asked the Department of Transportation to install a "part-time" flashing all-way stop light at the intersection of West 235th Street and Independence Avenue. This intersection sees a high volume of pedestrian traffic from students traveling to P.S. 24 and the public library, as well as the numerous seniors who live in the area. Although there is currently a stop sign on West 235th Street at this intersection for westbound traffic, many north- and southbound vehicles still tend to travel at high speeds through the intersection, as there is no deterrent for them not to.

This "part-time" flashing red light would function as a standard traffic light during school and library hours, but a flashing all-way light the rest of the time. It would ensure that drivers slow down and greatly improve safety in the area.

Safety is a priority for me, and I will continue working hard to press the city to make sure we are doing everything we can to keep our communities as safe and healthy as possible.

NEW SPEED BUMP ON GREYSTONE AVENUE

Good news: We're getting a new speed bump on Greystone Avenue! I requested that a speed bump be placed on Greystone Avenue between West 238th Street and West 240th Street, and I was recently informed that DOT had approved the request.

This is a narrow residential street with a playground on it, so it is especially important that we consider traffic and pedestrian safety. I requested the speed bump to slow down cars, which will improve safety for everyone in the area—but especially for children.

MTA VS. STUDENT COMMUTERS

I was joined by Councilmember Oliver Koppell in blasting the MTA for refusing to reinstate student reduced fares on the city's express buses. By refusing to reinstate these discounted fares, the MTA is effectively targeting a tiny percentage of the city's population—students and their families—and squeezing them for extra revenue. Without these reduced fares, students and their families will spend an extra \$1000 a year on transportation. The MTA claims the fare revision was made "to establish consistent fares" for all express bus services, an argument I called nonsense.

If the MTA was to impose drastic service cuts and fare hikes across the board—as they attempted to do before the Legislature granted them a bailout—there would have been a tremendous uproar among commuters. But because they are taking aim at a tiny part of the population, they think it is acceptable and "consistent." This consistency, as the MTA defines it, amounts to placing more pressure on students and their families, particularly those in the outer boroughs, and effectively punishes those of more moderate means who are striving to get an education. I saw it fit to remind the MTA of the old saying calling consistency "the hobgoblin of small minds."

I strongly believe that the students of our communities should be encouraged to pursue their education—and not be squeezed for cash. I think the MTA has behaved despicably in this regard and I will continue speaking out against such actions.



Pictured at the Annual Fellowship Breakfast of the 52nd Precinct Community Council are Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz, Jr., Deputy Inspector John D'Adamo, Council President Brenda Caldwell-Paris, Assemblyman Dinowitz, and Council Vice-president Steven Bussell.

CLEANING UP GRAFFITI

Graffiti is a scourge in our community and a constant nuisance. Graffiti isn't just an eyesore; it can also be a sign of decay within the community. This is why for years I have fought graffiti, both as a community leader and as a legislator.

Over the years I have personally gone out into the neighborhood and painted over graffiti markings that were particularly egregious. Now I have found an even more effective way to fight the problem: by procuring state funds to hire professionals.

For the last few years, CitySolve, a private company that specializes in graffiti removal, has handled our graffiti removal needs and has done a stellar job of responding quickly and efficiently to constituent calls for clean-up. Recently, the company has removed graffiti tags on West 231st Street, Fieldston Road, Johnson Avenue and the train pillars on West 228th Street.

If you have a graffiti removal request in your neighborhood, please call my office at (718) 796-5345, and we will relay the request directly to CitySolve, who will have the site cleaned within a couple of weeks. For graffiti removal on commercial property, please call the Kingsbridge/Riverdale/ Van Cortlandt Development Corp. at 718-543-7100 or my office. This is our neighborhood, help us keep it clean!



Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz presents his Community Service Award to Amanda Rosario at her graduation from P.S. 94.

CONCERTS AND EVENTS

I provided state funding to several Bronx arts and cultural organizations to co-sponsor a series of free concerts throughout the district this summer. The Bronx Council on the Arts and I brought Mary Pearson and Group, a jazz and standards band, to the Riverdale YM-YWHA. And for the first time ever, we arranged a concert at the Train Park in the Amalgamated Houses, featuring Latin jazz fusion band The Curtis Brothers Quartet. By all accounts, the concert and venue were a tremendous success and I am looking forward to holding more events there in the future. I also co-sponsored several concerts with The Bronx Arts Ensemble, including their annual Memorial Day concert and other summer concerts in Van Cortlandt Park. Many hundreds of people from all corners of the district and beyond enjoyed these wonderful events.

