

There They Go Again

by Steven Skyles-Mulligan, CRDC President

One of Ronald Reagan's favorite "gotcha" lines was "there you go again." He used it on any number of occasions to cast doubt on the truthfulness and relevance of something said by a political opponent. It was a remark that allowed Mr. Reagan to appear like a regular fellow – someone you might like to have a beer and trade stories with – while relieving him of any obligation to provide details or substantiate his charges with actual, verifiable facts.

The GOP's biggest problem is that it doesn't care much for facts. In recent years we have seen this in the way Bill Clinton was nearly hounded from office for first one thing, then another, with each effort crumbling to dust when the Republicans couldn't actually produce facts. We saw it in the hate campaign against Vietnam veteran and triple amputee Max Cleland as "weak on terror" because he supported workers' rights for those in the Department of Homeland Security. It also appeared in the (blessedly former) Republican House leadership's slipshod approach to investigating the Mark Foley matter. And of course it has shown up in virtually every policy pursued by the current administration, from its ill-advised upper-income tax cuts to its disastrous bellicosity to its appalling approach to the environment.

Recently, though, the GOP's lack of acquaintance with fact made an appearance that looked almost like a circus: the accusation that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was seeking a government jumbo jet to ferry her

between her district and the District. It was truly comical as the allegations changed from day to day and from moment to moment. First, they acted as if it were unprecedented for the Speaker of the House to be ferried in a government plane (it isn't; Denny Hastert had one for security reasons since he was second in the Presidential succession, as is Pelosi now). Then the Republicans, spending many hours on the house floor, insisted that Pelosi demanded a giant plane so she could ferry her family and staff with her (actually, the House Sergeant at Arms determined the Speaker should have a plane that could cross the country in a single hop; she was ready to fly commercial as she has always done). The twists and turns got so bad that even Tony Snow, the White House press secretary, deplored them and said that the Speaker should have whatever government plane could get across the country in one hop.

As I watched this ludicrous spectacle unfold, put forward by a bunch of legislators who could not even manage to complete the budget for FY 2007 when they had control of the House, I thought back to another time. In 1944, Franklin D. Roosevelt was fighting what would become his last Presidential campaign. You may recall reading a story about a little dog named Fala, about whom the Republicans kicked up nearly as big a fuss as their descendants have over Pelosi's plane. The story changed over and over again and finally the President was able to hold the Republicans up to the great ridicule they merited.

SPECIAL MEETING

Co-Sponsored by CRDC,
VID and GLID

THURSDAY, MARCH 15, 2007
7:00 PM (SHARP; please be on time)

Hudson Guild Fulton Center
119 Ninth Avenue
(btw 17th and 18th Sts
(PLEASE NOTE THE NEW
LOCATION FOR THIS
MEETING)

Agenda:

THE IMPEACHMENT OF GEORGE W. BUSH The Case, The Consequences

Guest Speaker
**HON. ELIZABETH
HOLTZMAN**

The former Kings County District Attorney and Member of the Watergate-Era House Judiciary Committee talks about her latest book and explains why the President's conduct rises (or descends) to the standard of impeachment.

So, as Ronald Reagan used to say, there they go again. But the facts are on our side. If the Republicans are not careful, "there they go again" may refer to earning themselves another half-century in the minority.

Inmates' Telephone Charges Still Unfair

Walton Vs. NYSDOCS And MCI

By Lee Sinovoi, CRDC Executive Committee Member

On January 8, Governor Spitzer ordered an end to the backdoor tax on telephone calls by inmates to the outer world. But his order will not take effect until April 1, 2007. Fortunately, a Court of Appeals hearing was held the next day.

I was one of 10 people on the 10:45 train to Albany for that hearing in the Walton vs. NYSDOCS (Department of Corrections) and MCI (the monopoly telephone corporation making exorbitant charges to inmates' family members, lawyers, and any other people who want to accept the collect phone calls from a person in a New York State Correctional Facility). Each phone call costs \$3.00 just to connect plus \$0.16 a minute. MCI remits 57.5 percent of its revenue from these collect calls to the New York State general operating fund.

