



(c) Newsday

New York Newsday - June 7, 1995

## Rudy in Albany: Alone Again, Naturally

The new state budget is an unmitigated disaster for New York City, and Mayor Rudy Giuliani deserves much of the blame for his failure to understand how Albany works. After his high-risk endorsement of Mario Cuomo turned out a losing bet, the mayor tried to redeem himself by praising Gov. George Pataki's budget, despite the fact that it was especially harsh on New York City businesses and residents. Giuliani refused to challenge the governor's effort to freeze school aid, or to fight for the city's mass transit system, whose funds were cut while commuter railroads were doled out increased aid.

Worse, at a hearing in Albany in front of legislators from both parties, Giuliani said that he would rather have more power over 110 Livingston Street than more money for schoolchildren. Feeding the Republican propaganda machine, Giuliani claimed that additional state dollars for city schools would be wasted by the Board of Education. Meanwhile, he ignored the generous pensions and massive waste in upstate and suburban school districts which, unlike the city, have declining school-age populations.

There is only one budgetary rule in Albany: When the troika talks turkey, you need a friend. As the governor, the Senate Majority Leader and the Speaker of the Assembly negotiate, at least one of them must be your ally. Let us not forget that Albany is governed like the former Soviet Union: three white males share power in a tense but constitutionally determined system. However, instead of the long-running Soviet troika of Khrushchev, Mikoyan and Gromyko, we have three relative newcomers: Pataki, Joe Bruno and Shelly Silver. Emulating the Soviet system, they operate in total secrecy; the legislature ratifies the decisions of the three and lends an aura of representative government.

Giuliani destroyed any support he had in the Republican Party when he abandoned it during the gubernatorial campaign. And he undermined potential Democratic friends in the Assembly when he called for greater cuts in social services and health care than even Pataki proposed. Simply put, Giuliani's strategy made it easy for Pataki, Bruno and Silver to ignore the needs of New York City. And by the time Giuliani (initially chose to seek additional state aid, his flip-flop reinforced his negative credibility with leaders of both parties.

As a result, New York City will not get \$150 million in mandate relief for special education that is desperately needed, but quietly opposed by the United Federation of Teachers. The city will also have to absorb an enormous increase in future pension costs, a result of Bruno's successful effort to supplement the pensions of the state retirees living in his district. In addition, the state is cutting \$86.5 million in operating assistance to the Transit Authority, a mean-spirited way to

induce a fare increase or reduce maintenance. Even the admittedly modest business tax cuts favor upstate interests. Beer distributors, an important source of upstate GOP donations, got a tax break, but nothing was done to lower punitive energy taxes in New York City.

Even if Giuliani had endorsed Pataki, New York City might not have been treated fairly by the Republican-Conservative coalition. But Giuliani's flawed post-November strategy, in which he argued that "less is more," made it impossible even for Democrats to act like friends of the city, if not its mayor.

Now only the City Council can rescue us from Rudy's mistakes. Perhaps the mayor will learn how to make friends with Peter Vallone. He has nothing to lose after the mugging he was asking for in Albany.

---

(C) 1999 Mitchell Moss