



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Liz Krueger

City Council Announces Oversight Hearing on Condition of Infrastructure

LIZ KRUEGER July 23, 2007

Council Member Dan Garodnick, Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn and Council Member Leroy Comrie announced that the City Council will hold an oversight hearing on August 7, where they will press Con Edison for answers relating to last week's steam pipe explosion.

New York--Backed by Borough President Scott Stringer, State Senator Liz Krueger, Assembly Members Jonathan Bing and Michael Gianaris, and Council Member Eric Gioia, as well as local merchants, the Council members said that Con Ed must account for the state of the steam infrastructure, and for the economic impact on local business.

"Six days after the explosion — after one death, dozens of injuries and millions of lost dollars — we still do not know the cause of what happened, we still do not have a timeline for finding out what happened, we still do not know how Con Edison will prevent a tragedy like this from occurring again," said Council Member Garodnick, whose district covers the blast site.

According to Council Member Garodnick, a number of businesses in the area closed for several days, racking up thousands of dollars in lost business. Some small professional offices in the "frozen zone" on Lexington Avenue remain closed, their workers unable to get into their buildings even to access their files.

“Unfortunately, it seems like every year our city is reminded of the danger our aging power infrastructure presents,” said Speaker Quinn. “In a city like New York, where we demand the best of everything and expect our population to grow to 9 million, we need a utility and a power infrastructure that is as great as our city. We need to come up with a real solution to make our infrastructure both safer and more reliable. At these oversight hearings we will ask Con Ed the tough questions and get answers, answers that New Yorkers deserve.”

The hearings come on the heels of last year’s Council hearings on the nine-day blackout of western Queens.

Borough President Stringer said, “With Con Edison treating the deaths and injuries of New Yorkers like collateral damage, an investigation is long overdue. We’ve had New Yorkers electrocuted walking their dogs, life-threatening blackouts in the height of summer heat waves and, now, asbestos-laden steam pipes exploding at the world’s busiest intersection. What’s next?”

State Senator Krueger, who, like Garodnick, has a district office on 43rd Street and Third Avenue, just outside the blast zone, added, “Millions of New Yorkers are dependent almost entirely on Con Edison’s energy infrastructure — a system facing very serious issues of neglect. Accidents and mistakes will happen, but Wednesday’s steam explosion is indicative of how the lack of oversight and years of rampant deregulation of the energy industry have proven dangerous. It is past time for the government to step in and hold public utilities accountable. We need to make sure that Con Edison’s maintenance of the steam system, and their response to this event is thoroughly evaluated.”

“As the State Assembly Member for Grand Central Terminal and the surrounding area, I was shocked by last Wednesday’s devastating steam pipe explosion and its continuing negative effect on the residents and businesses of East Midtown,” said Assemblyman Bing. “We must

uncover the reasons for why this tragic event occurred and determine a course of action to reduce the chance that something like this will happen again. I applaud Councilman Dan Garodnick and the New York City Council for holding hearings on this subject and I pledge my support to assist their efforts on the state level.”

The hearings will be held by Council Member Comrie, chair of the Council’s Committee on Consumer Affairs.

Council Member Comrie said, “It is my hope that this hearing will begin an examination of a critical part of city’s infrastructure. “Perhaps it is time to consider other options in assisting Con Edison’s oversight of the city’s steam pipe system. Unfortunately, Lois Baumerich, Gregory McCullough, Judith Bailey and numerous others who were injured that day, paid the price for our city’s inability to upgrade and maintain an aging system. Our goal now must be to insure that the needed resources, skills and willpower are provided to decrease the chances of a disaster like this happening again.”

Council Member Gioia of Queens added, “Last year, my neighborhood learned the hard way that Con Ed can’t be trusted, and many of our local businesses are still suffering. This year’s steam pipe explosion raises many of the same questions about Con Ed’s infrastructure and maintenance. Con Ed has a lot of questions to answer. The people of New York deserve an energy system they can truly rely on.”