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City Council On the Outs For Nine Days

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The city may be without a working City Council for nine days in January. No jokes, please.

The term-limits law that kicked in this year seemingly did not take into account the wholesale departure of council members — 37 of the 51 — and all its top leaders on Jan. 1.

The new council will not organize itself and create a leadership until its first authorized meeting on Jan. 9.

In the interim, only the mayor has the power to call a meeting of the council, because its members will not have elected a new speaker. "We will be in a nine-day dead zone," one council staffer said.

There is one escape clause in the City Charter. Section 43 says the mayor "shall also call a special meeting when a requisition for that purpose signed by five council members has been presented to him."

That section does not define "shall," nor does it impose a time limit for setting the date for the meeting.

The council has been accustomed to a minimum of turnover from election to election and has had only two speakers in the past three decades: Peter Vallone of Astoria (1986-2001) and Thomas Cuite of Brooklyn (1970-1985).

"There should always be continuity in government," said Councilman-elect Allan Jennings (D-Jamaica). "They have it in the executive branch, they have it in Albany and Washington.

"We never had term limits before, so we never had to face this," he said, adding that he thinks the new council should address the issue after it elects its leaders.

POLS & POLITICS

The City Charter provides for a "charter meeting" of the City Council on the first Wednesday after the first Monday in January. Next year, that will be Jan. 9.

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Gone, But Not Forgotten. Cynthia Jenkins of Springfield Gardens, who died Oct. 31, got 1,808 votes on the Independence Party line for the 27th District City Council seat in the Nov. 6 general election. Republican Ishmael Morgan got 1,600. Democrat Leroy Comrie won the seat.

Chalk that up to the sorry state of the GOP in local politics or to Jenkins' enduring popularity because of her stubborn battles with the Democratic Party over her long career.

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Never Too Early. Peter Vallone of Astoria prepared for the future last night with a fund-raiser for VPAC — the Vallone Political Action Committee for the Future of New York.

The soiree at the Four Seasons was to include entertainment by Mary Tyler Moore and Tony Bennett. He has told friends he intends to stay active in politics by seeking to overturn term limits and reform the Board of Education, among other things.

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Powerful Voice Silenced. Queens political columnist Arthur Nitzburg, who died last week, will be missed. It will be the borough's loss that his passing comes just as 14 new City Council members from Queens take office and pols get ready to carve up the political map to reflect population shifts measured by the 2000 Census.

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Meeks Shall Inherit? The big time is beckoning U.S. Rep. Gregory Meeks. The Jamaica Democrat is getting ready to move up to the No. 4 spot among Democrats in Congress.

Meeks has his sights set on becoming vice chairman of the National Democratic Caucus when that spot becomes open after next year's general election.

Although the party election will not occur until late next fall, Meeks has been putting together his campaign for more than a year.

Last year, he quietly hired Democratic fund-raiser Suri Kasirer, wife of Republican fund-raiser Bruce Teitelbaum.

"Suri brings good relations and contact with movers and shakers in New York City," Meeks said in an interview this week. "I meet people I might otherwise not have met."

He pays her $5,000 a month from his political campaign treasury, he said.

Meeks is a relative newcomer, having been elected in 1996 after Floyd Flake decided not to run for re-election. Meeks became whip for the Congressional Black Caucus in January.

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