



# **TMO NEWS**

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**NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN CONNECTION**

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# **DAILY NEWS**

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## **THE WORKING FAMILIES PARTY IS MILKING THE HOMELESS, THE ECONOMY AND STUDENTS FOR ALL THEY'RE WORTH**

The Working Families Party is working it.

"It's a very big year, both issue-wise and electorally," said party head Dan Cantor.

Last week, the party's polls were on the steps of City Hall and in the Legislature, pushing against the Bloomberg administration's plan to charge rent to some people in homeless shelters.

The idea of charging the homeless sounds cruel and seems so easy to oppose - though the reality is much more complicated.

The city is forced by state law to collect rent from shelter residents with jobs, but isn't happy about it.

Officials asked the state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance to accept a kinder version, with lower rent paid into savings accounts instead of city coffers - showing the homeless how to save enough money for a security deposit.

The state, in its infinite wisdom, said no. So now changing the law is an easy issue for the WFP.

Party bosses sent out an e-mail last week that neatly flipped the problem on its head: "Mayor Bloomberg wants to charge rent in the city's homeless shelters. State legislators in Albany can prevent this, but they need our help."

Well, sort of. In any case, 3,600 people signed the WFP's online petition last week - and surely some of them will become donors, volunteers and voters on the WFP line this fall.

"This is big, and we're going to win," Cantor said.

At the same time, the party's members in the City Council are pushing hard to guarantee paid sick leave to employees of city companies and to restore funding for student MetroCards. Who could be against that?

Up in Albany, the WFP is pushing taxes on Wall Street bonuses and stock transactions - a brilliant piece of populism, despite criticism from Democrats and Republicans alike that it would drive the banking business out of the city and state.

The WFP won't win all these battles, but it can win the larger war. The party helped get Controller John Liu and Public Advocate Bill DeBlasio elected last fall along with a slew of City Council members - only to then see its finances challenged and dragged into court.

Now it is bouncing back with popular causes and populist ideas.

This year, it plans to make the most impact by pushing candidates for state Senate races. That ungovernable chamber could determine the fate of every tax and spending proposal in New York next year - as well as in redrawing the election district lines for the next decade.

None of this sits well with the traditional enemies of tax-and-spend liberalism.

The Real Estate Board of New York, which raised \$750,000 from business leaders last year to back mostly GOPers against WFPers in City Council races, just hired Bloomberg administration veteran James Whelan for a similar push this year against WFP-backed Senate candidates.

So if there's any question about whether the WFP is still in play, don't just take it from them - take it from their enemies.

"They're very good at being loud and being listened to," said someone involved in the anti-WFP effort. "They obviously have impact."