

Claire Shulman Right, Hiram Monserrate Wrong On Willets Point Development

Printed In Monday, August 18
New York Daily News

Former Queens Borough President Claire Shulman has never been a woman given to tough words, but Shulman got it bitingly right last week when she declared:

"Shame on you, Hiram Monserrate."

Because Monserrate, a Queens councilman and state Senate candidate, is waging a cynical, destructive drive that would block the city from turning an environmental wasteland into a vibrant neighborhood.

And worse, Monserrate's battle against developing the Willets Point area of Queens threatens to restrict affordable-housing construction across the five boroughs.

He is engaged in a naked power play - and, with 31 of his fellow City Council members as allies, the potential for damaging the public good is all too real.

Monserrate's colleagues should understand that he is using them to advance the commercial interests of a handful of landowners in his district while jeopardizing the city's ability to encourage housing construction in their communities.

These Council members must wake up to the fact that Monserrate is playing them for patsies over the fate of an isolated 61-acre peninsula near Shea Stadium that has been a blight on Queens for half a century.

Home largely to auto repair businesses and junkyards, the area has never had sewer service. Its soil has been contaminated by dumped oil, gasoline, paints and solvents that leach into surrounding waters.

Working with nearby communities, the Bloomberg administration has advanced a plan that would build 5,000 units of housing, including 1,000 affordable residences; a pub-

lic school; retail stores; a hotel, and, possibly, a convention center.

To enable construction, the city would buy the land from its owners, at negotiated prices or through eminent domain, and then invite developers to bid on the project.

The developers would be responsible for conducting an environmental cleanup, raising the ground level by at least 6 feet to eliminate flooding and putting in sewers, streets and sidewalks.

First, the Council would have to rezone Willets Point. But Monserrate has led a majority into refusing unless the administration takes eminent domain "off the table."

Translation: Monserrate wants the city to meet prices demanded by the property owners before the Council gives the project the go-ahead.

Absurdly, he calls this "justice" for the "community."

It's not. Instead, it's a recipe for ripping off the taxpayers by forcing the city to pay more than its legal obligation. One man - Monserrate - would get to decide what was fair treatment for political allies.

Property owners would have every reason to delay development, and just one could derail the project. The higher the price rose, the less money there would be for affordable housing.

Apply the same tactics to all development plans that might require eminent domain, and you would stop anything from getting built.

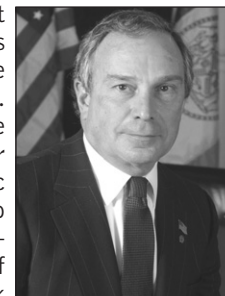
Shulman was right: Shame on you, Hiram Monserrate.

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Making Government Accessible

By Mayor Michael Bloomberg

Some 200 different languages and dialects can be heard on the streets of New York. While that incredible diversity is one of our city's greatest historic strengths - it can also create significant challenges. Nearly half of all New Yorkers speak a language other than



Michael Bloomberg

English at home - and nearly a quarter of New Yorkers lack a basic understanding of English at all. For them, every interaction with city government can be fraught with difficulty.

I remember when I visited Beijing and Shanghai last year to meet with Chinese business leaders; I did not go anywhere without a translator and I still sometimes had problems getting my point across. Therefore, I can only imagine how daunting it is for a New Yorker with limited proficiency in English to complete a seemingly straightforward task like obtaining a marriage license or enrolling a child in school.

In our schools, we have expanded our translation unit so that parents can receive everything from newsletters to meeting notices in eight different lan-

guages. Our police officers now have translators standing by to help them interview victims of violent crimes and get the valuable information they need to catch criminals. We have also made sure that 3-1-1 - the most popular gateway to city government - can handle calls in 170 different languages with experts fluent in those languages on call 24-hours-a-day.

We took the next big step in this effort by signing an executive order that requires our city agencies to implement better language access programs. That includes the translation of all essential documents and forms into the six most commonly spoken languages in the city besides English.

I am a big believer in improving customer service. Businesses need to speak the language of their customers, and so should government. By making city government more accessible, we are making our city safer, healthier, and stronger for all New Yorkers. And that's what we're working to do every single day.

Michael Bloomberg is the Mayor of New York City

Putting Our Economy Back On Track

By Senator Frank Padavan

We are facing challenging times. Home foreclosures are at record highs. Energy prices continue to soar. For most of 2008, our economy has been gripped with great uncertainty and instability. Given the current economic climate, it goes without saying that the future of our economy is at the forefront of all New Yorkers' minds. Putting our economy back on the right track and protecting the hard working taxpayers of New York is my top priority.

Combating Foreclosures

The subprime mortgage foreclosure crisis has hit Queens especially hard. In direct response to devastating effects of home foreclosures, I co-sponsored legislation that was recently signed into law that takes the necessary steps toward revitalizing housing markets and helping local communities by providing relief and assistance to at-risk homeowners facing a foreclosure on their home. The legislation also enacts strong legislative measures that will help avert a future subprime mortgage foreclosure crisis in New York.

Developing a Renewable and Alternative Energy Plan

One of the biggest challenges facing New York homeowners and small businesses is

the soaring cost of energy. We have all been adversely affected by rising prices at the pump during the summer months and with most analysts and economists predicating record increases in home heating fuel for the coming winter, it's clear that energy costs will continue to grow.

Our economic future hinges on the development of a long-term energy plan that focuses on renewable and alternative energy sources and reduces our reliance on foreign oil. New York's small businesses and middle class families can no longer sustain the instability that the global energy market has exerted upon our energy costs. Planning for our future begins now.

This year State Legislature took significant steps in the right direction in the development of a renewable energy policy for New York. Recently, Governor Paterson signed into law, legislation that I sponsored that provides property tax abatement for New York City homeowners and businesses who invest in solar power. The property tax abatement provides an incentive for New Yorkers to invest in cleaner, greener and more cost effective energy and is a key provision in Mayor Bloomberg's PLANYC 2030 sustainability plan.

During this year's legislative session, the Senate passed legislation that would provide a tax credit for businesses who invest in renewable and alternative energy sources. Specifically, the legislation provides a busi-

ness tax credit for eligible solar and wind energy system equipment equal to fifty percent of the qualified expenses incurred by a business. The legislation also provides a business tax credit equal to 45 percent for qualified expense related to fuel cell electric generating equipment.

While we are taking the steps on the state level, we can only go so far without the federal government acting on their part. It is vitally important for Congress to end the partisan wrangling and posturing and immediately act on common-sense solutions and develop a balanced energy policy that will help bolster the national economy today and for generations to come.

Protecting Taxpayers, Fighting Medicaid Fraud

Recently, the New York Post had a report about an audit conducted by the New York State Comptroller's Office that uncovered New York was losing millions of dollars in each year because former residents remained enrolled and continued to receive benefits in the State's Medicaid system. The audit shows that over 30,000 people in New York City alone were improperly enrolled in the State's Medicaid system over a one year period from November 2006 to November 2007.

In light of this recent and startling discovery, I have called upon the Medicaid Inspector General to immediately and swift-



Senator Frank Padavan

ly investigate each instance of fraud mentioned in this audit, aggressively recoup the millions of state tax dollars lost and prosecute the individuals involved to the fullest extent of the law.

Moving forward, I will continue to work with my State Legislative colleagues to revitalize our economy, develop an energy plan on a state level that is based on renewable and alternative energy and protect New York's hardworking families and businesses by aggressively rooting out fraud, waste and abuse in government spending.