



Battle in Albany: Rent Reform Showdown

By Steven Wishnia

On Valentine's Day, 200 New York City tenants attended the Black and Puerto Rican/Hispanic Legislative Caucus weekend in Albany to push the state Senate to pass the package of ten rent-reform bills approved by the Assembly on Feb. 2.

One of those bills would repeal vacancy decontrol for apartments that rent for \$2,000 a month or more. Another would strictly limit landlords' ability to claim occupied apartments for "personal use." A third would repeal the "Urstadt Law" of 1971, which bars New York City from enacting any rent regulations stronger than the state's.

The Senate is expected to take up those bills in early April. The Democrats winning a majority—by a slim 32 to 30 margin—in theory removed a roadblock to progressive change. But passage of the bills is far from assured.

"When you got 32 Democrats and you need 32 votes, one member can hold you up," says Michael McKee of the Tenants Political Action Committee.

Repealing vacancy decontrol is the tenant movement's top priority. That bill, S. 2237, has 23 cosponsors—22 Democrats and one Republican, Frank Padavan of Queens.

"This is about getting tens of thousands of apartments back into the hands of people who want to live in safe, decent and affordable housing," said the bill's chief sponsor, Sen. Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D-Westchester).

"We have to get to the root cause of why landlords want to get rid of us—vacancy decontrol," said Cathy Stephens, a Harlem tenant and member of Community Voices Heard. "With the same purpose that we got Obama elected, we need to put our efforts towards ending this law."

Both sides expect a tough fight. "Real-estate interests have poured a ton of money into Albany hoping to prevent exactly this," says Dan Levitan of the Working Families Party. "It's a battle for the soul of the Democrats. Whose interests do they represent, landlords or tenants?"

According to the *New York Times*, a group of "major real-estate developers, lobbyists and limited liability corporations," anticipating a Democratic shift in the state Senate, gave more than \$750,000 for the 2008 election. That is 15 times more than they gave to the Senate Democrats' central campaign accounts for 2006. Those accounts are now controlled by Deputy Majority Leader Jeff Klein (Bronx-Westchester) and Majority Leader Malcolm Smith (Queens).

Last year, a slew of tenant associations and groups raised money and, more important, supplied people power to staff campaigns for Democratic state Senate candidates. Tenant groups, labor unions, gay-rights organizations and other progressives knocked on voters' doors and called them from phone banks to help Democrats gain key seats in Long Island and Queens.

Ironically, because the Democratic majority is so slim, the state senators who have most benefited

from that activism are four considered among the party's most conservative: Jeff Klein, Carl Kruger (Brooklyn), Craig Johnson (Nassau) and Pedro Espada Jr. (Bronx). Espada and Kruger were among the "Gang of Three" that threatened to vote with the Republicans until they were given rewards—in Espada's case, being named chair of the Senate Housing Committee over the strongly pro-tenant Liz Krueger of Manhattan. Tenant advocates believe that real-

estate interests gave the gang the go-ahead and wanted to send a message about rent reform.

All four of these senators have rent-regulated voters in their districts, with 76,500 in Espada's and 15,600 in Klein's. Although there are rent-regulated tenants in Johnson's Nassau County district, vacancy decontrol is generally seen as affecting mainly New York City, especially Manhattan.

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What About Home Rule?

Met Council and other tenant groups have long called home rule over rent laws essential for preserving New York City's affordable housing. The 1971 Urstadt law took it away: It barred cities of more than one million people from enacting rent regulations stronger than the state's.

However, there are signs that some pro-tenant groups have conceded that repealing Urstadt is not possible this year. The Housing Here and Now coalition supports repealing Urstadt, says executive director Michelle O'Brien, but ending vacancy decontrol is its top priority.

"Some Democrats have made it pretty clear they're against repeal of Urstadt," says Dan Levitan of the Working Families Party. One of them is state Senate housing committee chair Pedro Espada Jr.

Fraud Common in Renovation Increases, Study Says

By Steven Wishnia

Fraudulent rent increases for apartment renovations are a major reason affordable housing is disappearing from New York, claims a study released in January by the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development.

The report, "The \$20,000 Stove: How Fraudulent Rent Increases Undermine New York's Affordable Housing," examines the "1/40th rule," also called the Individual Apartment Improvement Increase. That rule lets landlords raise the rent in rent-stabilized apartments by 1/40th of the cost of major improvements. For example, if owners spend \$20,000 to

put in new kitchen appliances, new bathroom fixtures, and new floors, they can then raise the rent by \$500 a month. They cannot claim such increases for ordinary maintenance such as painting.

ANHD estimates that such increases raised the rent to above \$1,000 on 164,000 apartments between 2002 and 2005—far more than the number of apartments that rose past that mark because of normal annual increases or the 20 percent vacancy surcharge. From 2002 to 2006, another 58,000 apartments went over \$2,000 and were de-regulated.

"It's a core, core issue," says ANHD deputy director Benjamin Dulchin. "We're losing an incredible amount of affordable housing when apartments go from \$600 to \$1,800 a month."

The system is lucrative for landlords even legitimately, he says, because it lets them make back their investment within four years and then continue collecting a large and permanent rent increase. But there are almost no checks on fraud. "There is no oversight or certification of any kind," the study says. "Landlords are allowed to universally impose 1/40th rent increases

without prior approval, even documentation."

No one knows how much fraud there is, because the state Division of Housing and Community Renewal

"is doing absolutely no oversight," Dulchin explains. "The chance of get-

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Met Council Gains Two New Staffers

Rachel Haut, Office Manager/Media Coordinator



Getting her start in activism as a tenant organizer with ACORN, Rachel Haut has been active in the labor, housing, and environmental-justice movements for the last six years. A former violin builder, Rachel is a Midwest Academy-trained organizer and popular education trainer. She has coordinated media, messaging and outreach for housing, education, and environmental campaigns. Most

recently, she worked with the Energy Action Coalition and its members to push a “Green New Deal” initiative at the final presidential debate of 2008.

Rachel earned her bachelor’s degree in urban studies and political science from Queens College. She also holds a certificate in labor studies from the City University of New York.

Mario Mazzone, Organizer



Mario Mazzone has been active in various community organizations in New York City over the past decade, working on neighborhood campaigns to resist displacement and gentrification, protect endangered community gardens, and preserve affordable housing. He is a graduate of New York University and Teachers College, and has worked previously as a researcher and a public high-school teacher. Mario has a passion for housing issues and a strong love for New York’s diverse, vibrant neighborhoods.

Renovation Fraud

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ting caught if you game the system is absolutely infinitesimal.”

The only way an illegal overcharge can be detected is if the tenant complains to the DHCR. Most tenants, however, have no idea of what the previous rent on their apartment was, what renovations were done, and how much that work cost. Tenants in deregulated apartments also have to fear being evicted if they file a complaint, as their lease will likely run out before the complaint is resolved.

The ANHD report cites eight cases that have come before either the DHCR or Housing Court. In one case, a Bronx landlord was found to have fraudulently raised rent by \$400 a month by claiming he had spent \$15,000 installing new floors, sinks, and more. There was no evidence the work had actually been done, and the landlord had no receipts for expenses. In another, a Forest Hills tenant paying \$2,000 filed a complaint with DHCR after he found that the previous tenant had been paying \$800. After pricing the appliances and fixtures in the kitchen and bathroom, he concluded there was no way the landlord could have legitimately spent \$40,000 on materials and labor.

