The Top Stories of 2010

by Gotham Gazette Staff
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Instead of looking at the polls, maybe New York's pundits and political players should have consulted Gotham Gazette's 2008 prognosticators . A large number forecast that Mayor Michael Bloomberg would either lose his bid for re-election or as actually happened, win only narrowly.

Baruch College professor Doug Muzzio, perhaps not entirely seriously, put it this way: "In a political stunner, *capo di tutti capi* of New York politics, Mike "Nine Zeroes" Bloomberg is denied a third term, even after spending $100 million plus, making many offers that couldn't be refused but ultimately were, by a majority of NYC voters." City Comptroller William Thompson Jr. also saw a Bloomberg defeat -- though did not go so far as to divine his own election.

Our prescient predictors also forecast the ramifications of tough economic times, including in novelist Kevin Baker's view, "a growing disparity of wealth." Manhattan College finance professor Charles Geisst foresaw cutbacks "in all city serves since so much wealth has been destroyed in the markets and, with it, tax revenues." WNYC's Brian Lehrer sensed that "the new Yankee Stadium will have may gold-plated empty seats."

Although no one predicted -- who would have dared? -- the chaos that engulfed Albany for much of the year, several did see trouble ahead.

Holding on to some hope, Steve Cohen, executive director of the Earth Institute at Columbia, ventured, "In 2009, we will learn if our political leadership can match the talents and courage of Hugh Carey and Ed Koch, or if we will have the revival of the three guys in a room that got us into this fiscal mess." (Guess we know the answer to that one.)

Jonathan Bowles of the Center for an Urban Future proved closer to the mark : "The state legislature's eventual response to this economic and fiscal crisis will remind New Yorkers, yet again, that the city has few friends in Albany and that the legislature is truly the most

dysfunctional such body in America."

Of course our intrepid forecasters missed the mark at times as well. They variously foresaw George Soros, Tina Fey and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute President Shirley Jackson as getting the appointment to fill Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's Senate seat. No one predicted Kirsten Gillibrand
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Then there were those predictions that would make many New Yorkers think "if only." Here's one from Lehrer: "The Ravitch Commission's recommendation [on transit funding] will be adopted almost unchanged and the city will be grateful for the next 30 years as world-class mass transit infrastructure attracts sustained private sector development."

Gene Russianoff of the Straphanger's Campaign veered a bit closer to the reality : "The state will permit the transportation authority to toll the East River Bridges, but only for vehicles driven by motorists who are visitors from very, very distant galaxies."

So what is the outlook for next year? We turn once again to a panel of experts who offer their predictions below and invite you to tune in in another 12 months to see who had the clearest crystal ball. (In the meantime, please share your predictions for 2010 -- or reaction to these -- by commenting on this story.

City Councilmember Simcha Felder

After reviewing the five-minute grace period [for parking violations] after it goes into effect, [Mayor Michael Bloomberg] is going to be so excited he's going to suggest a 10-minute grace period.

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City Councilmember and Minority Leader James Oddo

I have several predictions for yet another frenetically changing landscape in political life.

I will trip while jogging on a Staten Island street and, while I am temporarily prone on the ground, the Department of Transportation will attempt to paint a bike lane on my fallen body.

The council's Republican delegation will be asked to star in a Verizon "can you hear me now" commercial, as we will be spending lots of time taking calls from the leaders of each side of City Hall who quickly realize our block of five votes is more and more crucial.

At one point (or more) during the year, one of our colleagues will be making some excessively long-winded speech at a committee hearing and Councilmember Lew Fidler and I will pretend to be listening but will really be discussing a rotisserie baseball trade.

A groundswell of support will emerge to make Doug Muzzio grand marshal of a Columbus Day parade somewhere in this great metropolis.

I will be wagering on the under/over on how many votes Charles Barron will get for council speaker. Here's a hint: The under is a "mortal lock."

Marcia Bystryn, she of blatant conflicts of interest and a member of the Water Board, will vote for yet another water rate spike, no matter how egregiously high it is or how hurtful it is to New Yorkers.

I will be consistently funnier than Simcha Felder throughout the year.

Unfortunately, my only truly serious prediction is my most dire: Too many people on both sides of City Hall will attempt to keep government on an unsustainable path of spending, which will

continue to crush tax payers and small business owners into submission, forcing them to move out of the city, close up shop and endure a quality of life that is appreciably worse than years past.