The case, originally brought in 2000, was renewed against the state and MCI on February 25, 2004. The defendants' motion to dismiss the case, opposed by the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), was granted by Albany County State Supreme Court Justice George Ceresia. On May 4, 2006, CCR moved to appeal the case.

There are five friend of the court (amicus) briefs. One is by Betsy Gotbaum and 14 members of the City Council. The second is by The Innocence Project for itself and the Incarcerated Mothers Program. The third is by the law firm of Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel for over a dozen law firms and organizations. The fourth is by the Legal Aid Society for itself, The Center for Law and Social Justice and the Bronx Defenders. The fifth is by the Legal Services for Prisoners with Children submitted on behalf of 16 organizations devoted to providing services and support for the prisoners themselves and family members of prisoners, including my wife and me.

When the court session started our lawyer, CCR attorney and director Rachel Meeropol, argued Governor Spitzer's executive order does not affect our case as the unlegislated tax is still in effect. Removal of that tax will help bring prisoners closer to their families and lawyers paving the way for their return to society.

On Tuesday, February 20th the New York Court of Appeals gave us the victory we were looking for in the case against MCI.

Proposed letter to Governor Eliot Spitzer to create more jobs in Upper New York State

By Marc Joseph Krasnow, CRDC Recording Secretary

Upstate New York is losing jobs and population and cold winters are not to blame. South Dakota stole the credit card business from New York State and New Yorkers and Angelinos alike go to Toronto to make movies. Both places have worse weather than Upstate, but have created competitive advantages to attract business.

As you have said, Governor, Upstate looks like Appalachia. It is detrimental to our economy that New York based companies such as MasterCard, American Express and JPMorganChase have their back offices in Texas, Arizona and Florida.

It would be beneficial to New York if these financial service companies would keep jobs in our State, especially the upstate region. Thus, it is vital that Buffalo, Rochester and Schenectady are as competitive as Tallahassee, Phoenix or Ft Lauderdale. In the past several months JPMorganChase has actually moved its New York Executive Office staff to Houston.

Housing costs (the price to buy a home) and quality of life upstate are certainly on par with, if not better than, in many Sunbelt cities. Once issues such as taxes and energy costs are resolved, there would be every reason for companies to increase their staff in upstate cities.

With regard to the entertainment business, because of lower costs, Hollywood creates much of its content in Canada. Developing an economic empowerment zone for TV and Film production by building soundstages upstate, near Buffalo or Rochester (only a short distance from Toronto), could bring many jobs to the region. Hollywood will film wherever it is least expensive, which has been demonstrated by the increase in motion picture/television production, in New York City, after Mayor Bloomberg lowered the cost of filming.

Secondly, New York State needs to increase its current 300,000 sq. feet of studio space (most located in NYC) substantially to compete with the 3,000,000 sq. ft. in Los Angeles and its environs. To increase film and TV production in the New York City area, soundstages could be built in economically disadvantaged areas of the Hudson Valley; such as Newburgh (near the airport) similar to Los Angeles, where most new production facilities are built in the far suburbs.

Many talented people in show business are forced to leave New York, for jobs in Hollywood, because the physical infrastructure does not exist in our State to support all the productions that would like to work here.

Many talented people (especially upstate college graduates) are forced to leave New York, their homes and families, for jobs elsewhere, because enough opportunities do not exist in our State to support all those who would like to live and work here.

General Theological Seminary Plan Rejected by Community Board; Vote By City To Soon Follow

by Andrew Berman, CRDC Member

In early February, Community Board #4 voted overwhelmingly to reject the General Theological Seminary's (GTS) plans for a new 160 ft. tall building on 9th Avenue and a smaller new building on 20th Street. Groups like Save Chelsea Historic District (SCHD) and CRDC led the opposition against the proposal, which would introduce over 100,000 square feet of new luxury housing in a largely glass high-rise on 9th Avenue, and a new academic buildings for GTS on 20th Street. Like SCHD and CRDC, the Community Board found the proposed new building for 9th Avenue, which would violate the Chelsea Plan's 75 ft. height limit and which must be deemed "appropriate" for the Chelsea Historic District, much too large, and its glassy design totally inappropriate for the district. The 20th Street building was deemed basically sound in scale but still inappropriate in design. In addition to the Community Board, State Senator Tom Duane and Assemblymember Dick Gottfried both came out against the GTS plan.

