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No Friends In High Places

By William Murphy
STAFF WRITER

Some of the left-wing City Council members elected this week are not going to have a friend — as they thought — in the west-wing offices of City Hall.

That is where Republican Michael Bloomberg and his aides will be sitting come January, not Democrat Mark Green, the longtime liberal they thought would get elected.

Among the newly elected council members are veteran Democratic pols such as longtime Assemb. Al Vann of Brooklyn and former state Attorney General Oliver Koppel of the Bronx, who until Tuesday could have counted on at least some old friends on the mayor's side.

They and others won't be able to back-door the new speaker by cultivating friends down the hall — at least not without crossing party lines and incurring the anger of the new council speaker.

POLS & POLITICS

Some of the incoming members are pushing for changes in the structure of the council that would make it more difficult for a speaker to punish them for crossing party lines — whether or not the rule changes are intended to do so.

Many of the 37 new members are urging greater independence for those who chair committees, including the hiring of committee staff by the chair, not the speaker, as is done now.

What the speaker can now bestow — a plum committee post and the salary stipend that goes with it, or favorable consideration for pet legislation — the speaker can now strip away.

Currently, the speaker has the de facto power to keep a bill from being put on a committee agenda, or keep it from coming up for a vote.

That allows the sponsors of a bill to boast of their support and blame the speaker's office — not the speaker, of course — for bottling it up in committee.

Losing that structure through reforms might provide a breath of fresh air in the legislative process, but it could also loosen the speaker's grip on power — including the power to force through unpopular but necessary legislation.

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Council May Surprise Some. Here's another thought, offered by someone smart enough not to have his name associated with it: The council will turn out to be more politically moderate than expected.

The thinking is that if Green had won, he would have moved away from his roots in the old political left and positioned himself in the center for a re-election bid in 2005.

The council, now under the influence of Speaker Peter Vallone of Astoria, a moderate, would move to the left and be the sort of progressive voice that organized labor loves to hear from its favored legislators.

Instead, Mayor Michael Bloomberg will be nudged from the right — to the extent he was ever really there — toward the middle, and the council will have to retain its moderate approach so as not to appear radical when compared to the mayor.

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A Novel Idea. Count on Gene Russianoff of NYPIRG to come up with thoughts that rattle mainstream pols. Why not have the candidates for City Council speaker hold public debates, he asks?

"This is the second-most-important political office in the city," Russianoff said. "While it is not voted on by the electorate, we should hear how these people will run the city and help us recover from the World Trade Center."

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A Nice Go-Between. No wonder politicians gave voterless Central Park to the 68th District in East Harlem in drawing up the lines for state Assembly seats.

The park serves as a buffer between the moderate to conservative 73rd Assembly District on the East Side and the ultra-liberal 67th and 69th districts on the West Side.

The 73rd gave Bloomberg his biggest Assembly district vote except for the southern tip of Staten Island, with 28,811 ballots cast for him. The 69th and the 67th went for Green, 22,170 and 21,043 votes, respectively.

That was topped in the Green column only by the 66th Assembly District centered in Greenwich Village, which delivered a citywide high of 22,718 for him. The 61st in Tottenville / Richmond Hill topped the Bloomberg district list with 34,656.

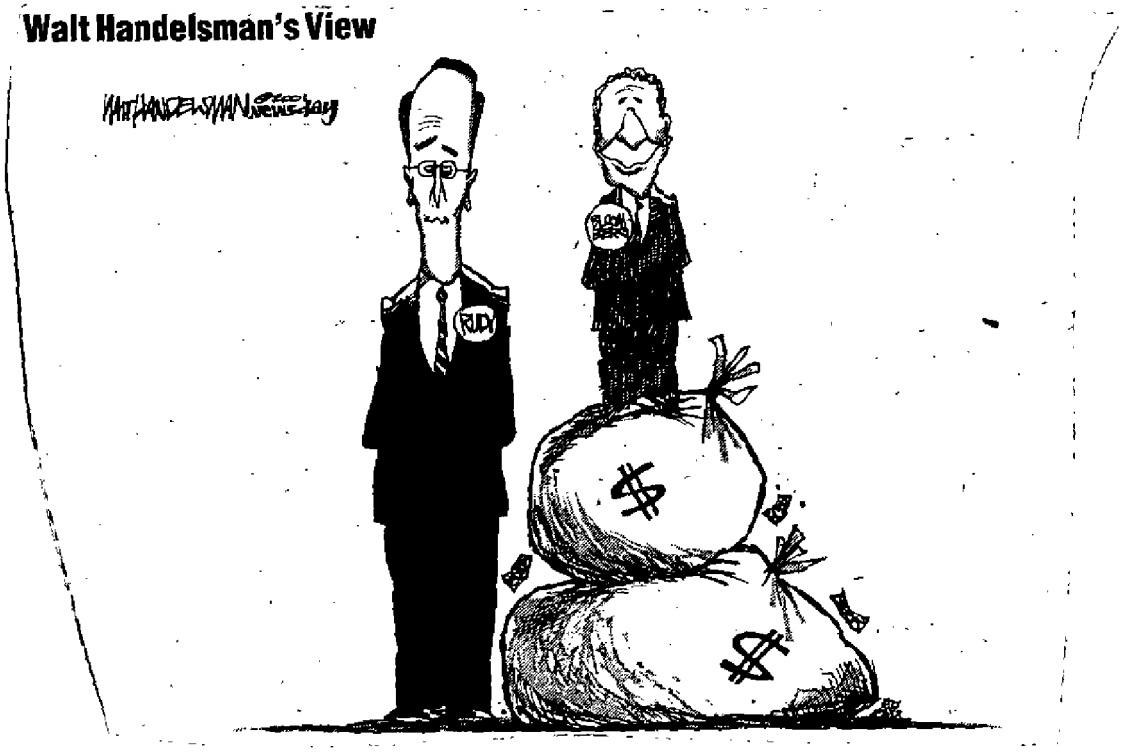
It was also at the bottom of Green's list, giving him his citywide low of 6,332.

Bloomberg's low spot was the 55th Assembly District in Brownsville / East Flatbush, where he got 2,674 votes.

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