In Norwood, I co-sponsored a festival with Friends of the Oval and the Northwest Community Clergy Coalition that featured Pregones Theater's bilingual play *Cuento que me Cuentan* ("The Story that I Tell"), the Caribbean Eagles steel drum band, Ibrahim Gonzalez's Latin Jazz Quintet, and other activities. I also co-sponsored the Jerome-Gun Hill BID Street Fair. Thousands of people attended this event.



Assemblyman Dinowitz supports many organizations throughout his Assembly district with state funding for important projects. He is shown here at the annual dinner of Riverdale Senior Services presenting checks for capital improvements for the senior center and a check for its many programs. Also pictured are Board President Michael Fossina, Executive Director Julia Schwartz-Leeper, and former president Helen Morik.

IRWIN AVENUE PROPOSED COMMERCIAL PARKING GARAGE

Developers are still attempting to get a special variance to turn the garage of an apartment building under construction into a giant commercial parking garage that will surely congest and negatively impact the beautiful Irwin Avenue. As you know, I have stood against this development from the beginning. I recently testified at a hearing at the New York City Board of Standards and Appeals against the developer's application to turn this garage into a commercial garage. I'm outraged at the efforts by developers to unjustly increase profits at the expense of this quiet, lovely community's quality of life—and I will continue to fight them in every way I can.

Assemblyman Dinowitz: Super Bill Hero

My constituents know that I have always been a dedicated and outspoken environmentalist, and this summer, the Environmental Advocates of New York recognized my commitment by naming me a “Super Bill Hero” for strongly supporting all five of the environmental community’s “Super Bills” in the 2009 legislative session.

Once again, the Assembly has led the way in supporting important pro-environmental legislation. Among this legislation is the Global Warming Pollution Cap, which would reduce New York State’s climate-changing pollution from all sources until greenhouse gas emissions are reduced 80 percent by the year 2050. Electronic Waste (E-waste) Recycling would remove tons of toxic e-waste from landfills by requiring manufacturers to collect and recycle their products. In addition, the Environmental Access to Justice Act would restore New Yorkers’ right to enforce environmental review laws, and the Wetlands Protection bill would close a loophole in New York and give the state authority to protect wetlands less than 12.4 acres in size.

Additionally, though I have always enjoyed a high rating from the Environmental Advocates for my support of environmental initiatives, over the past year my “score” was 103—the organization’s highest rating. I am one of only 12 Assembly members to hold this honor, and it is one that I am tremendously proud of. As my voting history and these figures demonstrate, protecting and preserving our city and state’s precious environmental resources remains a top priority for me and a cause dear to my heart. I will continue supporting such initiatives, both in Albany and locally, over the coming year and beyond.

Bigger Better Bottle Bill

The people of New York secured another exciting and important victory for the environment this year with the Bigger Better Bottle Bill, which expands the current law on New York’s beverage container deposit and recycling programs to include a 5-cent deposit on bottled water.

Bottled water has become extremely popular over the past two decades, but the state’s bottle deposit law—which was instituted in 1982—did not include these particular kinds of containers. These bottles have contributed significantly to waste and litter in our state: according to the Department of Environmental Conservation, more than 3 billion bottles and cans end up in the trash or as litter every year. Given the prevalence of these beverage containers today, and the advancements in recycling technology and environmental education, it was about time we expanded the law to provide another economic incentive to recycle.

Under the new law, 80% of unclaimed deposits will go to the State. Additionally, retailers were given an additional month to update their stock with redeemable bottles, so there’s no way your empty bottles will be rejected. I have been a long-time supporter of this initiative—which faced opposition from several strong and well-financed business interests—and I am thrilled to think of the tremendous benefits this revision will bring to our environment.



Children from P.S. 7 (pictured on the bottom) and P.S. 81 (pictured on top) donated hundreds of cans of food to Assemblyman Dinowitz’s annual canned food drive



Assemblyman Dinowitz is pictured with young journalists from the Marble Hill Tenants’ Association’s STOP program, who interviewed the Assemblyman as part of their Children’s Arts & Science Workshop.

Free Notary Service

My office provides free notary service during our regular office hours, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Please bring two forms of identification, at least one with your photo and signature, if you would like your signature notarized.