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MORNING INSIDER

Speaker candidates unleashed | Construction safety | Retail killing itself

Your Morning Insider for Nov. 2, 2017.

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Who won the speaker debate?

Given that the race for City Council speaker is decided by a handful of insiders in back rooms, the spectacle of the contenders making their cases in public at yesterday's *Crain's* forum was something to behold.

All eight candidates were eager to attend, even though they have been campaigning privately among the Democratic county leaders, union presidents and council colleagues who decide the outcome. They showed up because to be a contender, one must be seen as a contender. Not being on stage works against that impression.

Second, the event sold out well in advance, an indication of the importance that business people and their lobbyists place on being on good terms with the next speaker. But a fair number of them came for the entertainment value as well.

So, who won? The answer depends on the criteria. Some candidates impressed the audience but expressed views that might hurt their chances for one reason or another. Here was one insider's take, based strictly on the latter criterion:

"I thought Ydanis Rodriguez did worst, followed by Donovan Richards and Jumaane Williams. Ritchie Torres undercut himself by talking up the solidarity of the [Bronx] delegation. Robert Cornegy was solid but didn't project as an institutional leader. Jimmy Van Bramer was the most clever but a little too democratic—I don't think turning the council into Albany by letting people do grandstand introductions [of legislation] and force uncomfortable votes is an idea that a lot of members really want, no matter how much they say they want more freedom. Maybe there's a reason Mark Levine and Corey Johnson are the front-runners. I give it to Corey by a nose."

More on the race

A recurring theme among the council speaker contenders at yesterday's forum was independence from the mayor. All vowed to give the council a stronger voice, but at the same time said individual members should be able to move legislation that has numerical support in the chamber.

That, of course, is a contradiction. "The stronger the speaker, the stronger the council," observed Ken Fisher, a former Brooklyn councilman.

Currently, bills with lots of sponsors can be bottled up for a number of reasons, and frequently are. It generally happens when the speaker does not favor the bill or is negotiating changes to obtain the mayor's support—and avoid a veto. [Will Bredderman has more.](#)

Candidates bat .500 on two key issues

All eight candidates for City Council speaker cheered plans to charge vehicles entering the Manhattan business district and at least six endorsed one to keep commercial landlords from jacking up rents. They gave the impression that both measures will pass in 2018 after going nowhere for years.

But one of them, congestion pricing, makes obvious sense. It has been tried elsewhere and succeeded, and traffic modeling can predict how drivers will respond to tolls.

Rationalizing the city's facade road pricing will ease congestion, cut pollution, save time and fund mass transit, a combination that no other policy would accomplish. Commercial rent control, however, could lead to any number of unintended consequences, assuming it passes constitutional muster, which is highly questionable. [Read more here.](#)

City chose wrong solution for construction accidents

The new law requiring construction workers on buildings of four or more stories to receive at least 40 hours of training will do very little to build a real culture of safety throughout the city's construction industry, safety professional Mike Presutti writes in an op-ed. A [better solution is still available](#), though.

How to develop on the waterfront

Federal and state environmental regulations require developers of waterfront projects to do restoration projects elsewhere to counterbalance the potential harm they are causing. But in a highly urbanized city like New York, finding wetlands to restore or enhance can be extremely difficult. Until now. EDC President James Patchett [explains in an op-ed.](#)

Retail killing itself with dead-end jobs: report

A new report finds that more than 90% of the 350,000 workers in New York City's stores are stuck in entry-level positions, despite ample experience and constantly expanding duties. They are also less likely to be promoted if they are women or minorities. This leads to unhappy employees and thus bad customer experiences, presumably causing New Yorkers to shop less in brick-and-mortar stores.

The analysis will be released today by the Center for Frontline Retail and the Community Development Project of the Urban Justice Center.

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