Coupled with high-rent vacancy decontrol, 1/40th increases are crucial to the “predatory equity” business model, in which the in-

vestors’ profits depend on driving out as many rent-regulated tenants as possible so they can jack up rents. But the problem is much broader, says Dulchin: Renovation increases are “the major driving element” in the disappearance of affordable apartments.

“We respect the logic of encouraging landlords to make improvements,” he says, but the law must “make it reasonable and discourage fraud.” The law covering building-wide major capital improvements, he notes, requires landlords to document their expenses and inform tenants and the DHCR about them. It also limits rent increases to 1/84th of the cost of renovation, instead of 1/40th.

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver has introduced a bill, A5316, that would give the DHCR authority to approve or disapprove rent increases for apartment improvement and limit them to 1/84 of the cost. It would also bar collecting such increases unless the landlord had given the tenant an explanation of the increase, had no major outstanding violations, and had filed documentation with DHCR.

The bill was referred to the Assembly Housing Committee on Feb. 12. It does not yet have a sponsor in the state Senate.



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- ✓ How to Join Met Council
- ✓ Links to other resources
- ✓ Back issues of *Tenant/Inquilino*

and much more!

Get active in the tenant movement! Write to us at active@metcouncil.net

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EL INQUILINO HISPANO

Bloomberg a los ricos: ¡los necesitamos! Bloomberg a los de la clase media: ¡lárguense!

Por Craig Gurian

Traducido por Lightning Translations

En un debate poco recordado del primer año de su primer período, el alcalde Bloomberg de algún modo decidió que sería una buena idea acoplar su cabildeo de la Legislatura estatal por la restauración del impuesto a las personas que viajan a Nueva York para trabajar (un objetivo noble pero difícil de lograr) con un esfuerzo totalmente regresivo para bajar la tasa de impuestos para los neoyorquinos más ricos. Los dos proyectos fracasaron, y sus admiradores más liberales pronto borraron de su memoria la preferencia del alcalde para una estructura de impuestos menos progresiva.

Ya está de regreso ese Bloomberg de antes—el mismo que apoyó a George Pataki en 2002 (el gobernador cuyos cortes de impuestos para los ricos han contribuido a la actual aproximación a la insolvencia del Estado de Nueva York) y que apoyó a George Bush no solamente en 2000 sino también en 2004 (el presidente cuyos cortes de impuestos federales para los

ricos generaron un arranque de actividad económica tan fuerte que ya estamos en la peor depresión desde 1929).

Como respuesta a los informes que los legisladores están considerando aumentar las tasas de impuestos para las personas que ganan \$250,000 o más (con aumentos más grandes para los que sacan \$1 millón o más), el alcalde denunció que “es fácil ponerse furioso con los ricos” y “advirtió que los aumentos de impuestos sobre la renta para los neoyorquinos más ricos los ahuyentarían de la ciudad”.

La idea de que modestos aumentos de impuestos ahuyentarán a los ricos es equivocada de tantas maneras que llevar la cuenta resulta difícil. La gente no toma la decisión de abandonar su hogar a la ligera. La gente rica, como los demás, está más dispuesta a huir de una ciudad que, no habiendo aumentado los impuestos, termina con aun más reducciones de servicios. Además, el entorno económico es tal que la gente

apenas se entusiasma para localizarse dentro de él. Las posibles áreas para reubicación (¿Greenwich? ¿Nassau? ¿El norte de Nueva Jersey?) no son exactamente irresistiblemente tentadoras. De la misma manera, el momento es lejos de ser idóneo para vender un apartamento cooperativo o residencia particular de lujo si uno no tiene que hacerlo.

Lo más inquietante es el contraste entre la preocupación del alcalde por los más ricos entre nosotros y su indiferencia cuando se trata de las familias de la clase media forzadas a salir de Nueva York a causa de los alquileres inasquibiles. La envergadura de la inasquibilidad se ha vuelto enorme desde que resquicios legales en la regulación de rentas se aprobaron por primera vez en 1997. Para familias de recursos ordinarios, las frutas caídas del cielo que los caseros han cosechado (beneficios de viviendas disponibles, beneficios de tenencia de largo plazo, aumentos de alquiler permanentes aun cuando los inquilinos hayan

pagado todos los costos de las mejoras, etc.) funcionan como aumentos de impuestos mucho más grandes en términos de porcentajes que cualquier aumento propuesto por la Legislatura. A diferencia de los millonarios míticos huyendo de la ciudad, durante años ha existido un éxodo de familias de la clase media y trabajadora, quienes se han visto forzadas a dejar la ciudad.

A pesar de esto, el alcalde Bloomberg nunca ha movido siquiera un dedo para revigorizar la regulación de renta. En cambio, ha apoyado silenciosamente (hasta ahora sin repercusiones políticas) el régimen de desregulación iniciado por George Pataki. Como Pataki y otros partidarios de la desregulación, el alcalde espera que la desregulación pueda pasar al punto sin retorno antes de que los millones de neoyorquinos que se han beneficiado de la regulación de rentas vean las señales de peligro y se defiendan.

pasa a la página 4

Los Ajustes de la “Junta de Regulación de Renta” de la Ciudad de Nueva York (Orden No. 40)

Para los contratos de apartamentos de Renta Estabilizada que comienzan el 1ro. de octubre de 2007 hasta el 30 de septiembre de 2008.

Renovación de Contrato

Los caseros tienen que ofrecer a los inquilinos de renta estabilizada una renovación de contrato dentro de 90 a 120 días antes de que venza su contrato actual. La renovación de contrato tiene que mantener los mismos términos y condiciones que el contrato que vencerá, excepto cuando refleje un cambio en la ley. Una vez que se haya recibido el ofrecimiento de renovación, los inquilinos tienen 60 días para aceptarlo y escoger si van a renovar el contrato por uno o dos años. El propietario tiene que devolver la copia firmada y fechada al inquilino dentro de 30 días. La nueva renta no entrará en vigencia hasta que empiece el nuevo contrato, o cuando el propietario devuelva la copia firmada (lo que suceda después). Ofrecimientos retrasados: si el casero ofrece la renovación tarde (menos de 90 días antes de que venza el contrato actual), el contrato puede empezar, a la opción del inquilino, o en la fecha que hubiera empezado si se hubiera hecho un ofrecimiento a tiempo, o en el primer pago de renta fechada 90 días después de la fecha del ofrecimiento del contrato. Las pautas de renta usadas para la renovación no pueden ser mayores que los incrementos de la RGB vigentes en la fecha en que el contrato debía empezar (si se lo hubiera ofrecido a tiempo). El inquilino no tiene que pagar el nuevo aumento de renta hasta 90 días después de que se haya hecho el ofrecimiento.

Asignación de Subarriendo

Los caseros podrán cobrar un aumento de 10 por ciento durante el término de subarriendo que comience durante este

período de las pautas.

Programa de Exención de Incrementos de Renta para las Personas de Mayor Edad Las personas de mayor edad con renta estabilizada (y los que viven en apartamentos de renta controlada, Mitchell-Lama y cooperativas de dividendos limitados), con 62 años o más, y cuyos ingresos familiares disponibles al año sean de \$27,000 o menos (para 2006) y que paguen (o enfrenen un aumento de renta que les haría pagar) un tercio o más de tal ingreso en renta pueden ser elegibles para una congelación de renta. Solicite a: NYC Dept of the Aging, SCRIE Unit, 2 Lafayette St., NY, NY 10007 o llame al 311 o visite su sitio Web, nyc.gov/

html/dfta/html/scrie_sp/scrie_sp.shtml.

