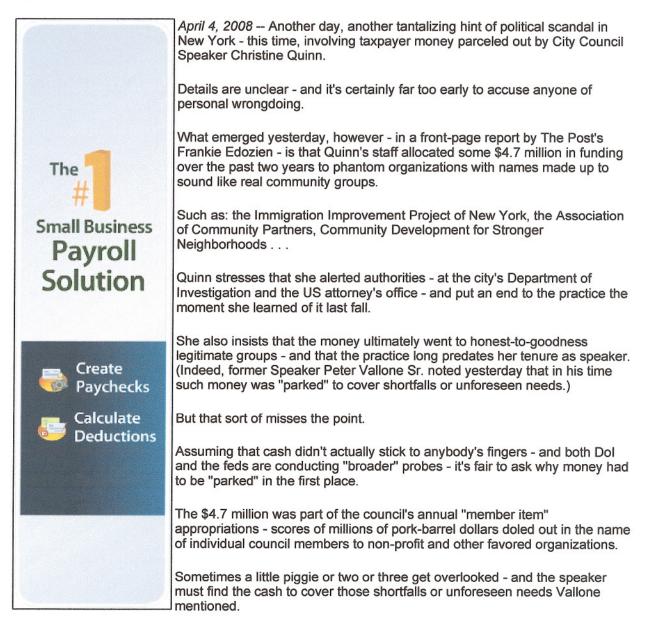


QUINN'S PHANTOM FUNDS



We say "must" advisedly, because very often the member item is granted or withheld as a means of controlling how individual council members vote.

It's a repugnant, inherently corrupting practice - even if the cash does go to perfectly respectable groups.

Usually, that is.

The Post's David Seifman reported earlier this year that Dol formed a special unit to probe nonprofit

agencies; the fake community groups could very well be a part of that.

Meanwhile, to her credit, Quinn has been trying to make the budget more transparent. Names of council members who request funding now appear in the budget with each allocation they get, for example.

Mayor Bloomberg gave her an unequivocal vote of confidence yesterday: "Christine Quinn I've worked with for six years now," he said. "She's the most honest person I know."

Still, Quinn is a likely mayoral candidate next year - and the phantom funds may cause her a problem, even if her foes can only criticize her for lax staff oversight. (She says she tried to eliminate the practice of reserving funds even before last fall, but staffers disobeyed her. Hmm . . .)

This scandal - if, indeed, that's what it is - is in its infancy.

But whatever it turns out to be, it remains that once again the morally dubious member item is roiling the political waters in New York City.

It's past time to end them.

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