



Your Voice In Congress

**GARY ACKERMAN**

*Serving the Residents of Queens & Long Island*



SUMMER 2006

CONSTITUENT NEWSLETTER

## Congressman Ackerman Demands Oversight On Iraq & War On Terror

A leading critic of U.S. policy in Iraq, Rep. Ackerman has championed efforts to compel the Congress to reverse its abdication from oversight of the national war effort. As Ackerman said in June during a heated debate on a resolution endorsing the Bush Administration's policy in Iraq, "...just because one is for oversight doesn't mean they hate freedom. Just because one is for tracking how billions of dollars have been wasted, mis-spent or stolen, doesn't mean they don't support our troops. And just because one questions the competence of the President and his administration doesn't mean they are not a patriot. On the contrary, you can't truly be a patriot if you just rubber stamp, if you turn a blind eye and bury your head in the sand as war-profiteers run off with the money needed to protect our troops and reconstruct a broken country."

Using obscure parliamentary procedures, Ackerman has also forced the House International Relations Committee to debate efforts by the Bush Administration to circumvent the Geneva Conventions prohibition on torture. In the

wake of Abu Ghraib, and debate on U.S. policy on torture, Ackerman introduced a Resolution of Inquiry, demanding the Administration provide the House of Representatives with documents pertaining to U.S. policies under the United Nations Convention Against Tor-

ture and the Geneva Conventions. The resolution forced the House International Relations Committee to finally debate the question of torture and the obligation of Congress to conduct effective oversight, even in wartime. But for the resolution, the subject would

never have come up for debate in the House's chief foreign-policy oversight body.

After losing a decision at the U.S. Supreme Court in July, the Bush Administration reversed

course and announced that all detainees be treated in compliance with Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, which requires humane treatment and a minimum standard of judicial protections.



*Congressman Ackerman at Fort Totten with Queens Borough President Helen Marshall welcoming home U.S. troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.*

## Ackerman Fights Homeland Security Cuts

Congressman Ackerman sent ten vintage postcards of New York icons to Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Michael Chertoff in response to DHS's recent slashing of homeland security funds to the New York City-Long Island region. DHS cut homeland security grants by \$83 million, or 40 percent. This outrageous decision was based in part on New York area's supposed lack of "national icons." Really, you can't make this stuff up.

In order to remind Secretary Chertoff that New York is proud to have numerous national icons, and that they are still vulnerable to terrorist attack, the members of New York's congressional delegation have sent the Secretary postcards of famous New York landmarks.

Remarkably, despite the recent discovery of yet another plot against New York's infrastructure, the Department of Homeland Security and Secretary Chertoff still don't seem to understand that the region is the premier target for terrorists. The decision to cut funds for America and the greatest city in the world is inexplicable and can only make us more susceptible to attack. The federal government must put its resources where the probability of an attack is the highest—New York! It's just common sense.

If you would like to send Secretary Chertoff a postcard about New York City-Long Island icons, his address is:

Secretary Michael Chertoff  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528



*One of the ten postcards Congressman Ackerman sent to the Homeland Security which reads "Empire State Building (American Landmark)-Even an ape could find it."*

## Protecting New York

Since 9/11, the security requirements for the UN, foreign dignitaries and foreign consulates and missions have dramatically increased the financial burden on New York and finding federal resources to meet the challenge has been job number

one. Fortunately, the House of Representatives has passed legislation sponsored by Rep. Gary Ackerman that will reimburse New York City \$19.58 million in back payments owed to the city by the federal government. The reimbursement is for money that

the NYPD has spent protecting the United Nations, foreign diplomats, foreign missions and consulates and visiting Heads of State. The legislation also provides \$15 million per year over the next two years—most of which will go to New York for future costs.

## Merchant Marine Academy Receives Millions For Upgrades

As the Dean of the Queens and Long Island delegations, Congressman Ackerman has led the successful and ongoing effort to sustain the renovation and modernization of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA) at Kings Point. In June, the House approved the full \$61.7 million requested by the Long Island delegation. Since 2001, USMMA has received very nearly full funding, receiving more than \$372 million of the \$378 million requested by the Administration during this period. As was highlighted recently by the President's appearance at

this year's Kings Point graduation, the USMMA is vital to America's economic and homeland security. Thanks to the delegation's efforts, the Congressionally mandated multi-year Master Plan for modern-

izing Kings Point is well underway, and is producing badly needed improvements to the Academy's infrastructure, much of which has remained unchanged since the 1950s.

