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Spotlight on the next generation

Political stargazing already under way; which newcomers are worth watching?

BY PHILIP LENTZ

A new group of politicians is about to come to power in City Hall and in the boroughs with their eyes on the next prize.

Insiders already are taking bets on which of the new stars could be future mayors, senators or maybe even governors.

"Regardless of ideology, this is a new generation of people who care about city government," says Mitchell Moss, director of the Taub Urban Research Center at New York University. "They are no political rookies."

The most closely watched new officeholder will be Bill Thompson, the incoming city comptroller. He will be the city's highest-ranking African-American official and thus an automatic spokesman for the city's minority populations.

Some already have mentioned Mr. Thompson as a future mayoral candidate. But his bruising primary campaign against Councilman Herb Berman unearthed questions about his personal finances that experts say he must put to rest to advance.

Beep-to-be

Another possible mayoral candidate of the future is Adolfo Carrión Jr., a councilman who, as the Democratic nominee, is virtually assured of being the next Bronx borough president. He is positioned to become the city's leading Hispanic politician, as Latinos become New York's largest ethnic group.

However, experts say that for Mr. Carrión to advance, he will have to establish his independence from the Bronx Democratic organization and its chairman, Roberto Ramirez, who has guided his political career so far.

One other borough president is on lists of political touts: Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields. First elected in 1997, Ms. Fields is now the city's senior borough president and one of the city's leading black politicians. Insiders believe she is positioned to succeed Rep. Charles Rangel, D-Manhattan, should he retire.

Many of the political up-and-comers will be on the new City Council, where term limits forced more than two-thirds of the incumbents to retire. Some of the council members marked for success are freshmen; others are returning members who now have a chance to move into the council leadership.

Several of the rising stars are running for council speaker, including two returning members, Angel Rodriguez of Brooklyn and Gifford Miller of Manhattan, both of whom are likely to be leaders regardless of the outcome of the speaker's battle.

Another potential council leader is not a speaker candidate this year, but could be in the future: Christine Quinn of Manhattan. As the representative of Greenwich Village, she came to City Hall as the chief advocate for the gay community. But observers say she has begun to reach out beyond that constituency and is poised to become a spokeswoman for the council's liberal bloc.

Among newly elected council members, many have long political résumés in campaigns and government that will position them for prominent roles in a council filled with newcomers.

In Brooklyn's freshman class, Bill de Blasio is a veteran political operative who ran Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton's 2000 campaign and has worked for such Democratic luminaries as Mr. Rangel, David Dinkins and Andrew Cuomo.

Also, David Yassky is a law school professor who worked for Sen. Charles Schumer when Mr. Schumer was on the House Judiciary Committee. And Diana Reyna, chief of staff for Assemblyman Vito Lopez, has been active in local environmental justice issues.

Queens contingent

In Queens, where all 14 council members will be freshmen, David Weprin, the son of the late Assembly Speaker Saul Weprin, is a former Cuomo administration official who will be a leading candidate for a council leadership post. So will former Assemblywoman Melinda Katz, who is a protégé of city Comptroller Alan Hevesi and lost a close primary for Congress in 1998.

Also, Eric Goia is a former White House aide and top official in Al Gore's 2000 New York campaign, who easily won a five-way race in western Queens. And Hiram Monserrate, a former police officer, could become a leading Hispanic council member.

Other new council members to watch: Michael McMahon, Staten Island; Gale Brewer, Manhattan; and Robert Jackson, Manhattan. ■

RISING STARS

- **Bill Thompson**
  Incoming comptroller
- **Adolfo Carrión Jr.**
  Incoming Bronx beep
- **C. Virginia Fields**
  Manhattan borough president
- **Angel Rodriguez**
  Councilman
- **Gifford Miller**
  Councilman
- **Christine Quinn**
  Councilwoman

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