

Speaker's Report

Christine C. Quinn was elected the Speaker of City Council by her peers in 2006. Speaker Quinn is a Council Member representing District 3 in Manhattan including Chelsea, the West Village, SoHo, NoHo, the Flatiron District, Hell's Kitchen/Clinton, and parts of Murray Hill.

The Key Role of the Speaker

The Speaker is the most powerful City Council Member. She is responsible for setting the legislative agenda of the City Council, and essentially controls the legislative agenda. In short, the Speaker bears the primary responsibility for setting an agenda at City Council that protects the human rights of New Yorkers. Every bill once introduced in City Council is assigned to a Committee. The Speaker should then work with the Committee Chair to set a date for a public hearing on the bill. The public hearing allows for debate and information gathering. After the Committee has held hearings, good bills are hopefully voted out of Committee, and then scheduled for a full Council vote. The Speaker controls this process. Unfortunately, some very important bills that have been introduced in City Council have languished for years without ever being scheduled for a hearing or coming up for a vote. When this happens, it is usually a reflection of the Speaker's priorities.

The Makings of a Good Speaker

One of the Speaker's duties is to facilitate the functioning of the City Council as a democratic body. A good Speaker would promote dialogue and public debate on legislative initiatives in true democratic spirit. The Speaker would establish an environment where transparency and democratic principles rule. In addition, a good Speaker would ensure that the City Council balances out the powers of the executive branch. Speaker Quinn unfortunately has not displayed many of these characteristics.

The Legislative Priorities of Speaker Quinn

As New Yorkers endure an economic crisis, they may be puzzled to learn some of the legislative priorities of the City Council led by Speaker Quinn. The number of bills that were enacted from September 2008 through August 2009 suggests that Speaker Quinn's biggest legislative priority this past year related to construction and building with an emphasis on ensuring safer construction sites. This priority largely reflects the Mayor's legislative agenda. Coming in second was the less substantive effort to rename New York City's thoroughfares and public spaces.

Top three legislative priorities from September 2008 - August 2009		
1.	Construction and building related issues	24%
2.	Name changes for thoroughfares and public spaces	9%
3.	Establishing business improvement districts and empire zones	8%
3.	Environmental protection	8%
		49%

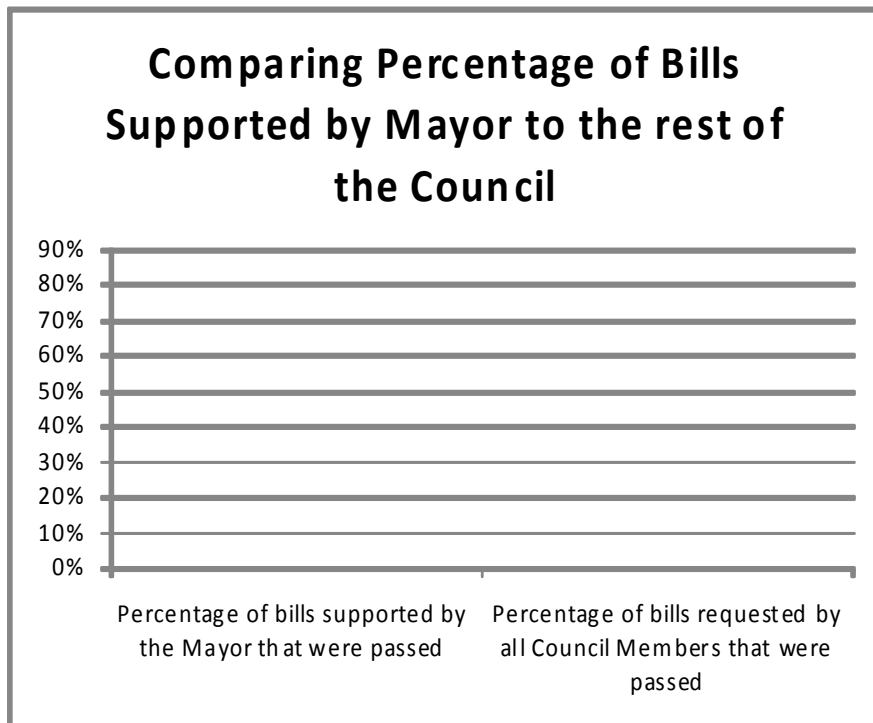
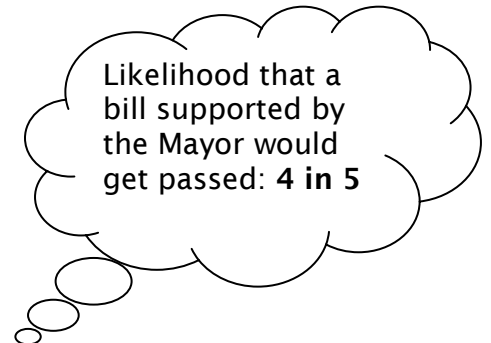
The Speaker was the primary sponsor of seven bills during the assessment period. All but one bill have been voted on. Commendable among her bills is the Clinic Access bill, which prohibits activity designed to prevent access to reproductive health care facilities. The Speaker also spearheaded two name change bills; a bill to encourage licensing of pedicabs; a bill requiring the chancellor of the city school district to submit to the council an annual report concerning school enrollment, capacity and utilization; a bill requiring the department of city planning to file a comprehensive waterfront

plan; and a bill to give redevelopment companies J-51 tax benefits to encourage rehabilitation of housing.