Programa de Exención de Incrementos de Renta para Minusválidos

Inquilinos con renta regulada que reciben ayuda económica elegible relacionada con discapacidad, que tengan ingresos de \$17,580 o menos para individuales y \$25,212 o menos para una pareja y enfrenen rentas iguales o más de un tercio de sus ingresos pueden ser elegibles para un congelamiento de renta. Solicite a: NYC Dept. of Finance, DRIE Exemptions, 59 Maiden Lane - 20th floor, New York, NY 10038. Llame al 311 para una solicitud o vaya al sitio Web en www.nyc.gov/html/dof/html/property/

property_tax_reduc_drie.shtml

Las unidades desvanes

Los aumentos legalizados para unidades de desván son un 2.5 por ciento por un contrato de un año y 5.25 por ciento por dos años. No se permiten incrementos para las unidades de desván vacías.

Hoteles y SROs

4.5% para todas categorías, sin embargo, 0% cuando menos de un 85% de las unidades sean ocupadas por inquilinos permanentes de renta regulada.

Exceso de cobro

Los inquilinos deben estar al tanto de que muchos caseros se aprovecharán de las complejidades de estas pautas y concesiones adicionales, además del poco conocimiento de los inquilinos del historial de renta de sus apartamentos, para cobrar una renta ilegal. Los inquilinos pueden impugnar los aumentos de renta sin autorización en las cortes

o al presentar una impugnación con la agencia estatal de vivienda, la División de Vivienda y Renovación Comunitaria (Division of Housing and Community Renewal, DHCR). El primer paso en el proceso es ponerse en contacto con la DHCR para ver el registro oficial del historial de renta. Vaya a www.dhcr.state.ny.us o llame al 718-739-6400 y pida un historial de renta detallado. Luego, hable con un abogado o defensor experto antes de seguir.

Para las pautas previas, llame a la RGB al 212-385-2934 o vaya al www.housingnyc.com

Tipo de Contrato		Renta Legal Actual	Contrato de 1 Año	Contrato de 2 Años
Renovación del Contrato	Todos	casero abastece la calefacción	4.5%	8.5%
		inquilino paga la calefacción	4%	8%
	Salvo donde el último contrato del apartamento vacío se firmó 6 o más años atrás y la renta es menos de \$1,000	casero abastece la calefacción	45	85
		inquilino paga la calefacción	40	80
Contratos para Apartamentos Vacíos	Más de \$500	Incrementos por desocupación cobrados en los últimos 8 años	16%	20%
		Incrementos por desocupación no cobrados en los últimos 8 años	0.6% por el número de años desde el último incremento por estar vacío, más un 17.25%	0.6% por el número de años desde el último incremento por estar
	Menos de \$300	Incrementos por desocupación cobrados en los últimos 8 años	16% + \$100	20% + \$100
		Incrementos por desocupación no cobrados en los últimos 8 años	0.6% por el número de años desde el último incremento por estar vacío, +16% + \$100	0.6% por el número de años desde el último incremento
	Renta de \$300 a \$500	Incrementos por desocupación cobrados en los últimos 8 años	16% o \$100, lo que sea mayor	20% o \$100, lo que sea mayor
		Incrementos por desocupación no cobrados en los últimos 8 años	0.6% por el número de años desde el último incremento por estar vacío, mas 16%, o \$100, lo que sea mayor	0.6% por el número de años desde el último incremento por estar vacío, mas 20%,

la clase media

viene de la página 3

La filosofía de hacer el mundo seguro para los especuladores y los banqueros especialistas en inversiones ha gozado de un largo ensayo. Los resultados—aumentos marcados en la desigualdad de ingresos, una ciudad que depende demasiado de Wall Street y totalmente desprevenida frente a una caída económica—debe al menos indicarnos que hay cosas más importantes de que preocuparnos que el impacto de un aumento en la tasa de impuestos marginal del pequeño porcentaje de neoyorquinos con las más altas ganancias.



tion Center, www.antibiaslaw.com) y gerente del programa de Equidad de Vivienda para Todos (Fair Housing for All, www.fairhousingforall.org). Reimpresa con permiso del Centro Anti-Discriminación.

Craig Gurian es el director ejecutivo del Centro Anti-Discriminación (Anti-Discrimina-



Met Council adquiere dos nuevos empleados

Rachel Haut

Administradora de la Oficina/Coordinadora Mediática

Empezando su carrera activista como organizadora de inquilinos con ACORN, Rachel Haut ha estado activa en los movimientos para justicia laboral, de vivienda y del medio ambiente durante los últimos seis años. Una antigua constructora de violines, Rachel es una organizadora capacitada en la Midwest Academy y entrenadora en educación popular. Ella ha coordinado actividades mediáticas, de divulgación de mensajes y de extensión para campañas de vivienda, educación y el medio ambiente. Últimamente, trabajó con la Coalición de Acción Energética (Energy Action Coalition) y sus miembros para impulsar una iniciativa para un “Nuevo Trato Verde” (“Green New Deal”) en el último debate presidencial de 2008.

Rachel obtuvo su licenciatura en estudios urbanos y ciencia política en Queens College. Ella también tiene un certificado en estudios laborales de la City University of New York.

Mario Mazzone
Organizador

Mario Mazzone ha estado activo en varias organizaciones comunitarias en la Ciudad de Nueva York durante la última década, trabajando en campañas de vecindario para resistir el desplazamiento y la burguesificación, proteger jardines comunitarios en peligro y conservar vivienda asequible. Es licenciado de New York University y Teachers College; ha trabajado anteriormente como investigador y profesor en una escuela pública de segunda enseñanza. Mario tiene una gran pasión por las cuestiones de vivienda y un fuerte cariño por los vecindarios mixtos y efervescentes de Nueva York.

AYUDE A PONER FIN AL DESCONTROL DE VIVIENDAS DISPONIBLES

Estamos exigiendo que el Senado estatal ponga su parte para salvar la vivienda de alquiler regulado. El proyecto de ley, S2237-A, ha salido del comité; ahora necesitamos nueve votos adicionales para ganar.

Los inquilinos en toda la ciudad están tomando medidas durante marzo y abril para presionar a todos y cada uno de los senadores a suscribirse al proyecto de ley para revocar el descontrol de viviendas disponibles. Por favor, tome nota en su agenda de las fechas en la Ciudad de Nueva York y en Albany, a continuación:

Lunes 16 de marzo, 10 a.m.
Cámara o Sala de Comité Municipal, Alcaldía, Manhattan
Audiencias públicas del Comité de Vivienda y Edificios y del Comité de Legislación Estatal y Federal del Concejo Municipal. Sus programas incluirán la autonomía y la regulación de renta. Estamos presionando para que incluyan la revocación del descontrol de viviendas disponibles.

Viernes 20 de marzo, 1:00 p.m.
Oficina del Distrito del Senador Martin Golden
7408 Quinta Avenida, Brooklyn
Haremos una manifestación fuera de la oficina del Senador Golden instándoles a ayudar a los inquilinos en Bay Ridge y apoyar la revocación del descontrol de viviendas disponibles! Tome el tren R a la calle 77, proceda al norte en la Cuarta Avenida hasta la calle 74 y vire a la derecha. La oficina está en la esquina de la calle 74 y la Quinta Avenida.