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# Rep. Ackerman Helps Fort Totten Become Sprawling Waterfront Park

Little more than one year after Congressman Ackerman handed the key to Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Fort Totten has become one of the prized jewels in the Big Apple's crown of public parks. Since 1995, when the Department of Defense shut down the base, Congressman Ackerman has fought to ensure that Fort Totten will remain free from commercial development, or conversion for use as a massive homeless shelter. Once a guardian of New York's waters, and the facility through which thousands of American soldiers left to go to war, Fort Totten is now protected forever as

public space for the benefit of the people of New York.

From its roots as a military base, Fort Totten has become a sprawling 80-acre public park overlooking the Long Island Sound and the East River. Since the handover in 2005, Fort Totten has become a center for public activities including theatrical performances, historical tours, live music, dancing under the stars, children's events and canoe instruction.

In addition, 10 new acres which recently became available and includes the Fort Totten Coast Guard Station, will also be turned over to

the city at a later date. Ackerman, who recently brokered a deal for the Coast Guard to relocate to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy—just over a mile across the shore—persuaded the federal government to award the Coast Guard property to the city for use as additional parkland. The agreement meanwhile allows the Coast Guard to consolidate costs without increasing its response time to local emergencies.

For those wondering about the 77th U.S. Army Reserve—which the neighborhood always lived comfortably with—the unit is keeping their existing facility on a small section of the fort. Further, the New York City Fire Department will continue to utilize several buildings on the property. All residents of the community are encouraged to take advantage of the new park which is undoubtedly among the most prime pieces of waterfront real estate in the metropolitan area.

Fort Totten's conversion follows the successful conversion in 2000 of the Roslyn Air National Guard base into a 50-acre public park in the Village of East Hills.



*Congressman Ackerman handing New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg the key to Fort Totten making the transfer of the property from the federal government to the city complete.*

## A Message From Congressman Ackerman On Immigration

Among the most pressing issues before Congress has been the question of how our nation should approach immigration in a post-9/11 world, and what policy the United States should pursue with respect to the millions of undocumented immigrants who are currently living in our country. Most of these undocumented workers have come to our country only in search of an honest wage for hard work, and for

*The United States is also a nation of laws and the American people insist upon fair governance.*

a better future in freedom for their families.

As in any large group of people, there are certainly bad apples among the millions of undocumented aliens in America. These bad

apples should certainly be removed from our shores. However, efforts to brand all undocumented aliens as felons, and to slap criminal penalties on those who help them (e.g., churches, community centers, English-language instructors) are, at best, ill-advised.

America has always been a nation of immigrants, a haven for people from around the world who have come here in search of a better life. American history shows that immigrants have brought and continue to bring inestimable richness and vibrancy to our country, to our economy, and to our culture. The United States is also a nation of laws and the American people insist upon fair governance. This nation's problem with undocumented aliens can not be wished away, and insisting that additional border security efforts alone will solve the problem is a delusion.

America needs an alternative plan that will help secure a path to citizenship for those new, would be Americans, who once here, have played by the rules, led exemplary lives, and are willing to meet new additional requirements to ensure that law-breaking and 'line-jumping' are not rewarded. Additional measures to ensure the security of our borders are long overdue and the federal bureaucracy for dealing with immigrants is in need of a major overhaul and additional resources. Fundamentally, the federal government has an unmistakable obligation to get its own paperwork done on time and within budget. Moderate, sensible, and reasonable reform is both possible and necessary to ensure the security of our borders, and to provide our nation with the continued cultural and economic vitality legal immigration brings.

## Ackerman Stands Up For America's Veterans

Following the theft of personal data for as many as 26.5 million veterans, Congressman Ackerman, joined by 36 of his House colleagues, sent a scorching letter demanding answers from Veterans Affairs Secretary James Nicholson.

The letter insists that Nicholson answer for his department's failure to notify veterans and the FBI, in a timely manner, that veterans' names, Social Security numbers, dates of birth, as well as some

disability ratings, were stolen from the home of a Veterans Affairs (VA) official who had removed the information from his office. The employee who took the data home, was not authorized to possess the material outside the VA. Secretary Nicholson announced the theft after officials had waited two weeks to notify authorities and 19 days to inform veterans.

Secretary Nicholson has yet to reply.

## Town Hall Meeting Held On Prescription Drug Program For Seniors

Congressman Ackerman hosted a town hall meeting in Floral Park, at North Shore Towers to help senior citizens make sense of Medicare Part D, the new prescription drug plan, which many seniors have criticized for being so confusing. Since the program went into effect in January, seniors have voiced frustration in trying to understand and navigate through the barrage of confusing and complex choice of new plans. Representatives from Medicare, the Social Security Administration, the Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) program and the community service group Selfhelp attended as well.