State Sen. Kevin Parker

Tiger Woods' wife will be much richer than she started out this year.

We are going to have an on-time budget this year that makes significant improvements on the way we do taxation and also looks at spending in a more critical matter.

I predict I won't be a candidate for governor.

Doug Muzzio, professor at Baruch College

Mike Bloomberg pays off his bribe to Ron Lauder for not challenging the term limits extension by naming him to the Charter revision commission, which he once again announces in a State of the City speech.

David Paterson resigns; Richard Ravitch becomes governor. Ravitch appoints Eliot Spitzer lieutenant governor. Ravitch resigns; Spitzer becomes governor. Spitzer names Paterson lieutenant governor.

New York State legislature was found by the Brennan Center to be the most corrupt in the nation. What pushes New York over the top is the indictment by the U.S. Attorney of 17 current and former members of the State Assembly and 12 current or former senators in an "ongoing" probe of legislative corruption.

Mets win Series; Rangers, the Stanley Cup; Knicks in six in the NBA Finals; Jets v. Giants Super Bowl. Marijuana legalized.

Tom Robbins, reporter for the Village Voice

David Paterson steps aside in early February, accepting a post as special roving human rights ambassador for the White House. "I never said I wanted to be governor. It was all Eliot's fault," he explains. "This new job is the opportunity of a lifetime. After dealing with Carl Kruger and his wacko pals, Kim Jong-il will be a relief."

Joe Bruno's corruption conviction is overturned on appeal after a split Supreme Court rules that the "honest services" statutes used against the ex-senate boss is unconstitutional. Writing for the majority, Justice Antonin Scalia states: "In their wisdom, the Founding Fathers understood that citizen-legislators need to make a living. Show me where it says it had to be an honest living?"

Andrew Cuomo launches his campaign for governor and tells Post state editor Fred Dicker that he's going to be nothing like Spitzer. "You and Eliot really got off on the wrong foot Fred and I'm not going to let that happen with us," he vows. "No governor in his right mind wants both you and your boss Rupert as enemies. I learned that from my father." In the following weeks, Dicker runs off a string of exclusive stories based on insider tips from the AG's office and Cuomo campaign.

Carol Kellermann, president of the Citizens Budget Commission

As the economy of New York City continues to sputter, all stakeholders come together to help reduce the cost of government and avoid additional burdens on taxpayers that would further discourage job growth and consumer spending, including:

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1. A new pension tier is agreed to by the unions for all city public employees, including the uniformed services, and adopted by the legislature. As part of this agreement, "Christmas bonuses" for retired police and firefighters are eliminated; a minimum retirement age for uniformed employees is adopted; and reimbursement of retirees' Medicare Part B premiums is eliminated.

2. The mayor and the United Federation of Teachers come to an agreement on a new contract that expands the use of merit pay; provides differentials for shortage positions such as math and science teachers; speeds the process of terminating incompetent teachers; and curtails the amount of time un-utilized teachers can collect full pay.

3. The legislature agrees to congestion pricing in Manhattan, reducing traffic and pollution and providing a reliable revenue stream to support the MTA and avert service cuts.

Bradley Tusk, campaign manager for Michael Bloomberg's re-election campaign

Voter frustration produces a new political dynamic in Albany that probably won't be that different from the old political dynamic except that compared to the craziness we see today, it'll feel refreshing and promising.

Mike Bloomberg leads the city effectively through a very difficult budget, reminding New Yorkers that competence is ultimately what matters most.

At least one major elected official running statewide next year takes things for granted and loses.

Knicks get LeBron (OK, that last part may be wishful thinking).

City Comptroller William Thompson Jr.

2009 was a devastating year for New York City's economy. As we move into 2010, I predict that Wall Street will continue to make money, but other areas of the city's economy such as small business and the communications sector will continue to struggle. In addition, unemployment will remain a severe problem in our city, so much so that many people ultimately will become so discouraged with the lack of job prospects that they will stop looking for work altogether.

The residential real estate market ultimately will stabilize even as the foreclosure crisis continues, resulting in high levels of New Yorkers losing their homes. We will see a growing problem in the commercial real estate market over the coming year, and 2010 also will yield a resurgence of cash. Because credit will remain tight, we will see greater numbers of New Yorkers paying for goods and services in cash. And at least in the beginning of 2010, New Yorkers will look to save some money by spending more evenings and weekends at home.