Martes 24 de marzo, 1:00-4:00 p.m.
Cámara del Concejo Municipal, Alcaldía
El Concejo entero vota sobre la regulación de renta y el llamado a Albany para autonomía y la revocación del descontrol de viviendas disponibles.

Lunes 6 de abril
Día de cabildeo en Albany

Miércoles 15 de abril
Manifestación frente al Edificio de Oficinas Estatales de Harlem (Harlem State Office Building)

Para más información, llame a Jon Furlong en Vivienda Aquí y Ahora (Housing Here and Now), al (718) 246-7900 ext. 273.

Ayude a realizar una campaña en el Bronx
Vaya de puerta en puerta para hablar sobre el descontrol de viviendas disponibles en el Bronx. Los senadores Pedro Espada Jr. y Jeffrey Klein tienen que oír las voces de miles de inquilinos en sus distritos. Para unirse como voluntario, póngase en contacto con Orlando Torres (NWBCCC) al (718) 584-0515 ext. 412 o (917) 213-7529 (teléfono celular), Orlando@northwest-bronx.org; o con Tamara Cyzck (New Settlement/CASA) al (718) 716-8000 ext. 125, tamara.c@newsettlement.org.

Haga llamadas telefónicas en Manhattan
Inquilinos y Vecinos (Tenants & Neighbors) y Comité de Acción Política de Inquilinos (Tenants PAC) van a hacer llamadas telefónicas de sus oficinas en Manhattan a distritos claves del Senado. Los lunes, martes, miércoles y jueves de 5:30 a 8:30 p.m. durante las próximas semanas.

Para unirse como voluntario, póngase en contacto con Tenants PAC, 11 Park Place, Suite 814 (entre Broadway y la Calle Church, una cuadra al oeste del Parque de la Alcaldía (City Hall Park) o llame a Michael McKee al (212) 577-7001. Tenants & Neighbors, 236 oeste de la Calle 27, 4o piso. Llame a Pat Coleman al (212) 608-4320 ext. 306 para informarse sobre fechas y horarios.

No se quede helado: ¡ORGANIZESE!



La ley requiere que su casero proporcione calefacción y agua caliente a las temperaturas siguientes, desde el 1ro de octubre hasta el 31 de mayo:

Desde las 6 a.m. hasta las 10 p.m.: Si la temperatura afuera es de menos de 55 grados, la temperatura adentro debe ser al menos de 68 grados en todo el apartamento.

Desde las 10 p.m. hasta las 6 a.m.: Si la temperatura afuera es de menos de 40 grados, la temperatura adentro debe ser al menos de 55 grados en todo el apartamento.

Se tiene que proporcionar agua caliente a un mínimo de 120 grados en el grifo las 24 horas del día, todo el año.

Si su casero no mantiene estas temperaturas mínimas, usted debe:

- * Comenzar una “Acción HP” (HP Action) en la Corte de Vivienda. Pida una inspección por orden de la corte y una Orden de Corrección (Order to Correct)
- * Llamar al Buro Central de Quejas (Central Control Bureau) de la ciudad de Nueva York al 311 inmediatamente, para documentar la violación del casero. Llame repetidamente. Se supone que un inspector vendrá eventualmente, aunque a veces no lo haga.
- * Exhortar a los otros inquilinos en el edificio a llamar al Central Complaint. Todos deben llamar repetidamente, al menos una vez al día, todos los días en que tengan problemas con la calefacción.
- * Comprar un buen termómetro para afuera y adentro, para documentar las fechas exactas, las horas, y las temperaturas, tanto afuera como adentro, mientras tenga problemas con la calefacción. Esta documentación es su evidencia
- * Llamar a la División de Vivienda y Renovación Comunal del Estado de Nueva York (DHCR, por sus siglas en inglés) al (718) 739-6400, y pedir que le envíen el formulario de Queja de Calefacción y Agua Caliente. Llene el formulario y consiga la participación de todos los

inquilinos en su edificio que pueden firmarlo. Reclame una orden para restaurar la calefacción y el agua caliente, y que se reduzcan y congelen (idisculpe lo de “congelen”) todas las rentas.

- * Necesitarán una fuerte asociación de inquilinos para obligar al casero a proporcionar calefacción y agua caliente. Escriban y llamen al casero para demandar reparaciones y aceite. Prepárense para una huelga de renta (sobre todo con asesoría legal)—de relámpago si es necesario.

Las leyes sobre la calefacción establecen también:

- * Que el Departamento de Reparaciones de Emergencia de la ciudad le proporcione la calefacción si el casero no lo hace. (No se siente en un bloque de hielo—otra vez, idisculpe!—mientras espere que lo haga.)
- * Una multa de \$250 to \$500 al casero por cada día que se produzca la violación. (Pero la verdad es que la Corte de Vivienda raras veces impone las multas, y menos aun las cobra).
- * Una multa de \$1,000 al casero si algún aparato de control automático se instala en la caldera para mantener la temperatura por debajo del mínimo legal.
- * Si el tanque de combustible de la caldera está vacío, los inquilinos tienen el derecho de comprar su propio combustible después de haber pasado 24 horas sin calefacción y también sin obtener ninguna respuesta del casero. Esto no se aplica si la caldera está rota y necesita tanto reparación como combustible.

¡Cuidado! ¡proteja su dinero! Si los inquilinos deciden comprar el combustible, hay que seguir los procedimientos legales cuidadosamente. Consiga la ayuda y el consejo de un organizador de inquilinos. La existencia de leyes de calefacción y agua caliente vigentes no garantiza que el gobierno las implemente. No se quede helado por esperar que la ciudad o el estado actúe. ¡Organízes!

Showdown

continued from page 1

The WFP's Dan Levitan says the party has no current plans to challenge Democrats who oppose repeal, but notes that Espada's district "is full of tenants" and that might persuade him to do the right thing. The WFP also supplied 50 organizers to propel Johnson to victory in a special election in 2007.

When the Republicans controlled the Senate, the landlord lobby, led by the Rent Stabilization Association and the Real Estate Board of New York, contributed millions of dollars to the GOP. According to multiple sources, Malcolm Smith approached the RSA before the election about donating more to the Democratic senatorial cause but was rebuffed. However, the RSA reportedly offered to settle \$600,000 of state Senate committee debts from campaigns after the Democrats took control. Senate Democrats and Smith reportedly declined the offer, but Smith has not taken a position on repeal of vacancy decontrol.

Jack Freund of the RSA says he will not discuss the group's campaign contributions. He argues that with the city financially strapped and dependent on real-estate taxes, now is "absolutely the wrong time" to impose regulations that would reduce landlords' revenues. Vacancy decontrol and the other changes in the rent laws enacted in the 1990s, he says, "are the only things that have breathed life into the real-estate market" in the city. The prospect of deregulation has encouraged more investment in rental housing, he adds.

Tenant groups call some of those investors "predatory equity." These are highly leveraged private equity firms that bought huge

swaths of rent-regulated housing. Their business plan depends on gaining enough vacancies to jack the rents up to market rates. One such firm is Vantage Properties, which bought 48 Queens buildings for \$300 million last year, according to the Real Deal.