If you, or a senior you know, did not enroll by the May 15, 2006, deadline, the current plan will penalize you with a higher monthly premium. You won't be able to enroll until this November, and you won't be covered until 2007. In addition, seniors who did enroll in a plan by the deadline are stuck in that plan for a year and a half. The Bush administration continues to support this program, and has stubbornly refused to extend the enrollment deadline.

If the public's interests came first, however, Congress would quickly enact the Medicare Informed Choice Act, which would extend the enrollment deadline to January 2007, and would give Medicare beneficiaries who enrolled in a prescription drug plan in 2006 the chance to make a one-time switch before the end of the year.

## Helping The Victims Of Hurricane Katrina



*Congressman Ackerman highlighted the need to assist residents of the Gulf Coast devastated by Hurricane Katrina, when he spoke at an event hosted by Alan Mindel at the Adria Hotel in Bayside in September 2005.*

# Congressman Ackerman Secures Funds For Quiet Zone In Little Neck

In an attempt not to blow his own horn, let alone any other horn, Congressman Ackerman quietly slipped \$250,000 into the transportation appropriations bill for the establishment of a "Quiet Zone" in Little Neck, Queens. The House of Representatives approved the funds in June, in the 2007 Treasury, Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Bill. The funds will be used to install Supplemental Safety Measures (SSM) at the at-grade railroad crossing of the Long Island Railroad (LIRR) and Little Neck Parkway, clearing the way for an eventual Quiet Zone.

A Quiet Zone is a federal designation that allows trains to pass through a crossing without blasting their horns because sufficient crossing safety measures, such as a 4-way gate system, exist.

Trains passing through are currently required by federal regulation to blast their horns, often late at night and early in

the morning, destroying the surrounding community's quality of life. Once these other supplemental safety measures are in place, city and federal officials will have to work together to ensure the Quiet Zone designation is made. Replacing the blasting of the train horns with the new supplemental safety measures will not only restore peace and quiet, but will also provide much greater safety for motorists and pedestrians alike.

Currently, up to 100 trains per day pass through Little Neck, and because of the inadequate gate system, these trains are mandated by federal rules to sound their horns to warn traffic and pedestrians. The passing trains must blast their horns 15 to 20 seconds prior to a train's arrival at the crossing with two long bursts, one short burst, and one prolonged burst of their horn until the locomotive occupies the crossing. Once the new safety measures are installed, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) will be asked to designate

the Little Neck crossing as a Quiet Zone, thereby permitting passing trains to approach the crossing without sounding their horns several times.

This Quiet Zone designation will immediately improve the quality of life of the residents who live within earshot of the crossing. People near the railroad will finally be able to sleep at night and enjoy their weekends without train horns blaring constantly. More importantly, the Long Island railroad crossing at Little Neck Parkway will be much safer because people and cars won't be able to move into the path of the passing trains due to the enhanced safeguards. Currently, both vehicles and pedestrians can easily circumvent the existing gates at the at-grade crossing, presenting a danger to vehicles and train passengers, as well as pedestrians. LIRR police have been issuing summons to pedestrians who are crossing the tracks when the gates are down.

## Efforts Made To Preserve The Environment



*Congressman Ackerman conducting an inspection of cleanup efforts at Flushing Bay and Creek with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, community activists and city and state officials. More than \$10 million in federal funds has been secured for the cleanup and dredging of the waterway.*

## Constituent Service For YOU

Every day, Congressman Ackerman strives to provide the best constituent service in the nation, period. Handling thousands of cases each year in two counties on issues ranging from immigration processing, community zip code disputes, social security errors and veterans advocacy, to urgent life and death interventions abroad, the staff is ready to assist everyone in New York's 5th Congressional District. No intermediaries or prior contacts are in anyway necessary.

With one of the most diverse constituencies in the nation, efforts to reach out to the community have included a broad variety of programs including, special office hours at local town halls, coordinated blood drives, free flu shot clinics, special town hall meetings on the Medicare prescription drug program and constant outreach meetings with every interested ethnic, religious, business or student group.

**For assistance, or to arrange a meeting, please call: 718-423-2154 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.**

## Leadership & Action On Israel And The Middle East

**Democratic Leader in House Debates:** Top Democrat on the House International Relations Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, at the forefront of efforts to tackle terrorism head on while supporting America's allies in this key region.

**Taking Down Hizbullah-TV:** Led the successful effort in Congress to persuade the Bush Administration to add the Lebanese terrorist group Hizbullah's television affiliate al-Manar to the list of specially designated global terrorist organizations. This vital step allows the U.S. government to block any enterprise that wants continued access to American financial institutions from dealing with al-Manar. This campaign has forced al-Manar off all but two of its previous 17 satellite re-broadcasters. Efforts are continuing to force the remaining the two satellite providers to give al-Manar the boot and to finally get Hizbullah's mouthpiece turned off for good.

