

To the editor:

Queens Civic Congress appreciates The Times editorial highlighting the clear failure of the just passed City Budget to cover the needs of our most vulnerable (Editorial: “The Needy and Budget Priorities, July 7, 2008). The solution advocated by City Hall and apparently seconded in your editorial – hiking property taxes across the board – makes absolutely no sense. Queens Civic Congress – in testimonies, statements, other advocacy and, most recently, our “REAL Property Tax Reform” forum – advocates an improvement that bring equity, fairness and transparency to the City's antiquated, inequitable and unfair real estate tax regime AND nets the City some five billion dollars – yes, \$5,000,000,000, without gouging middle and working class homeowners, businesses and tenants. CIVIC2030 includes this and other Queens Civic Congress reforms

Queens Civic Congress advocates most of the net revenues, not for the city the embark on a spending spree, but to help it strategically reform its tax system, address long-term borrowing issues. Clearly, this sound reform covers the need to address core services for our needy. New Yorkers can help the cause: Call 3-1-1. Tell the Mayor to implement the Queens Civic Congress REAL Property Tax Reform.

-Corey Bearak, President,
Queens Civic Congress
July 9, 2009

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Opinion

July 7, 2008
Editorial

The Needy and Budget Priorities

These are tough times. But the newly passed \$59.1 billion New York City budget cut nearly \$300 million in spending, a good part of it for programs meant to protect the city's most vulnerable people, including the elderly, youth, the unemployed, people who need legal aid and those with H.I.V. and AIDS.

Traditionally, New York mayors propose cuts needed to balance the budget as required by law, and then the City Council fights to restore funds to education, health and other social programs. Not this year. With the fiscal picture worsening as revenues falter, the Council drew a narrow line in the sand over education and little else, finding some \$129 million for the schools.

That is welcome. But what the Council members refused to do is far more important. Eager to save their own political skins before the 2009 election (more than 20 of the 51 members are already preparing to run), they rejected Mayor Michael Bloomberg's call to rescind the 7 percent property tax cut. That alone would have raised \$1.2 billion. They could have generated \$200 million simply by cutting in half the yearly \$400 property tax rebate.

Even with these breaks taken away, owners of single-family homes would still pay taxes at a lower rate than their counterparts in surrounding communities.

Instead, lawmakers called on Mr. Bloomberg to loosen his grip on a surplus of more than \$4.6 billion. The mayor did the fiscally sound thing; with the city almost certainly headed for several years of hard times, he committed the money to pay down a portion of future budget shortfalls and obligations that continue to grow. The recently settled police officers' contract may cost the city \$1 billion in raises. Council members even suggested a new hotel tax, which makes little sense for a city that should be encouraging even more visitors to come and spend.

The property tax breaks were supposed to be temporary, there to be lifted when New York needed them, like now. The city's politicians chose to protect themselves rather than New York's most vulnerable. That was the wrong choice.