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FROM COUNCILMEMBER

ROBERT JACKSON



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Legislative & Community Update – December 22, 2008

Budget: Negotiations continue to dominate the Council's calendar. I am a member of the **Budget Negotiating Team** and we are meeting to propose alternative cuts to the Mayor's proposed program cuts. In budget parlance, these are known as PEG's – **P**rograms to **E**liminate the **G**ap. Make no mistake - there will be cuts. The question is: where they will come from and who will be affected?

My priorities continue to be the safety and well being of my constituents. A combination of advocacy by organized senior groups and grassroots efforts by seniors themselves has resulted in the Mayor and the Department for the Aging (DFTA) withdrawing their plans to reconfigure DFTA's programs. I am pleased by the success of this campaign. I was opposed to the proposed reorganization. It would have consolidated services and required seniors to travel farther to participate in activities or get a hot meal. There is no question in my mind that these proposals were neither innovative nor efficient; in fact, estimates are that these proposals would cost \$117,000 million MORE annually. There was a fundamental disconnect between the role that senior centers play in our community – delivering essential services in a neighborhood setting - and the Department's perception that seniors want more "frills".

I also believe that education is the best long term social investment we can make. Study after study shows that for every dollar invested in education, government eventually receives more tax revenue and spends less on incarceration & health costs. I will continue to advocate for education spending.

Bottom line – we need to pull together to do more with less at every level of government. It bears repeating: Please call 311 to report quality of life issues. Did you know that some of the city's cleanest, most highly rated sanitation districts – such as the Upper East Side – also have the highest number of litter and sanitation complaints. As the saying goes, the squeaky wheel gets the grease.

Legislation & Oversight: On Tuesday, December 16th, I chaired a public hearing on **gifted and talented program admissions policy**. Changes made in the admissions criteria have resulted in fewer minority students and, in some districts, the total elimination of G & T programs. This is a complex topic, hinging on which tests and criteria are used as the defining yardsticks for the admissions tests, a history of racial bias and the pluses and minuses of contained classes bearing the "G & T" label but the fact of the matter is that after multiple revisions, the DOE has succeeded in making the situation worse:

General student population	17% White	41% Hispanic	27% Black	15% Asian
07-08 School Year G & T	33%White	15% Hispanic	31% Black	20 % Asian
This School Year G & T	48% White	9% Hispanic	13% Black	28%Asian

The purpose of the hearing was to force the Department to re-examine its policies and hear from parents, experts and advocates on how to improve this dismal situation.

At the Council's most recent Stated Meeting, three streets were co-named to honor African-American leaders in the arts, sciences and civil rights movement. Edgcombe Avenue between 155th Street and 171st Street was co-named **Paul Robeson Boulevard** in recognition of the unparalleled achievements of the athlete, actor, singer, scholar, writer, lawyer and human rights leader. West 160th Street between St.Nicholas and Edgcombe Ave. was named in honor of the amazing **Count Basie**, true music royalty. West 145th Street from Riverside Drive to St. Nicholas Avenue was named in honor of A. Philip Randolph, the great labor and civil rights leader and scholar, making 146th Street from river to river, **A. Philip Randolph Boulevard**.

Other action on December 18 includes passage of a resolution that calls upon the NYC Dept. of Education (DOE) to survey city schools to assess their **compliance with State Education Law** and the Regulations of the Commissioner of the State Education Department. These mandates include required instruction outside of the core reading, math and science curriculum such as courses related to physical education, patriotism, citizenship, civility and character education, fire and arson prevention, child abuse prevention, the humane treatment of animals, as well as health education regarding alcohol, drug and tobacco use and instruction on AIDS. The resolution also calls upon the DOE to assist those city schools that are not in full compliance with the mandates. I introduced this bill because of repeated complaints by students, parents and advocates that city schools were ignoring the State standards.

The Council also passed a new law which I sponsored to create an **exception to the City's residency requirement** for city employees. Members of DC 37 and other collective bargaining units will be able to reside in Nassau, Westchester, Suffolk, Orange, Rockland or Putnam County as long as they have resided in New York City for two years of their city service.

At this same Stated meeting, I had the pleasure of joining the Speaker, Christine Quinn and my colleague, Miguel Martinez, in presenting a proclamation to the cast and producers of **"In the Heights"**. It was a honor to salute the talent and energy that has made this musical such a success.

Community In November, I had the privilege of joining a team of doctors that traveled to the Dr. Jaime Mota Hospital in Barahona, Dominican Republic in November. The mission accomplished several extraordinary things. Sixty surgeries encompassing such things as gall bladders, tumor removals, and hernia repairs made a big difference for the individuals who received the care. Since the patients were both Dominicans and Haitians, this mission bridged a divide that has traditionally separated the two cultures. In addition, we were able to extract a commitment from the Minister of the Environment, Dr. Jaime David Mirabel, that the government would initiate a clean up in Haina, the community I have previously visited where the water table is severely polluted by contaminants from battery factories. Not bad for five days "vacation". The mission was sponsored by Helping Hands of the Heart, Inc. with Dominican Sunday serving as a fiscal conduit.

My best wishes for a very happy and healthy New Year!