**Holding a Hard Line Against Hamas:**

Helped craft and push through the House of Representatives tough sanctions following Hamas's electoral victory to make clear America's unwavering rejection of terrorism while ensuring humanitarian aid can still flow. Also, using his own credentials on the issue, defended colleagues—particularly those with differing opinions—from having their pro-peace advocacy used to question their fundamental support for Israel.

**Supporting America's Ally Israel:** Knowing the value of multilateral institutions, led Congressional efforts to support Israel's humanitarian aid society, the Magen David Adom's recently successful struggle to win full membership in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement; championed improving ties between NATO and Israel; and forced debate on U.N. resources that go to a number of agencies within the U.N. bureaucracy whose sole duty is propagandizing against Israel.

**Old Ties Pay-off In Egypt:** Used decades

of contacts and experience to "save Sukkot" for thousands of American Jews last year. With a shortage of Egyptian palm-fronds threatening to disrupt the holiday observances, longstanding ties with the highest levels of the Egyptian government made it possible to work out ad hoc arrangements to

allow sufficient export of 'lulavs,' the palm branches used by observant Jews to observe the holiday. With Sukkot fast approaching, this intervention with the Egyptian government, the U.S. ambassador and top officials in the State Department, produced a quick and effective resolution.



*Congressman Ackerman discussing U.S.-Israeli relations, national security and terrorism with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert at his office in Jerusalem in January.*

# Ackerman Brings Federal Dollars Back To Fifth Congressional District

Every member of Congress tries to bring taxpayer dollars back to their constituents and, throughout the 109th Congress, New York's 5th Congressional District ranks near the top in getting its share of the federal pie. Transportation infrastructure, significant health and cultural institutions, and essential government operations in New York all got major infusions of federal resources.

## The 5th Congressional District's list of projects benefiting communities include:

- Fort Totten, Reconstruction and Expansion of Little Bay Parking Lot
- Bayside, Cross Island Parkway Bridge Overpass and 212th Street, Redesign and Reconstruction
- Downtown Flushing, Multi-Modal Transportation Improvements to College Point Boulevard, Main Street and Roosevelt Avenue
- Flushing, Roosevelt Avenue Waterfront Development
- New Hyde Park, Long Island Jewish Medical Center Parking and Road Improvements Intersection at Lakeville Road
- Great Neck, Traffic Calm-

ing and Safety Improvements on Great Neck Road

- Kings Point, Multi-Year Modernization of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy
- Long Island Sound Restoration Funds
- Flushing Town Hall, Foreign Exchange Program with Taiwan
- Queens Theater In the Park, Programs for At-risk Youth
- Little Neck Parkway, Quiet Zone Supplemental Safety Funds
- NYPD Diplomatic Security Compensation Funds
- Heroes Stamp Funds for the Survivors of 9/11 First Responders
- Over 40 Federal Grants for Health, Research, Community Interest Programming, Library Operations and Education.

## Humane Society Honors



*Congressman Ackerman being honored by the Humane Society of the United States for his antifreeze bill and legislative leadership on numerous animal welfare issues. Presenting the prestigious "Humane Champion Award" in above photo is Humane Society President Wayne Pacelle.*

## Ackerman Legislation Protects Dogs, Cats And Young Children

With a 3-year boy now dead, 1,400 children going to the emergency room each year, and 10,000 to 90,000 pets being poisoned annually, Congressman Ackerman is continuing to push Congress to enact his legislation to compel antifreeze manufacturers to add a bittering agent to their currently sweet-tasting product. Though not widely known, antifreeze poisoning is a major threat to children and beloved household pets. The bill requires that denatonium benzoate, the world's bitterest known substance, be added to antifreeze to render it unpalatable to animals and kids. Denatonium benzoate is currently used in a variety of household products including applications to prevent children from biting their nails or sucking their thumbs.

Children playing outdoors come into contact with puddles of antifreeze in driveways, parking lots and curbsides, then place their hands or toys in their mouths, and animals are too eager to lap up these sweet-tasting puddles. Curious children also find the bright colored substance in garages and mistake it for juice-drinks and other safe beverages, while dogs have been known to chew the necks of antifreeze containers.

The House Energy and Commerce Committee recently approved the legislation for consideration by the whole House and efforts are underway to get the measure scheduled for consideration before the end of the legislative year.

## Cuts To Nassau County Criticized



*Congressman Ackerman holding press conference with Nassau County Legislators to protest the President's proposed cuts to Community Development Block Grants. Under the program, Nassau receives \$18 Million in federal funds. Elimination of the money would adversely affect downtown revitalization projects, affordable housing initiatives and senior and youth programs throughout the county.*

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M.C.

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