It is disappointing that the legislative agenda promoted by Speaker Quinn does not reflect a recognition of the systemic problems facing New Yorkers including: the lack of safe and affordable housing commensurate with the need in the City; the closings of small businesses; the displacement of workers and residents from their communities; racial profiling and police violence targeting people of color; systemic discrimination and inequalities faced by New Yorkers on a daily basis; and high poverty rates.

Separation of Powers

The three branches of government are designed to serve as a check and balance for each other so that no one branch becomes too powerful. The Human Rights Project assessed the extent to which the Speaker maintained the City Council's independence from the executive branch by looking at the number of bills that were passed at the request of, or in conjunction with the Mayor, and comparing it to the number of bills that were passed at the introduction of other Council Members. **We found that the Speaker essentially pushed the Mayor's agenda during her tenure, and prioritized the Mayor's bills over that of fellow Council Members.**



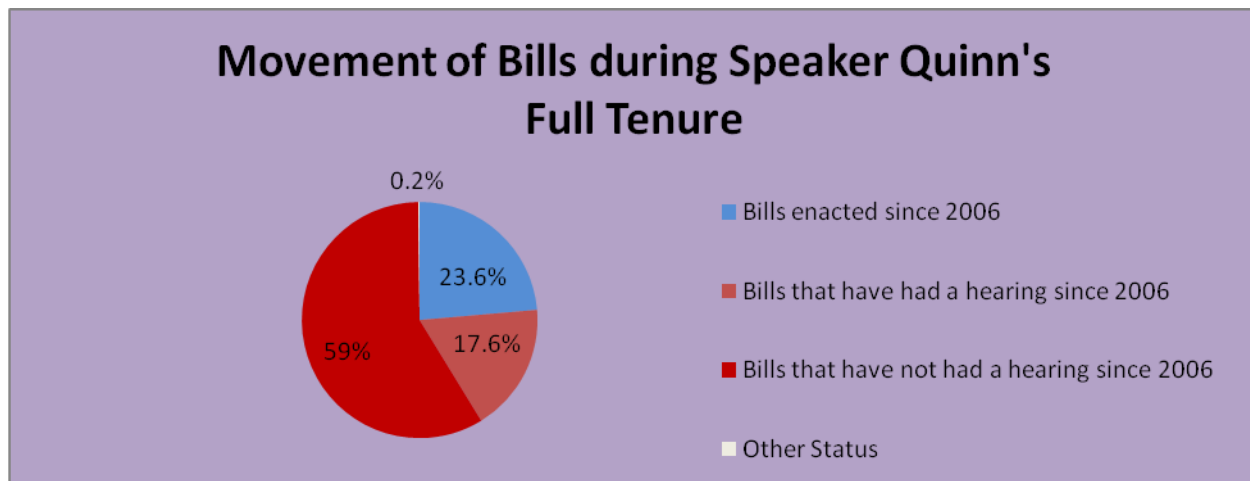
In 2008, only 2 out of the 28 bills supported by the Mayor were not passed. One of the bills not passed would have created a civil cause of action for victims of domestic violence. In 2007, only 4 of the 29 bills supported by the Mayor were not passed. In 2006, only 3 of the 31 bills supported by the Mayor were not passed. One was filed.

✓ Likelihood that a bill supported by the Mayor and Speaker will be scheduled for a vote compared to bills requested by the other 50 Council Members combined: **1 to 1**

✓ Most bills scheduled for a vote get passed.

Promoting the Democratic Process

We assessed Speaker Quinn's performance in advancing the democratic process by reviewing the number of bills that she scheduled for debate or a vote.



In order to pass, a bill needs at least 26 Council Member votes. **Since she took office as Speaker, Christine Quinn has prevented debate**, not to mention a vote, **on at least 13 bills with 26 or more sponsors**, and at least 34 bills with more than 20 sponsors. These include bills that would promote the welfare of New Yorkers like the Human Rights in Government Operations Audit Law, which would promote equal treatment of city employees and equitable delivery of city services; the School Safety Act, which would protect students of color from discriminatory school disciplinary policies; and the Counsel to Foreclosure bill, which would provide legal counsel for certain tenants subject to eviction or foreclosure proceedings. Unfortunately, unless these bills get a hearing in the next few months, they will need to be reintroduced next year. The Speaker will have contributed to weakening the democratic process.