

Those who wanted the Assembly Speaker to dictate that his Assembly Democrats be Congestion Taxers ought to read on and understand that New York State (and City) remains a Democracy.

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To be Assembly speaker, first you have to get elected



April 21, 2008 at 12:43 pm by Alan Chartock

Now things are getting interesting. Just in case you've been off on a trip to Mars, here's what happened. The Democratic conference (caucus) in the state Assembly said, "Hell, no" to Mayor Michael Bloomberg's congestion pricing proposal that would have imposed an eight-dollar fee on cars traveling below 60th Street in Manhattan. We hear that Speaker Sheldon Silver was actually in favor of the plan but a majority of his members were not. We also hear that Mayor Bloomberg was furious that his plan went down, taking with it the millions of federal dollars it would have brought to the city. We know that an angry Mike Bloomberg can be a fearsome thing. In fact, he has an army of little green soldiers "billions of them" that might be able to help him exact revenge on his enemies. But is Shelly Silver really Mike Bloomberg's enemy? **My feeling is that he is not and should not be regarded as such.**

Mike Bloomberg is at heart a good guy who wants to help his city and, with a few glaring exceptions like the failed Bloomberg plan for a West Side stadium, Shelly has been there for Mike. Bloomberg knows good government when he sees it. He's that kind of guy. In fact, he may one day be governor of New York state and he'll certainly want a transparent political system. **Mayor Mike has got to know there are things a speaker can do and things he can't do. Mike knows rule number one in politics is that first you have to get elected.** For his part, **Shelly Silver knows that his core constituency is his Democratic conference.** Shelly may have hesitatingly been for the Bloomberg plan but **the members of his conference** were not. **They perceived the congestion pricing plan to be political death. They saw it as economically unfair to the little people who couldn't afford it and to small business owners who saw an eight-dollar charge (and much more for trucks), as potentially ruinous for their businesses. In other words, they saw it as a regressive tax on the little people and they were not going to stand for it.** Shelly had to see the situation as very dangerous for his political well-being. He must have remembered when a former adversary, Mike "The Brag Man" Bragman almost got away with a coup d'etat. He went along with his conference and the plan was killed. Shelly Silver is, above all, a survivor. He survived and even prospered because of the Spitzer mess but this congestion thing was a tough one.



Now Shelly has not one but two primary adversaries in his own district. In politics, having two enemies is better than one because it divides the vote. Nevertheless, this is dangerous stuff. Despite the fact that Shelly has produced massive amounts of money and "pork" for his district, one can never

take the voters for granted. I've been watching this game for some time now and I remember the late Speaker Stanley Steingut very well. His Brooklyn district threw him out despite the fact that he, too, delivered big time. **There is a rumor around Albany that Mayor Mike might use some of his billions of little green helpers to "unelect" Shelly from his district.** If you're out you can't be speaker, so this is tough stuff.

Hey, I thought congestion pricing was a good thing but I also recognize that **we can't go around calling for more democracy in Albany while saying Shelly should be a dictator to his conference.** I would also suggest that Shelly has done some heavy lifting in the past and has always come out on top. **If Mayor Mike should try to exact retribution of the kind described above on Speaker Shelly and if Shelly survives and if Mayor Mike becomes Governor Mike, the mayor might rue the day he took on the speaker.**

Shelly is a smart guy who knows how to work the system. You will remember the line in *The Godfather* better than I do when the supplicant is told that one day he might be able to do the Godfather a "service." Shelly Silver has been giving out a lot to his district for a long time. He is owed a lot of "services" by grateful constituents. If I'm Mayor Mike, I've got to be weighing the danger here. Of course, things could get really dirty. Eliot Spitzer learned the hardest of ways that when the mud starts to fly, everyone, and I mean everyone, has to be Tide clean. This whole mess could turn out to be unproductive for everyone.

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