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Home to Roost

As other politicians respond to sub-prime crisis, Lew Fidler explains why he saw it first

BY ELIE MYSTAL

Lewis Fidler (D-Brooklyn), the Council member who is also the general counsel for 1-800-LAW CASH, sees two reasons to keep the Council officially part-time.

The first is practicality. "The idea that people are going to come into a term-limited office, give up their vocation for eight years, give it their all, still pay college tuition and all that stuff, and then go back to the farm? It is just not realistic," he said.

But just as important, Fidler says, is avoiding isolation in what he calls the ivory tower of the government world to better serve constituents. Fidler credits his private legal practice in Brooklyn as the reason he predicted the collapse in the sub-prime lending market two years ago, long before

to other Council members with a block of text explaining the problem and his head superimposed on a movie poster from the Disney film *Chicken Little*. That caught his colleagues' attention.

Fidler was able to secure \$1 million for the Mortgage Foreclosure Emergency Prevention Program, which matches at-risk homeowners with legal and financial counseling services. That program and others were precursors to the Center for New York City Neighborhoods, the \$5.3-million program recently announced by Mayor Michael Bloomberg (Unaffil.), Speaker Christine Quinn (D-Manhattan) and Fidler. The center is geared toward enhancing the city's financial educational and counseling services.

Many proposed remedies, such as stiffer penalties for predatory lenders or an adjustable rate freeze, are beyond the purview of city government. But Fidler is not content to simply wait for a market correction.

"I'm a Democrat, I believe this is a government problem," he said.

Fidler hopes that the national politicians now paying attention to the sub-prime market remember that local communities have been suffering from the foreclosure crisis for years.

And he also would not mind if his colleagues in government remembered his long-standing advocacy on the issue.

"It is funny to watch when Rev. [Jesse] Jackson comes to New York. I see my colleagues crowding around him as he gives the same speech I gave

two years ago," Fidler said. "It's like they all found religion."

Fidler will be term limited out of his Council seat in 2009. But though he is interested in continuing in politics, he says he has made no decisions about what he might run for next. "I'm not running for anything in particular, and I am not retiring," he said.

But even if he had already been in higher office, Fidler pointed out, he would not necessarily have been able to do more to stop sub-prime lending and avert the current crisis. Just trying to convince his fellow Council members was trouble enough, he said.

"I don't think I would have been able to get that accomplished," Fidler said. "If I had to sell 150 colleagues in Albany, or 435 colleagues in Washington on passing legislation to end sub-prime lending, I think they would have taken me out to the loony bin."



market analysts and government officials from Wall Street to Washington caught on to the problem themselves.

Fidler estimates that 85 percent of the real estate closings he participated in before he got to the City Council involved some type of sub-prime or balloon rate loan.

"We were encouraging people to do it," he said.

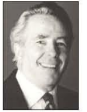
Later, Fidler represented some of those same clients at foreclosure proceedings.

"I saw the beginning, I saw the process, I saw the end, and I think I saw reality setting in," he said.

In 2005, Fidler joined with Council Member Leroy Comrie (D-Queens) in an attempt to get publicity for what he was already calling a looming crisis, but they could not obtain government funding to help affected homeowners.

As the foreclosure crisis deepened—especially in his home turf of Canarsie, which Fidler called "ground zero" for the mortgage foreclosure crisis—he started passing out fliers

Absent New Power, Construction Outlook Dims



By Edward J. Malloy

In the next two decades, New York City will add one million new residents – equal to the populations of Miami and Boston combined. At a minimum, it will take 65-70 million new square feet of residential, commercial and retail space to accommodate our population and economic growth.

With this expansion will come a need for greater energy infrastructure. Investments in electricity generation and distribution to power the homes and offices of tomorrow will be critical.

Without the reliable ability to do things as simple as turning on the lights or running computers and air conditioners, new development cannot advance. A building boom and job creation to match what we now enjoy could be seriously compromised.

Each year we consume more electricity without any thought of where the next megawatt will come from. Some predictions say that within a few years New York City's peak electricity demand may outstrip supply. What's more, it takes five years to site and build the average power plant. But the state law to site power plants expired more than five years ago, effectively stalling the development of the increased energy supply we desperately need.

Additionally, New York is home to some of the highest electricity rates in the nation. Stagnant electricity supply levels, combined with ever increasing demand for this scarce commodity have resulted in rates that are 60% above the national average.

Working with groups like New York AREA, the Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York is committed to siting and building necessary power generation to meet New York City's goals for growth while maintaining all current forms of electricity generation that our region depends on.

Clean, affordable electricity and its reliable delivery is not a luxury today, it is a necessity. Without a reliable supply in place, bold plans for the future may be beyond our grasp.

Edward J. Malloy is president of the Building & Construction Trades Council of Greater New York, representing 100,000 working men and women.

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