

# Vendors And The Local Communities

BY HELEN SEARS

**W**hile the current economic turmoil has most eyes fixed on the budget, there is a long-standing issue in Queens over what to do about vendors. Vendors have a long history in New York City, and are undoubtedly an important part of the cultural fabric. Many of us have fond memories of eating hot dogs from a push cart in lower Manhattan or getting ice cream in Central Park. However in Queens, where vending is a relatively new phenomenon, there have been recent problems between vendors and the local communities.

Specifically, while it is natural that most vendors want to set up business in areas with high traffic volume, locating in these areas creates multiple problems for pedestrians and local businesses. Oftentimes the size of the carts either forces pedestrian traffic to narrow on the sidewalk, which in turn leads hurrying pedestrians to spill out into the street.

This creates a definite safety hazard as

well as affecting motor vehicle traffic. Another safety risk is the use of propane tanks – particularly those tanks that are left on the corner of a cart at the edge of a street corner. This is a potentially huge risk, as any errant driver could ram into it at any moment.

There are also sanitation issues involved, primarily with food vendors. Given the high density of both foot traffic and commercial businesses, the added trash creates a greater likelihood of infestation. This problem is particularly prevalent along Roosevelt Avenue. While the problem is not solely because of vendors, the added refuse does exacerbate an already difficult situation.

I am aware of the difficulties vendors face in New York City. Their business is governed by a complex framework of laws and legal decisions across federal, state and local levels. A 2006 Justice Center study discovered that only 26 percent of vendors believed that they had an adequate understanding of the city vending laws. This is somewhat understandable considering that the same report

also stated that there are over 20 different rules that dictate where vendors can conduct business, which differ depending on the wares being sold, the days of the week and the times of the day.

In the City Council we are addressing the issue with several new pieces of proposed legislation. The bills include clarifying the spaces in which vendors can and cannot vend (such as over ventilation grills, cellar doors, etc), more clearly defining obstruction for the purposes of general and food vending on crowded streets. Additionally, they would prohibit general vendors from leaving their stands or goods unattended for more than 30 minutes at a time, regardless of whether they are actively vending. Also there is proposed legislation that will allow for easier enforcement of already existing laws.

*Helen Sears is the Councilmember for the 25th District, representing Elmhurst, East Elmhurst, Jackson Heights, Corona, LeFrak City and Rego Park.*



**Councilmember Helen Sears**

# Don't Forget The Middle Class

BY CONGRESSMEMBER ANTHONY WEINER

**T**he recent election is a celebration, especially for Democrats. President-elect Obama comes to Washington at a time when the country is desperate for a change in how we do business. And, he now has more Democrats to help in the House and the Senate.

But, Democrats won't achieve our vision for America, if we don't do a better job communicating to middle class Americans that we understand them and what they are hoping to achieve.

Americans are ready to leave the last eight years behind, but Democrats must offer a vision of change that helps the middle class get ahead. The Democratic Congress and President-elect Obama must embrace new ideas that deliver real solutions that help the middle class achieve success in the way they define it – sending kids to college, affording a nice home in a safe neighborhood, saving for retirement, starting a business, and getting ahead.

First, we need to cut middle class taxes. For too long the party has treated this issue as an afterthought. But, at a time when the tax burden in the city is among the highest in the nation, having a discussion about how to lessen it is overdue.

Second, we ought to adopt a fresh approach to fiscal responsibility, one that emphasizes transparency and simplicity. Democrats are right to defend what works, but when money isn't being spent the right way, our party should put the spotlight on failure – and propose a way to do it more efficiently.

Third, we should improve public education through better teacher pay and a strong approach to school discipline. Our schools are the future and our kids won't be able to compete if they don't have a world class education. That means paying our teachers like professionals and holding them accountable.

Fourth, we must renew our commitment to safe cities and communities. It was a grave mistake to diminish the COPS program that put 100,000 new police on the street. But by combining new initiatives to hire more police with a strong focus on community policing, we will foster an environment in which citizens and police work together to make neighborhoods safe for everyone. Fifth, we need to bolster support for small business. Small businesses create jobs – more jobs than even the big corporations our nation is famous for. But we don't do enough to nurture small businesses and the spirit of entrepreneurship. Easing the tax burdens on small businesses would be a start, but we must also return the Small Business

Administration into the powerhouse it was before the Bush administration cut much of its funding.

Sixth, we have to ensure all citizens have health care they can afford. A key constituency may be the middle class, which will want to know reform means more affordable, guaranteed coverage but does not mean loss of choice and quality.

Seventh, we should recommit ourselves to rebuilding the American infrastructure. Among other things, that means making broadband available everywhere and expanding mass transit resources.

Eighth, we need to support the development of new affordable housing. Under this administration in Washington, affordable housing has taken some tough hits. Urban members of Congress in particular will need to go to bat with the next administration.

With the rise of President Obama, there is a tide of excitement that our long national nightmare in the White House may be over. But, even though we won the election, what's important now is that we understand what the middle class wants and take real action to help them achieve it.

*Anthony Weiner is a member of Congress representing the 9th Congressional District.*



**Congressman Anthony Weiner**