Vantage tenant Nancy Encarnación says the firm is deliberately allowing living conditions to deteriorate to drive her and her neighbors out. "We don't demand luxury, just a decent place to live," she adds.

Legal Services New York claims that Vantage Properties' model runs afoul of the law, because the only way to achieve such a large tenant turnover is by dubious means. It filed a lawsuit last year to curtail the firm's practices.

Tenant groups say the long-term effect of vacancy decontrol will be to eliminate rent regulations in all but the city's poorest neighborhoods. The RSA's Jack Freund agrees—but he says that's a good thing. Although almost all of the unregulated apartments built in the city have been luxury housing, he contends that the increase in the housing supply "ripples down through the system" and that if the market were freed up, owners would be in a position to provide housing to all levels of the market.

The Stewart-Cousins bill would also reregulate apartments that were deregulated after 1997 if their rent is below \$5,000 (or \$3,500 in Nassau, Westchester, and Rockland counties). According to Tenants and Neighbors, more than 100,000 apartments in the city have been deregulated by vacancy decontrol or condo/coop conversions. About 1 million

apartments remain regulated, about half of the city's rental housing stock.

"We need nine more senators to pass this bill," Stewart-Cousins

said. The 10 Democrats who have not endorsed it include Smith, Klein, Espada, Kruger and Johnson.

CORRECTION AND UPDATE

In the February issue, the "Landlords Running Scared on 'Unique or Peculiar' Increases" story contained one error. It said the reason State Supreme Court Justice Alice Schlesinger refused to let former Mitchell-Lama landlords drop their challenge to the state DHCR's denial of their applications for "unique or peculiar" rent increases was because the best way to resolve the question would be to let the DHCR decide.

Actually, Justice Schlesinger ruled that the court should decide the issue—whether the DHCR's November 2007 regulations, which say that just leaving Mitchell-Lama is not by itself a "unique or peculiar circumstance," are valid. If that question is not settled, she said, any decision the agency makes would just end up back in court.

The landlords have since complied with the judge's deadline and filed a motion for summary judgment. A hearing is set for April 13. The motion repeats the grounds of their complaint, and adds that Justice Schlesinger refused to recuse herself from the case because her law secretary had once worked for lawyers for one of the tenant associations involved. (The law secretary had written a single letter concerning whether the building should leave Mitchell-Lama.) In refusing to recuse herself, Justice Schlesinger pointed out that she, and not her law secretary, made the decisions in her courtroom.

State Senators: Four Possible Turncoats

Jeff Klein: Klein is the number-two Democrat in the state Senate. He is known to prefer raising the vacancy-decontrol threshold to \$3,000, instead of the current \$2,000. He is rumored to be actively campaigning against the repeal of vacancy decontrol and triangulating on other progressive initiatives such as raising taxes on the rich—the top New York State income-tax bracket now starts at \$40,000 a year.

Pedro Espada Jr.: Espada is the chair of the housing committee and has not taken a position on vacancy decontrol, although he is against restoring home rule to New York City. He told *Daily News* columnist Juan Gonzalez that he has an alternative plan to vacancy decontrol, but would not reveal it. Elected to the Senate last November, Espada previously held a seat in another Bronx district, but lost it in 2002 after he switched to the Republican Party. He is not respected by Senate Democrats, who resent his use of their small majority to extort personal power. Espada might also be indicted for campaign-finance violations later this year. As of press time, he did not have a district office in the Bronx.

Craig Johnson: Johnson won his Nassau County seat in a 2007 special election with strong support from the Working Families Party and tenant groups. He takes his cues from Klein and is also triangulating on tax reform and vacancy-decontrol repeal.

Carl Kruger: Kruger has a campaign war chest of \$1.6 million, "much of it from city real-estate moguls who appreciate his support," wrote Tom Robbins of the *Village Voice* in April 2008. Kruger ran unopposed last year and brokered a deal with Bruno to redraw his district in 2002 in exchange for supporting conservative issues. Fellow senate Democrats believed that he "spied" on them for senate Republicans. According to the *Daily News*, Kruger also wants to take some surplus campaign cash to form a "Blue Dog" coalition of center-right Democrats in the senate.

Don't Freeze— Organize!



The law requires your landlord provide heat and hot water at the following levels from October 1 through May 31:

From 6 am to 10 pm: If the outside temperature falls below 55 degrees, the inside temperature must be at least 68 degrees everywhere in your apartment.

From 10 pm to 6 am: If the outside temperature falls below 40 degrees, the inside temperature must be at least 55 degrees everywhere in your apartment.

Hot water at a minimum 120 degrees at the tap must be provided 24 hours a day, year round.

If your landlord does not maintain those minimum temperatures, you should:

- * Start an "HP action" in Housing Court. Ask for a court-ordered inspection and an Order to Correct.
- * Call the New York City Central Complaints Bureau at 311 immediately to record the landlord's violation. Call repeatedly. An inspector should eventually come, although sometimes they don't.
- * Get other tenants in your building to call Central Complaint. Everybody should call repeatedly, at least once every day the condition is not corrected.
- * Buy a good indoor/outdoor thermometer and keep a chart of the exact dates, times, and temperature readings, inside and out, so long as the condition is not corrected. The chart is your evidence.
- * Call the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal at (718) 739-6400 and ask them to send you their Heat and Hot Water complaint form.

Get as many other apartments as possible in your building to sign on, demanding an order restoring heat and hot water, and a reduction and freeze (pardon the expression!) in all the rents.

You'll need a strong tenant association to force the landlord to provide heat and hot water. Write and call the landlord and demand repairs or fuel.

Prepare to go on rent strike—but get legal advice first.

The heat laws also provide for:

- * The city's Emergency Repair Department to supply your heat if the landlord does not. (Try waiting for this one!)
- * A \$250 to \$500 a day fine to the landlord for every day of violation. (But the Housing Court rarely imposes these fines, let alone collects them.)
- * A \$1,000 fine to the landlord if an automatic control device is put on the boiler to keep the temperature below the lawful minimum.

If your boiler's fuel tank is empty, tenants have the right to buy their own fuel after 24 hours of no heat and no response from the landlord. But this provision does not apply if the boiler is broken and needs both repairs and fuel.

Caution! Protect your money! If you decide to buy fuel, you must follow special lawful procedures very carefully. You should get help and advice from a tenant organizer.

Because the heat and hot water laws are in the law books does not mean they are enforced by government. Don't freeze to death waiting for the city or state to act. Organize!

Bloomberg to Wealthy: We Need You! Bloomberg to Middle Class: You Can Go!

By Craig Gurian

In a little-remembered debacle from the first year of his first term, Mayor Bloomberg somehow decided it would be a good idea to pair his lobbying of the state Legislature for the restoration of the commuter tax (a worthy but difficult objective) with a completely regressive push to lower tax rates on the wealthiest New Yorkers. He lost on both counts, and his more liberal admirers were quick to push out of their memory the mayor's preference for a less progressive tax structure.

Now that old Bloomberg is back—that same one who supported George Pataki in 2002 (the governor whose state tax cuts for the wealthy have contributed to New York State's current near-insolvency), and who supported George Bush not only in 2000 but in 2004 (the President whose federal tax cuts for the wealthy generated such an explosion of economic activity that... we're in the worst depression since 1929).

