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The Latest Slap

By ALICIA COLON | April 4, 2008

On Sunday, I received a recorded phone message from a group of firefighters and police officers, urging me to contact my councilman, Michael McMahon, and tell him to vote against the proposed congestion pricing bill. Alas, on Monday, Mr. McMahon voted with 29 of his fellow Democrats to approve the legislation now scheduled for a vote next week in Albany. The three Republican council members and the remaining sane Democrats voted no. Congratulations must now go to Mayor Bloomberg for once again demonstrating how adept he has become in exerting his political will against the average New Yorker.

In explaining his approval vote, which he said he agonized over, Mr. McMahon contended that by and large, Staten Islanders would not pay more for congestion pricing because the fee is offset by existing tolls. But as I understand it, residents now pay \$4.80 at the Verrazano and will have to pay \$3.20 more to meet the \$8 congestion pricing fee. Where's the offset? What about the Islanders who work early morning shifts and are forced to drive in because the ferry is operating a reduced schedule?

Mayor Bloomberg was beaming at the City Council's close vote (30 to 20), and critics have implied that he has promised to host fund-raisers and back projects for those voting for the bill. Earlier last week, the mayor was wooing the state legislators who were still leery about the pricing bill. Mr. Bloomberg told lawmakers that the \$225 million required to implement the new system would be entirely covered by federal money, with any leftover funds going toward improvements in mass transportation. For some very strange reason, people seem to forget that any "federal money" comes right out of our pockets. Guess who'll be managing these funds? Why, the good old Metropolitan Transit Authority, which has a poor record of keeping its promises. Staten Islanders in particular remember being assured by the MTA that the tolls on the Verrazano Bridge would end once the bridge was paid for.

What rankles me the most about this legislation is that it's being marketed as an environmental necessity. I have developed an intense dislike for the word "green" when used to influence guilt about our ecology. Thank you, Al Gore, for turning this city into a morass of doomsday-fearing lemmings. Want to make a quick buck? Take an old product, put the word green technology on the label, and charge two bucks more. Can you really vouch that organically grown vegetables or free range chickens are exactly that? Is there really such a thing as a carbon footprint? Is it

anywhere near Area 51? Want to buy a bridge?

The scientific industry is now openly questioning the validity of Mr. Gore's global warming hysteria. The claims he made in "An Inconvenient Truth" have been widely discredited. Polar bears are not dying. Yet there are many here in New York who are swayed by arguments made by billionaire mayors who insist that the city will be cleaner, less polluted, and greener by the year 2030. It will also be considerably less crowded. Our only hope is that the state legislators put a damper on this proposal.

Mayor Bloomberg does not want you to drive into the city. You should leave your car at home and use public transportation. Does he really think this is good for the city and small businesses located here? Make no mistake. This congestion pricing will punish the little guy and will do nothing to alleviate traffic in the city, because the real problem of gridlock is caused by the endless construction of luxury apartments that demands lane closures and detours. The mayor's West Side development project pushed FedEx out of its West 34th Street station, and it's now operating near the Lincoln Tunnel. The resultant gridlock has nothing to do with passenger cars.

Congestion pricing is just the latest slap in the face for the working class of New York, who can no longer smoke in a bar or eat tasty fried foods, and soon won't be able to buy an incandescent light bulb. Will this nanny state nightmare ever end?

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