One of many areas of contention came up in relation to GTS' last-minute claims that if allowed to go through with this plan, they would also build some affordable housing in the area. Problem is, there is absolutely no concrete plan being offered by GTS to do so, there is nothing stopping them from building such affordable housing now, and their claims that their "air rights" were needed for affordable housing to be built on a neighboring site turned out to be false.

Now the plan goes to the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. If approved there, the plan goes to the NYC Planning Commission and finally the City Council, each of which must approve it; if any reject it, the plan dies. The hearing at the Landmarks Preservation Commission on GTS is expected to be scheduled for some time in March, with a decision by the Commission not until many weeks later. Letters can be sent to the Commission now at comments@lpc.nyc.gov letting them know how you feel about the proposal, and you can call the LPC at 212/669-7923 to find out when the hearing is scheduled.

Many Chelsea residents fought many years for the very modest neighborhood protections we have, like the Chelsea Historic District and the Chelsea Plan. To get them, we had to allow the City to "upzone" (i.e., promote large-scale, market-rate development) in much of the neighborhood, and then the City further upzoned almost all of West Chelsea. Now, Chelsea is suffering from massive overdevelopment that provides little help to average Chelsea residents and which is squeezing out the neighborhood's remaining affordable housing while dramatically changing the neighborhood's character. The current GTS plan will only accelerate this trend. GTS should work with the community on a plan that respects Chelsea's character and neighborhood protections rather than further undermining them.

Dubai on the Hudson

By Gloria Sukenick, CRDC Housing Chair

There's lots going on in Chelsea. So, what to deal with first? Well, at our monthly club meeting, Council Speaker Christine Quinn made it through the icy, freezing cold weather and spoke to those of us who were determined enough to brave the weather.

She expressed concern for the growing disappearance of middle class housing as well as support for a renters' tax break and legislation that would build on a federal program that assists first time home buyers. Also on Christine's agenda, a commitment to try to change the make up of the Rent Guidelines Board so that the members are more representative of the public at large, not members of bank boards, financial institutions, and generally the "moneyed class."

As the New York Times noted, her State of the City speech "sounded as much like a blueprint for a potential mayoral campaign as an outline of her agenda for the coming months."

So, now on to Chelsea's big issue: the General Theological Seminary's proposed new building to replace Sherrill Hall and, also, the dearth of any new affordable housing resulting from the recent Chelsea rezoning. Let me start by pointing out that I understand the concern with density. I am also very concerned with all the effort I, and many others, have devoted to the push for NEW affordable housing.

I attended a meeting with HPD, NYCHA, GTS, the Brodsky organization (the potential developers involved

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Chelsea, Madison Sq., Flatiron, Rosehill



Dubai On The Hudson

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with the Seminary site on 9th Avenue), and representatives of our elected officials. A very credible offer was made by Brodsky. As a “give-back” to the community. Brodsky would agree to build affordable housing on 19th Street between 9th and 10th Avenues. Other plans were offered to achieve the same end. All of these would require permits from the city, but in view of the housing crisis in Chelsea, every effort should be made to take advantage of this opportunity.

Where do things stand now? GTS awaits a decision on the feasibility of this plan for HPD and NYCHA, as well as the decision of the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

A recent headline from the New York Times, 2/19/07, “Housing Market up in New York, in 2007 Boom,” indicates that the prospect of achieving any new low and moderate income housing is grim. What is needed is more than just protection of existing affordable housing, (rapidly disappearing)/ we must create NEW affordable housing. Otherwise we are really in danger of, indeed, becoming “Dubai on the Hudson.”

When I meet my fellow Chelsea-ites, and they say to me, “We will never get any new housing that we can afford, all we see are luxury condos rising up,” I would love to be able to tell them that, indeed, there are plans for NEW affordable housing to go up right now here in Chelsea. *Wouldn't that be a gas!*

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