



Queens Civic Congress

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
TUESDAY, May 6, 2008

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QUEENS CIVIC CONGRESS OPPOSES WATER & SEWER TAX GOUGE

Statement to the NYC Water Board, Tuesday, May 6, 2008
by Corey Bearak, President, Queens Civic Congress

Thank you for this opportunity for Queens Civic Congress to oppose the unnecessary 14.5% Water and Sewer tax gouge. My name is Corey Bearak. I serve as President of this umbrella group that represents over 100 civic, cooperative, condo, tenant and other community associations throughout the borough of Queens. Our membership represents almost every community in the borough.

Queens Civic Congress reminds policymakers that New Yorkers pay 500% more than they paid when the City introduced water metering. City Hall needs to step up and take actions it took a pass on – this goes back several administrations – to deliver clean water to New Yorkers at the lowest cost. The current mindset continues us on a path to pay more and we need that to change. At the [December](#) hearing, Queens Civic Congress called on City Hall to take 10 reforms further updated for today's hearing and which clearly refute any need to gouge us:

- 1) Stop the abdication when it comes to securing support New Yorkers should expect from Washington and Albany for mandates each imposes. When a New Yorker chairs the House Ways and Means Committee and many other Members hold other senior posts in Congress the lack of any plan to capture appropriate federal aid and relief staggers the mind. Queens Civic Congress questions why City Hall lets Washington and Albany off the hook when 60% of capital project costs result from the mandates.
- 2) In our CIVIC 2030 [platform](#), Queens Civic Congress continues to question a filtration plant in a park when time exists to pursue filtration avoidance in the Croton Watershed and advocate for the Federal reforms needed to empower New York City to implement these cost-effective alternatives. New York City and its water board owe a duty to its taxpayers and citizens, not to upstate special interests for whom we effectively subsidize development, when we acquiesce in a building a filtration plant for the Croton system.
- 3) The alternative to filtration plants – membrane filtration as called for by the Croton Watershed Clean Water Coalition – provides a lower cost means – about 1/13th the latest cost - to provide safe and pure drinking water. It involves less energy use, less maintenance cost, less footprint, less chemicals. It has become far and away the water filtration technology of choice across the nation.

- 4) Further, some of the remainder of the now \$2.8 billion for Croton and additional \$1.5 billion for UV for Cat-Del might be better allocated to more land purchases and conservation easements; where property owners become recalcitrant, the state must step in for the City which gave up its right to use condemnation as part of the watershed agreements forged with the State and upstate communities.
- 5) We remain particularly concerned about the use of Water taxes for projects unrelated to water and sewer needs that should be funded from the regular budget (\$15 million/ year). The Croton project funds projects that remain meritorious examples for City capital funding. This is clearly outside the scope of water supply and sewer systems.
- 6) The New York City capital budget should fund the capital costs for water supply and treatment facilities.
- 7) End the Water Board's annual rental payment (\$178 million) to the city. Recent hearings by Council Finance Chair David Weprin and Environmental Chair James Gennaro have focused on this “Ponzi scheme,” as my predecessor Sean Walsh calls it. The City can decline payments and should. It should decline (or return) the current payment (\$147 million) and follow that path every year.
- 8) Cease the practice of setting rates before the City adopts its budget. Our [platform](#), found on our website, www.queensciviccongress.org, specifically calls for this reform embodied in [legislation](#) sponsored by Assembly Member Mark Weprin. It passed the Assembly, is pending in the Senate and would certainly lead to savings. The Independent Budget Office's May 2008 [brief](#) notes the higher fringe benefits accounting (\$19 million), debt service savings (\$17 million) from delays to non-essential projects and holding code 499 (\$94 million). The water system, which relies on a regressive system of users fees ought not to be a backdoor revenue stream for the City. The fringes and rental payments serve as just two examples. Certainly, the failure to seek funding for mandates fits this bill.
- 9) The water board needs to get on board and support efforts to ease the impacts of rate increases on our seniors – both homeowners and tenants – who lived on fixed incomes. Queens Civic Congress and [CIVIC 2030](#) supports [legislation](#) sponsored by Assembly Member Ann Carrozza which would provide a tax levy subsidy to households 65 or older and with incomes below the current Senior Citizens Homeowner Exemption eligibility limit to help offset the increasing water rates. From the time of its proposal it was clear any relief would not be funded by other water ratepayers so why remain silent?
- 10) Finally, make sure the Department of Environment Protection improves its focus and delivery on routine matters that when neglected cause city residents and business great havoc and burdensome costs. Make sure DEP meets its obligation to keep existing storm and combined sanitary-storm systems in a state of good repair. The backups into homes and apartments last summer and fall of reflected more than just mother nature at work.

Thank you.

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For more information please refer to:

* [2007-10-22 Queens Civic Congress Opposes \(18 percent\) Water and Sewer Tax Hike.](#)

* [2007-04-24 Oppose Water Rates Increase](#)

Find Queens Civic Congress [Members](#) on the web at: <http://queensciviccongress.org/organization/members.php>.