In response to reports that state legislators are considering raising tax rates on those who earn \$250,000 or more (with greater increases for those raking in \$1 million or more), the mayor charged that it is "easy to rile against the rich," and "warned that the income-tax increases being considered for the wealthiest New Yorkers would drive them from the city."

The idea that modest tax increases will drive away

the wealthy is wrong on so many counts that it is difficult to keep track. People don't make the decision to abandon their home lightly. Wealthy people, like others, are more likely to flee a city that, having not raised taxes, winds up with even more service reductions. And the economic environment is hardly one in which people are eager to locate. The potential areas for relocation (Greenwich? Nassau? Northern New Jersey?) are not exactly beckoning brightly. Likewise, it is far from the best time to sell a high-end co-op or brownstone if one doesn't have to do so.

Most disturbing is the contrast between the Mayor's concern for the wealthiest among us and his indifference when it comes to middle-class families who are forced to leave New York because of unaffordable rents. The scope of unaffordability has grown tremendous since loopholes in rent regulation were first passed in 1997. For families of ordinary means, the windfalls that landlords have been reaping (vacancy bonuses, long-term tenancy bonuses, permanent rent increases even when improvements have been fully paid for by tenants, etc.) act like tax increases much larger in percentage terms than anything the Legislature is proposing. Unlike the mayor's mythical departing millionaires, there has been an actual years-long exodus of middle-class and working-class families, who are being forced to leave the city.

Despite this, Mayor Bloomberg has never lifted a finger to reinvigorate rent regulation. Instead, he has (thus far at no political cost) quietly supported the deregulation regime initiated by George Pataki. Like Pataki and other deregulation supporters, the Mayor has hoped that deregulation could proceed beyond the

point of no return before the millions of New Yorkers who benefit from rent regulation saw the danger signs and fought back.

The philosophy of making the world safe for developers and investment bankers has had a long trial. The results—marked increases

in income inequality, a city overly dependent on Wall Street and utterly unprepared for economic downturn—should at least tell us that there are better things to worry about than the impact of an increase in the marginal tax rate of the top-earning few percent.

Craig Gurian is executive director of the Anti-Discrimination Center (www.antidiscrimination.com) and program manager of Fair Housing for All (www.fairhousingforall.org). Reprinted with the permission of the Anti-Discrimination Center.

NYC Rent Guidelines Board Adjustments (Order No. 40)

for Rent Stabilized Leases commencing Oct. 1, 2008 through Sept. 30, 2009
Order No. 39, covering leases commencing prior to October 1, 2008,
is available at <http://www.metccouncil.net/campaigns/RGB.htm>

Lease Type	Current Legal Rent	One-year Lease	Two-year Lease	
Renewal Leases	All...	landlord supplies heat	4.5%	8.5%
		tenant pays for heat	4%	8%
	Except where last vacancy lease was 6 or more years ago and rent is below \$1000	landlord supplies heat	\$45	\$85
		tenant pays for heat	\$40	\$80
Vacancy leases	More than \$500	Vacancy allowance charged within last 8 years	16%	20%
		No vacancy allowance charged within last 8 years	0.6% times number of years since last vacancy allowance, plus 16%	0.6% times number of years since last vacancy allowance, plus 20%
	Less than \$300	Vacancy allowance charged within last 8 years	16% plus \$100	20% plus \$100
		No vacancy allowance charged within last 8 years	0.6% times number of years since last vacancy allowance, plus 16% plus \$100	0.6% times number of years since last vacancy allowance, plus 20% plus \$100
	Rent \$300 to \$500	Vacancy allowance charged within last 8 years	16% or \$100, whichever is greater	20% or \$100, whichever is greater
		No vacancy allowance charged within last 8 years	0.6% times number of years since last vacancy allowance, plus 16%, or \$100, whichever is greater	0.6% times number of years since last vacancy allowance, plus 20%, or \$100, whichever is greater

Renewal Leases

Landlords must offer a rent-stabilized tenant a renewal lease 90 to 120 days before the expiration of the current lease. The renewal lease must keep the same terms and conditions as the expiring lease, except when reflecting a change in the law. Once the renewal offer is received, the tenant has 60 days to accept it and choose whether to renew the lease for one or two years. The owner must return the signed and dated copy to the tenant in 30 days. The new rent does not go into effect until the start of the new lease term, or when the owner returns the signed copy (whichever is later).

Late offers: If the owner offers the renewal late (fewer than 90 days before the expiration of the current lease), the lease term can begin, at the tenant's option, either on the date it would have begun had a timely offer been made, or on the first rent payment date 90 days after the date of the lease offer. The rent guidelines used for the renewal can be no greater than the RGB increases in effect on the date the lease should have begun (if timely offered). The tenant does not have to pay the new rent increase until 90 days after the offer was made.

Sublease Allowance
Landlords can charge a 10 per-

cent increase during the term of a sublease that commences during this guideline period.

Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption Program Rent-stabilized seniors (and those living in rent-controlled, Mitchell-Lama, and limited equity coop apartments), 62 or older, whose disposable annual household income is \$28,000 or less (for 2007 tax year) and who pay (or face a rent increase that would cause them to pay) one-third or more of that income in rent may be eligible for a rent freeze. Apply to: NYC Dept. for the Aging, SCRIE Unit, 2 Lafayette St., NY, NY 10007 or call 311 or visit their Web site, www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/html/scrie/scrie.shtml.

Disability Rent Increase Exemption Program Rent-regulated tenants receiving eligible disability-related financial assistance who have incomes of \$18,396 or less for individuals and \$26,460 or less for a couple and are facing rents equal to more than one-third of their income may be eligible for a rent freeze. Apply to: NYC Dept. of Finance, DRIE Exemptions, 59 Maiden Lane, 20th floor, New York, NY 10038. Call 311 for an application or go to the Web site at www.nyc.gov/html/dof/html/property/property_tax_reduc_drie.shtml.

Loft Units

Legalized loft-unit increases are 2.5 percent for a one-year lease and 5.25 percent for two years. No vacancy allowance is permitted on vacant lofts.

Hotels and SROs

4.5% for all categories, however, 0% when fewer than 85% of units are occupied by permanent, rent-regulated tenants.

Rent Overcharges

Tenants should be aware that many landlords will exploit the complexities of these guidelines and bonuses—and the tenant's unfamiliarity with the apartment's rent history—to charge an illegal rent. Tenants can challenge unauthorized rent increases through the courts or by filing a challenge with the state housing agency, the Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR). The first step in the process is to contact the DHCR to see the official record of the rent history. Go to www.dhcr.state.ny.us or call (718) 739-6400 and ask for a detailed rent history. Then speak to a knowledgeable advocate or a lawyer before proceeding.

For previous guidelines, call the RGB at (212) 385-2934 or go to www.housingnyc.com.

Complaint Numbers

To reach the Department of Housing, Preservation and Development's Central Complaints hotline, call 311.

Also call 311 to reach the Department of Buildings and other city agencies.

Rent Guidelines Board Schedule

The Rent Guidelines Board will hold public meetings on March 24, April 7, and April 21. All three will be from 9:30 a.m. until noon at Spector Hall, 22 Reade St., Manhattan.

The board will vote on preliminary guidelines on May 5. The final vote will be on June 23.

A full schedule will appear in next month's issue. For more information, go to <http://www.housingnyc.com/html/about/meetings.html>

Court Rules Stuy-Town Deregulation Illegal

The owners of Stuyvesant Town/Peter Cooper Village illegally deregulated thousands of apartments while taking tax breaks from the city, a state appeals court ruled March 5.

