

CRAIN'S

NEW YORK BUSINESS

Living-wage war heats up over study

Supporters of wage bill say Bloomberg officials timed release of study to undermine legislation.

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Supporters of a revised City Council living-wage bill say Bloomberg administration officials timed their release of a study on wage mandates to undermine the legislation, details of which had just been leaked to the press.

"They've been sitting on [the study] for months, and then they read *The New York Times* story and quickly added a new section on the revised bill," said a spokesman for the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union.

But other bill supporters said the study ignored the revisions, which purport to reduce the measure's impact by exempting small projects from wage mandates. "This study has no relevance whatsoever," said Bronx Borough President **Ruben Diaz Jr.**

The changes to the bill, however, did nothing to persuade opponents, who argue that raising the minimum wage to \$11.50 an hour at subsidized developments would kill retail projects before they reach the drawing board. They point to the demise last year of a rezoning bill needed by a proposed mall at Kingsbridge Armory in the Bronx.

"It's Kingsbridge on a citywide scale," one real estate insider said of the bill. "Tenants will not sign leases. Without tenants, there is no development."

TAKING ON TOWNS

Assemblyman **Hakeem Jeffries'** congressional fundraising total will become public Oct. 17, a date that is likely circled on Rep. **Edolphus Towns'** calendar. But the initial size of Mr. Jeffries' war chest won't determine whether the Democrat runs for Mr. Towns' Brooklyn seat in 2012; that is already a certainty, an insider said.

The incumbent has faced only two serious primary challenges in two decades, but Mr. Jeffries' backers consider the congressman vulnerable. He is 78, has a depleted campaign fund, lost an election for the Democratic state committee, saw his daughter finish last in a three-way September Assembly race, and made little impact as House Oversight Committee chairman from 2007 through 2010. His son **Darryl Towns**, a former assemblyman, was busted for drunken driving shortly after joining the Cuomo administration.

SCALING DOWN THE SCAFFOLD LAW

Business groups are hopeful that the climate in Albany is ripe for changing New York's "scaffold law," which they say makes contractors and property owners liable for nearly all workplace injuries.

Foes of the century-old law believe attempts to repeal it have failed because Assembly Speaker **Sheldon Silver** protects trial lawyers. But with the economy stalling and a governor promoting a business-friendly agenda, that could change.

Business groups have also switched tactics. The Lawsuit Reform Alliance of New York, the Business Council of New York State and industry associations are seeking reform, rather than repeal, of the law. They back a bill to make workers responsible when they sustain injuries while they are intoxicated, violating safety standards or committing a criminal act.

Andrew Friedman, executive director for Make the Road New York, which assists undocumented construction workers, opposes changing the law. “What business is trying to do is escape liability even when they’re breaking the rules,” he said.

TREACHEROUS TWEET

Alex Zablocki, community relations director at the Department of Homeless Services, used his Twitter handle to lambaste protesters at Zuccotti Park. “Occupy Wall Street?” he tweeted. “Occupy a job training center—enough with the class warfare.”

A spokeswoman for his agency said, “Alex expressed his own personal views on his personal Twitter account.”

But PR consultant **George Arzt** urged caution for government employees using social media. “They’re going to get burned,” he said. “Then they’re going to learn.” Mr. Zablocki ran on the GOP line for public advocate in 2009.

MEEKS VOWS TO RUN

The *New York Post* reported that Rep. **Gregory Meeks**, D-Queens, who is under investigation, was not expected to seek another term.

“Didn’t you hear that the folks at the *Post* are great fairy tale writers?” Mr. Meeks said. “As long as the Lord keeps me on this planet, I’m running for re-election.”