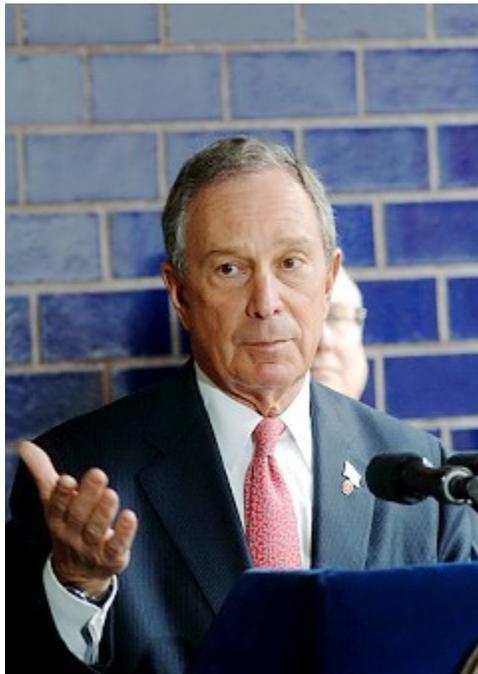


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Pork handouts offered to pressure council members to OK congestion plan



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Mayor Bloomberg put on pressure to get green light on plan.

No one could recall such a naked combination of arm-twisting and pork-barrel handouts to pressure City Council members to approve the huge tax increase known as congestion pricing.

"City Hall offered more in goodies this week to get this tax passed than the federal government is giving us to do it," said [Brooklyn Councilman Lewis Fidler](#), a leading opponent of the plan that passed by a 30-to-20 vote.

Harlem [Councilwoman Inez Dickens](#), for instance, got a last-minute promise from City Hall for major changes she'd been seeking to the huge 125th St. redevelopment plan.

Her colleague, [Sara Gonzalez](#), got a promise of a new ferry line for her district in [Sunset Park, Brooklyn](#).

[Councilman Domenic Recchia](#) of [Gravesend](#) was offered a new ferry line for his constituents from [Coney Island](#) to [Manhattan](#).

Up in the [Bronx](#), a major retail redevelopment project at the Kingsbridge Armory that had been stalled for a year suddenly moved forward in the past few weeks.

[Joel Rivera](#), the Council majority leader from the Bronx, had opposed the mayor's plan until Monday. Rivera suddenly switched his position the day of the vote. He joined six other members of the Bronx delegation to deliver near-unanimous support for the mayor's \$8-a-day tax on cars coming into the central business district on weekdays.

On [Staten Island](#), [Councilman Michael McMahon](#), who claimed he was leaning against congestion pricing, stunned most insiders by flipping at the last moment.

"You wouldn't believe the pressure," said one supporter of congestion pricing who asked not to be identified. "Some of my colleagues in Council suddenly got religion on Monday after opposing this thing for weeks."

Others talked of the mayor suggesting in private meetings that he might hold fund-raisers for certain term-limited Council members running for new posts next year.

Everyone, of course, denies any direct relation between their vote and the specific "enhancements" for their districts, or any offers of political support.

"The 125th St. negotiations with the local members of the Council are a normal part of the ULURP [uniform land use review process] process," Bloomberg spokesman [John Gallagher](#) said.

As for the new ferry routes, Gallagher said the mayor and [Council Speaker Christine Quinn](#) are "working with the Council on a five-borough ferry plan."

Throughout all of this frenzied lobbying the past few months for congestion pricing, Quinn has acted like a slavish deputy sheriff to the mayor.

In case you think this was all part of the give-and-take of the democratic process, consider the following: A few months ago, the mayor's plan was so unpopular it looked unlikely to even be voted out of committee.

Five of the seven committee members, including Rivera and McMahon, were poised to vote against it. So what did Quinn do? She slipped two supporters of congestion pricing onto the committee.

Now the fight moves to [Albany](#), where the Senate and the new governor just rejected [Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver](#)'s commendable plan to tax millionaires.

Our billionaire mayor who keeps creating congestion with huge new skyscraper condos for the affluent will now demand that Albany force the middle class to pay the freight for reducing congestion.

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