The Appellate Division, First Department, unanimously ruled that Tishman-Speyer, which purchased the 11,200-unit complex on Manhattan's East Side in 2006, could not deregulate apartments there while it was receiving J-51 tax abatements from the city for improving a rent-regulated property. The owners, who paid a record \$5.4 billion for the development, have deregulated more than 3,000 apartments in it. They have depended on vacancy decontrol and "luxury decontrol" to do that.

Stuy-Town/PCV tenants filed a suit challenging the deregula-

tions in 2007. They argued that the J-51 law requires owners to keep apartments rent-stabilized as long as they are receiving the tax breaks—and in some cases, longer. The complex's owners have gotten approximately \$24.5 million in J-51 tax breaks since 1992, and are scheduled to get them until 2017.

Manhattan Supreme Court Justice Richard B. Lowe dismissed the tenants' suit in August 2007, holding that the restrictions applied only if an apartment is rent-regulated solely because it receives J-51 abatements. State law says that apartments cannot be removed from rent control or rent stabilization if they are regulated "by virtue of receiving" tax benefits.

The appeals court disagreed with Lowe, holding that the

state Legislature did not intend "by virtue of" to mean "solely." "The Legislature, in numerous instances, has not hesitated to use the phrases 'only by virtue of' or 'solely by virtue of' when it intended to restrict a provision to a single cause," Justice Eugene Nardelli wrote.

The decision lets the tenants' lawsuit continue through the courts. They are seeking \$200 million in compensation for illegal overcharges.

Crain's NY Business called the decision an "enormous blow" that "derails the business plans of owners like Tishman Speyer, who purchased rent-regulated complexes with an eye towards deregulating units and boosting rents to market rents in order to pay off their mortgages." The

company is considered at risk of defaulting on its mortgage on the complex, as it has not been able to deregulate units fast enough to cover its loans profitably.

"They've basically reregulated tens of thousands of apartments overnight," Joseph Strasburg, president of landlord lobbyists the Rent Stabilization Association, complained to the *New York Times*. "Every single tenant living in a decontrolled apartment can file for overcharges."

"Tishman Speyer cannot take \$24.5 million in tax breaks while they push rent-stabilized tenants out the door," City Councilmember Dan Garodnick, who represents the area, responded in a statement. "This is a landmark victory for thousands of tenants."

East Side Housing Coalition Forms

By Jeff Gold

East Side tenants gathered last month over 600 strong at the Julia Richman High School auditorium to kick off the East Side Housing Coalition. The group was built by volunteers working with organizers from the Hunter College School of Social Work, with the incubating support of state Senator Liz Krueger.

The ESHC is the spiritual successor of the East Side Tenants Coalition, which for almost a quarter-century was led by the late and much-admired Dawn Sullivan. Despite its reputation for affluence, the East Side has a comparatively large number of rent-regulated units inhabited by people of modest means.

Dawn Sullivan was posthumously honored with an award presented by Sen. Krueger to her three adult children, Brendan, Stephanie, and Tyrone. Stephanie Sullivan and her husband, Nick Stavrides, made a short film about her Australian immigrant mother's dedicated contribution to the welfare of tenants and Mitchell-Lama residents over decades. Many speakers cited Dawn as an inspirational tenant leader and a much-missed presence since her early death from cancer in 2005. She was a leading "MCI-ologist" or expert on landlord abuses of the Major Capital Improvement law.

Many East Side Housing Coalition volunteers took their inspiration from Dawn. Volunteer Jill Greenberg vowed to "build an even bigger movement for tenants' rights in New York State that would make Dawn proud."

Sen. Krueger laid out the new Albany agenda for tenants, and situated the fight for affordable housing as one that benefits all New Yorkers, emphasizing the need to organize. A companion panel chaired by *Village Voice*

columnist Tom Robbins took on the issues of home rule for rent regulation, the state of the Rent Guidelines Board, and problems with the Democratic state senators who have yet to sign on to pro-tenant legislation.

Other speakers exhorted the assembled to build on the great turnout for the coalition's first event. Newly elected state Senator Dan Squadron, who represents the Lower East Side and part of Brooklyn, cited "vacancy decontrol as Issue Number One, since it creates all sorts of other issues in its wake." Adriene Holder, the tenant representative on the Rent Guidelines Board, called for more pressure on recalcitrant elected officials. Michael McKee, treasurer of TenantPAC and a longtime tenant leader, urged the crowd to "pincer" Democratic state senators who aren't supporting tenant objectives. Robbins cited Mayor Bloomberg's role in appointing pro-landlord members to the Rent Guidelines Board, which Holder called "unfair and corrupt."

Alice Fisher and Lauren Mariotti of Hunter College were publicly thanked for their organizing efforts, as were Sen. Krueger's staff, who were present to handle tenant problems clinic-style. Many newly laid-off tenants and fixed-income retirees told of their own dire financial situations in this depression/recession, as landlords continue to try to raise rents beyond reasonable income levels and the very economy of New York is endangered. Many had never faced such economic catastrophe before, and were quite emotional.

The East Side Housing Coalition intends to grow as a volunteer-led key part of the overall tenant movement, working cooperatively in concert with long-established groups to build on the work start-

ed long ago by Dawn Sullivan and her many allies. The East Side may still have some silk stockings, but it is mainly surviving off the frayed nylon of rent regulations that need to be strengthened and brought home.

The next big public meeting will take place March 26 at the Community Church on East 35th Street. For more information, call (212) 249-8481 or email e.sidehousingcoalition@gmail.com.

HELP END VACANCY DECONTROL

We are demanding that the state Senate step up and save rent-regulated housing. The bill is out-S2237-A-and now we need nine more votes to win. Tenants across the city are taking action throughout March and April to push every last Senator to sign on to the bill to repeal vacancy decontrol. Please mark your calendars for the following dates in New York City and in Albany:

Monday, March 16, 10 a.m.

City Council Chamber or Committee Room, City Hall, Manhattan
Public hearings of the City Council Housing and Buildings Committee and the State and Federal Legislation Committee. Their agendas will include home rule and rent regulation. We are pushing for the repeal of vacancy decontrol to be included.

Friday, March 20, 1:00 p.m.

District Office of Senator Martin Golden
7408 Fifth Ave., Brooklyn
We will be having a rally outside of Senator Golden's office calling on him to help tenants in Bay Ridge and support repealing vacancy decontrol! Take the R train to 77th Street, walk north on Fourth Avenue to 74th Street, and make a right. The office is on the corner of 74th Street and Fifth Avenue.

Tuesday, March 24, 1:00-4:00 p.m.

City Council Chambers, City Hall
The full Council votes on rent regulation and calling on Albany for home rule and vacancy decontrol.

Monday, April 6

Lobby day in Albany

Wednesday, April 15

Rally at Harlem State Office Building

To find out more, call Jon Furlong at Housing Here and Now, (718) 246-7900 ext. 273.

Canvass in the Bronx

Go door to door talking about vacancy decontrol in the Bronx. Senators Pedro Espada Jr. and Jeffrey Klein need to hear from the thousands of tenants in their districts. To volunteer, contact Orlando Torres (NWBCCC) at (718) 584-0515 ext. 412 or (917) 213-7529 (cell), Orlando@northwestbronx.org; or Tamara Cyzok (New Settlement/CASA) at (718) 716-8000 ext. 125, tamara.c@newsettlement.org.