Queens Civic Congress Members

Association of Old Forest Hills ♦ Auburndale Improvement Association ♦ Bayside Civic Database ♦ Bayside Clear-Spring Council ♦ Bayside Hills Civic Association ♦ Bayswater Civic Association ♦ Bay Terrace Community Alliance, Inc. ♦ Bellaire-BellVill Civic Association ♦ Belle Harbor Property Owners Association ♦ Bellerose Commonwealth Civic Association ♦ Bellerose Hillside Civic Association ♦ Bell Park Manor Terrace Community Council ♦ Bowne Park Civic Association ♦ Briarwood Community Association ♦ Cambria Heights Civic Association ♦ Civic Association of Utopia Estates ♦ C.O.M.E.T. (Communities of Maspeth-Elmhurst Together) ♦ Concerned Citizens of Laurelton ♦ Cornucopia Society ♦ Creedmoor Civic Association ♦ Deerfield Area Association ♦ Doug-Bay Manor Civic Association ♦ Douglas Manor Association ♦ Douglaston Civic Association ♦ Dutch Kills Civic Assn. of Long Island City ♦ East Flushing Civic Association ♦ Federated Block Associations of Laurelton ♦ Federation of Civic Associations of Southeast Queens ♦ Floral Park Community Council ♦ Flushing Heights Civic Association ♦ Flushing on the Hill Taxpayers Association ♦ Forest Hills Chamber of Commerce ♦ Forest Hills Crescents Association ♦ Forest Hills-Van Court Association ♦ Fresh Meadows Homeowners Association ♦ Georgetown Mews ♦ Glendale Civic Association of Queens ♦ Glen Oaks Village Owners, Inc. ♦ Greater Astoria Historical Society ♦ Greater Whitestone Taxpayers Civic Association ♦ Harding Heights Civic Association ♦ Hillcrest Estates Civic Association ♦ Hilltop Village Co-Op #1 ♦ Hilltop Village Co-Op #2 ♦ Hilltop Village Co-Op #3 ♦ Hilltop Village Co-Op #4 ♦ Hollis 11423 Block Association ♦ Hollis Hills Civic Association ♦ Holliswood Civic Association ♦ Hollis Park Gardens Civic Association ♦ Holly Civic Association ♦ Hyde Park Gardens Cooperative ♦ Jackson Heights Beautification Group ♦ Jamaica Estates Association ♦ Jamaica Hill Community Association ♦ Juniper Park Civic Association ♦ Kew Gardens Civic Association ♦ Kew Gardens Hills Homeowners Association ♦ Kew Gardens Improvement Association ♦ Kissena Park Civic Association ♦ Little Neck Bay Civic Association ♦ Little Neck Pines ♦ Long Island City Alliance ♦ Malba Civic Association ♦ Meadowlark Gardens Owners ♦ Middle Village Property Owners Association ♦ Mitchell Linden Civic Association ♦ Neponsit Property Owners Association ♦ Newtown Civic Association ♦ North Bellerose Civic Association ♦ North Flushing Civic Association ♦ North Hills Estates Civic Association ♦ Northwest Clearview Homeowners Association ♦ Norwood Civic Association ♦ Oakland Terrace/ Gardens Community Council ♦ Off Broadway Homeowners Association ♦ Our Neighborhood Improvement Association ♦ Our Neighbors Association of Ozone Park, Inc. ♦ Parkway Village Historical Society ♦ Queensboro Hill Neighborhood Association ♦ Queens Colony Civic Association ♦ Queens Community Civic Corp. ♦ Queens Village Civic Association ♦ Ramblersville-Hawtree Civic Association ♦ Richmond Hill Historical Society ♦ Ridgewood Property Owners and Civic Association ♦ Rockaway Park Homeowners/ Residents ♦ Rocky Hill Civic Association ♦ Rosedale Civic Association ♦ Royal Ranch Association. ♦ Southeast Queens Concerned Neighbors ♦ South Ozone Park West Civic Association ♦ Springfield/Rosedale Community Action Association ♦ Station Road Civic Assoc. of Auburndale ♦ Sunnyside Gardens/Harrison Place Homeowners ♦ Surrey Estates Civic Association ♦ Union Turnpike Merchants Association ♦ United Forties Civic Association ♦ United Neighbors Civic Association ♦ Waldheim Neighborhood Association ♦ Wayanda Civic Association ♦ West Cunningham Park Civic Association ♦ Westmoreland Association ♦ Woodside Community Council

Appendix A

Water and Sewer Rate Increases

Date/ FY	Meter change %	Sewer Charge %	Total Rate** Increase	Date/ FY	Meter change %	Sewer Charge %	Total Rate** Increase
1980		25%		1994	0%	159%	0%
1981		33%		1995	0%	159%	0%
1982		33%		1996	5%	159%	5%
1983		50%		1997	6.5%	159%	7%
1984		50%		1998	6.5%	159%	7%
1985		60%		1999	4%	159%	4%
1986		60%		2000	4%	159%	4%
1987*	9.9%	60%	9.9	2001	1%	159%	1%
1988	12%	70%	19%	2002	4%	159%	4%
1989	0%	75%	14%	2003	6.5%	159%	6.5%
1990, 1-6	7.8%	88%	24.3	2004	5.5%	159%	5.5%
1990, 7-12	9.00%	112%		2005	5.5%	159%	5.5%
1991	0%	112%	22.9	2006	3%	159%	3.0%
1992	6.4%	136%	18%	2007	9.4%	159%	9.4%
1993	0%	159%	10%	2008	11.5%	159%	11.5%

Proposed FY 2009 14.5% Proposed FY 2010 11.3%

*metering began that fiscal year, July 1, 1987