

## Election Special--The Major Local Issues, from dredging to access

by Peter Fleischer

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Election 2000 finds the waterfront a more heavily used and more important resource than it has been for generations. In New York, more citizens use the water's edge than vote. But many do both.

The major-party candidates for the U.S. Senate have both shown interest in the Long Island Sound. Rick Lazio has a record of support for issues affecting shoreline preservation in the Great South Bay and relief efforts for the beleaguered Long Island Sound lobstermen. Hillary Clinton indicates her support for clean-up efforts in the Sound.

But there are a half dozen important waterfront issues that are directly connected to New York City:

**Dredging.** If the New York port is to expand, or even operate efficiently at current activity levels, muck from the harbor bottom must be dredged and dumped somewhere. Shipping the muck by train out of state is expensive. Placing it in pits within the harbor or even in "dumps" outside is fraught with environmental issues, affecting fishermen, ecologists, local communities and relations with neighboring New Jersey. The Clinton administration has attempted to balance New Jersey and New York concerns. Would a President Gore lean toward Senator Clinton on this matter?

**Water Quality.** The water is markedly cleaner due to regulations on industrial pollution and municipal waste release. The Clean Water Act is given much of the credit. Hillary Clinton supports marine research of water quality issues. Rick Lazio is considered a moderate on many environmental issues. His Republican Party is much less so. Can a junior Republican resist calls from his party's leadership to weaken these laws? Few did when the GOP challenged many environmental laws in 1995.

**Governor's Island.** For years, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan's idea that the federal government should sell Governor's Island to New York for use as a public resource has languished in studies, delayed by Pataki-Giuliani rivalry. The promised one-dollar purchase price may expire in ninety days as President Clinton and the senior senator fade from the scene. At any higher price, the island may have to be sold to those, like Donald Trump, who can afford it. Universities, park uses, historical preservation would all suffer. Senate Republicans have tried to price the Island at \$500 million. Would Senator Lazio resist?

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Presumably Hillary would seek to keep the promised price, but would a President Bush give her such a plum?

**Access.** Who can get to the water and where? The proposed new Hudson River Park and the Brooklyn Bridge Park are getting many millions of dollars. What about other waterfront communities? The South Bronx, hemmed in by highways, seeks funds for waterfront renewal. But swimming, sailing, kayaking, and sitting by calming waters have statewide appeal; Erie Canal towns from Tonawanda to Waterford are also seeking funds. Neither candidate has focused directly on water as "quality-of-life," though Clinton has expressed support for waterfront revitalization and restoration through legislation that promotes public-private partnerships.

**Remediation.** Harbor muck ranges from muddy and brown to horribly toxic. The toxic material can be left alone, capped or cleaned up. Costs are high. Private companies such as General Electric have resisted full clean-ups. PCB's released by GE decades ago sit in muck on the Hudson River bottom. RFK, Jr. supports Clinton. Governor Pataki has moved slowly on GE. Would Lazio break ranks?

**Industrial.** The building of a tunnel beneath the harbor is perhaps the most important single step New York is taking for its economic development and infrastructure. Neither candidate has had much to say about it. Whoever is elected will get many, many chances to do so.



Peter B. Fleischer, currently writing a book on the New York City waterfront, was formerly a transportation and environment policy advisor to New York City Mayors David Dinkins and Rudy Giuliani.