Phone Bank in Manhattan

Tenants & Neighbors and Tenants PAC are phone banking from Manhattan offices into key Senate districts. Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. for the next few weeks.
To volunteer, contact Tenants PAC, 11 Park Place, Suite 814 (between Broadway and Church Street, one block west of City Hall Park) or call Michael McKee at (212) 577-7001. Tenants & Neighbors, 236 W. 27th St., 4th Fl. Call Pat Coleman at (212) 608-4320 ext. 306 for dates and times.

Missed an issue of TENANT?

Check us out on the Web:

www.metcouncil.net

Guess Who's Against the Millionaires' Tax? Your Landlord!

By Kenny Schaeffer

Thousands of working New Yorkers jammed the City Hall area on March 5 in support of "fair-share tax reform." They believe that raising personal income taxes on the wealthy will help balance the New York State budget and be more just than the current Reagan-vintage tax structure, which cut taxes on the rich and ended a policy of progressive taxation that went back to 1913.

The Fair Share coalition is calling for increases on people who earn more than \$250,000 a year, with progressively higher rates

kicking in at \$500,000 and \$1 million. They estimate that the proposal would bring in as much as \$6 billion more revenue than the current tax structure, where the top rate starts at \$40,000. The plan has been endorsed by the Working Families Party and unions including the United Federation of Teachers, health care workers' Local 1199, municipal workers' District Council 37, and the United Auto Workers.

State Sen. Eric Schneiderman (D-Manhattan) has introduced a "Fair Share" bill, and 22 Demo-

crats have signed on so far. Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver is backing a similar measure, in which the increases would start at a higher income level. Senate Majority Leader Malcolm Smith and Gov. David Paterson have been equivocal.

Combined with the billions of dollars in federal aid coming from the Obama administration, the increased revenue would enable the state to avoid the devastating cuts to education, health care, legal services and other programs that Paterson has proposed.

Powerful and wealthy interests are funding a campaign to keep from paying their fair share. Significantly, as the *Daily News* revealed, it is New York City landlords, through their lobbying arms the Rent Stabilization Association and the Real Estate Board of New York, who—together with the Business Council—are bankrolling that effort, including a mail-

ing to 150,000 households in key Senate districts that falsely tells taxpayers that the WFP wants to raise their taxes. In fact, the dozens of smaller increases and fees that Gov. Paterson is proposing would hit working people more disproportionately.

Following the March 5 rally, Mayor Michael Bloomberg weighed in—on the side of the millionaires. He argued that rich people can't afford to pay more in taxes because they have suffered losses in the recession and "they aren't making any money." That ignores the fact that only those who still have high incomes would pay. Bloomberg also claimed that rich people would leave the state if taxes were raised, but previous experience, including New Jersey's, doesn't bear this out. In the case of landlords it is obviously not true.

"We love the rich people," the billionaire mayor added.

Bostonians Protest Bank of America's Evictions



CITY LIFE/VIDA URBANIA

City Life Bank Tenant Association members protested the Bank of America's continued evictions of residents of foreclosed properties on Feb. 14. City Life/Vida Urbana organized a demonstration at the bank's branch in the Fields Corner neighborhood, while the environmental group Rising Tide rallied at its Copley Square branch downtown.

The groups have been campaigning to end post-foreclosure evictions. They are demanding that both tenants and foreclosed owners be allowed to stay in their homes and pay rent to the bank holding the property.

The Fields Corner protest peaked at about 60 people, but many more came for shorter periods. Many went in to terminate accounts with the bank, as part of the "Break Up with the Bank"

campaign. Protesters also had a large puppet standing across the street, with a sign reading, "I want your bailout AND your home."

In the spirit of Valentine's Day, protesters chanted "Roses are red, violets are blue, Freddie Mac did the right thing, why can't you?" The federal mortgage-loan corporation decided Feb. 2 to stop post-foreclosure evictions.

Demonstrators also delivered "Dear John" letters to the bank, which said: "This may hurt your feelings. But we must look after the welfare of all the ordinary people of the country, all the hard-working mortgage- and rent-paying victims of the financial crisis you caused. We have to break up with you, Bank of America."

A coalition of several groups plans weekly actions against the bank this month.

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL ON HOUSING

Met Council is a citywide tenant union.

Our phones are open to the public
Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays from 1:30 to 5 p.m.

We can briefly answer your questions, help you with organizing or refer you to other help.

212-979-0611

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

LOWER EAST SIDE BRANCH at Cooper Square Committee
61 E. 4th St. (btwn. 2nd Ave. & Bowery)
Tuesdays 6:30 pm

CHELSEA COALITION ON HOUSING
Covers 14th St. to 30th St., 5th Ave. to the Hudson River.
322 W. 17th St. (basement), CH3-0544
Thursdays 7:30 pm

GOLES (Good Old Lower East Side)
171 Avenue B (between 10 and 11 St.)
by appointments only except for emergencies. 212-533-2541.

HOUSING COMMITTEE OF RENA
Covers 135th St. to 165th St. from Riverside Dr. to St. Nicholas Ave.,
537 W. 156th St.
Thursdays 8 pm

LOWER MANHATTAN LOFT TENANTS
St. Margaret's House, Pearl & Fulton Sts.,
212-539-3538
Wednesdays 6 pm-7 pm

MIRABAL SISTERS
618 W. 142nd St., 212-234-3002
Saturdays 1 - 4 pm

PRATT AREA COMMUNITY COUNCIL
201 DeKalb Ave., Brooklyn,
718-522-2613 ext. 24
3rd Wednesday 6 pm

VILLAGE INDEPENDENT DEMOCRATS
26 Perry St. (basement), 212-741-2994
Wednesdays 6 pm

WEST SIDE TENANTS UNION
4 W. 76 St.; 212-595-1274
Tuesday & Wednesday 6-7 pm

HOUSING CONSERVATION COORDINATORS
777 10 Ave.; 212-541-5996
Mondays 7-9 pm

NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS
Covers Sunset Park and surrounding neighborhoods
443 39 St., Ste. 202, Brooklyn
By appointment only. 718-686-7946, ext. 10

QUEENS COMMUNITY HOUSE
Forest Hills Community Center,
10825 62nd Dr., Forest Hills
(718) 592-5757, ext. 280
Mondays and Wednesdays ... 9:30-11 am

QUEENS COMMUNITY HOUSE
Pomonok Community Center,
6709 Kissena Blvd., Flushing
(718) 591-6060
Fridays 10 am-12 pm



Join Met Council

Membership: Individual, \$25 per year; Low-income, \$15 per year; family (voluntary: 2 sharing an apartment), \$30 per year. Supporting, \$40 per year. Sustaining, min. of \$100 per year (indicate amount of pledge). For affiliation of community or tenant organizations, large buildings, trade unions, etc. call 212-979-6238.

My apartment controlled stabilized unregulated other _____
 I am interested in volunteering my time to Met Council. Please call me to schedule times and duties. I can counsel tenants, do office work, lobby public officials, attend rallies/protests.

Name _____

Address _____ Apt. No. _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone Number _____ Email _____

Send your check or money order with this form to:
Metropolitan Council on Housing, 339 Lafayette St., NY, NY 10012