Austin Shafran, spokesperson for the State Senate Majority

We expect to pass ethics reform â€“ that is a top priority.

Property tax relief is a priority, and we expect to pass a balanced budget with no new taxes or fees. Those are all priorities that we feel are very attainable.

Blair Horner of the New York Public Interest Research Group

More chaos! The budget situation, senate leadership and the governor's race are all variables that will determine how the year goes. It all depends on how they play out.

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State Sen. Bill Perkins

Next year is 2010... on a serious note I would like to see continuing types of reform we were able to pass this year like the public authorities reform bill.

I am looking forward to introducing legislation on eminent domain reform. I think there is a movement that has been galvanized around that issue. I am hoping to see us reform the budget process as well. We need to do it the right way.

I hope the circus has left town -- never to return again. And if it comes back I hope it takes the long way back if at all.

Daniel Goldstein, Develop Don't Destroy Brooklyn

Gov. Paterson enacts a statewide moratorium on eminent domain.

The Feds indict Bruce Ratner.

Cuomo commences a thorough investigation of the Empire State Development Corp.

The state legislature approves a bill removing "blight" as a justification for eminent domain.

Mikhail Prokhorov moves the Nets to Moscow, where they proceed to win a game.

Mayor Bloomberg comes to his senses and realizes that Atlantic Yards would be a huge stain on his legacy.

Brooklyn gets the kind of world-class development, at its crossroads, that it deserves.

Kathryn Wylde, president and CEO of the Partnership for New York City

2010 will be a year in which New York's status as the world's financial capital will be challenged on two fronts. Here at home, Washington D.C. will continue to pursue regulatory and tax actions that are intended to show angry American voters that Wall Street is being punished for its sins. From abroad, the competitive challenge will shift from London, which is suffering its own brand of regulatory self-destruction, to the Pacific Rim, most particularly the emerging financial centers in Singapore and Shanghai. I predict that the desire to remain a global economic power and to generate business investment in job creation ultimately will drive Washington, D.C. to legislate common sense reforms that strengthen our international position, but not before we go through a lot of hostile rhetoric that will keep New York and its financial industry on tenterhooks for the first part of the year.

Councilmember Letitia James

My predictions for 2010 begin with the community continuing to be strong and supportive of every neighbor, resident and worker.

I am certain that crime and homelessness will be reduced, and I have hope that affordable housing will become readily available in Brooklyn and throughout New York City. The Atlantic Yards project will continue to be challenged in the New Year, and I predict the courts will make the right decision to stand against eminent domain and big development in Brooklyn.

I also believe that in the upcoming year job opportunities will be created. And, we will make major strides in the fight against all kinds of discrimination; I look forward to the day when marriage is a right extended to every New Yorker. Lastly, health and prosperity will be in abundance for 2010, and I predict taking care of youth and seniors will be the number one priority in this county.

Gary Babad, a NY City public school parent and writer for NYC Public School Parent

In the spirit of the parodies, I write on New York City Public School Parents, here are my predictions:

Klein Closes Department of Education, Fires Self

April 7, 2010 (GBN News): Schools Chancellor Joel Klein, in a bold restructuring move, abruptly closed down the New York City Department of Education today and fired himself. The chancellor's actions came following the release of the city's reading test scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), showing that the city's performance has remained flat for the past two years. On top of last fall's report that math scores had not significantly improved since 2007, the revelations gave the chancellor no choice but to take this drastic step.

However, on the heels of this announcement, Mr. Klein dropped another bombshell. He told reporters that he gives more weight to the "steady progress" made since 2003 than the lack of progress in the past two years. Thus, he will be rehiring himself immediately and reconstituting the DOE.

These rapid-fire reorganizations come at a particularly challenging time for the education department. Just last week, Mr. Klein had announced the closing of the last remaining public high school in the city. The DOE had been closing more and more "underperforming" schools, with students from each one flooding the few non-charter schools that were left. It is unclear just where the 253,763 students from Alfred E. Neuman High School in Queens will go next year,

but the chancellor had a reassuring message for concerned parents. “The good news,” said Mr. Klein, “is that with virtually no schools left, the high school application process has been considerably simplified.”

Michael Miscione, Manhattan Borough Historian

To put the outlook for next year in perspective, let us first look back. Historically speaking, 2009 was marked by three shameful "what were they thinking" moments.

The first came when the state legislature renamed the Triborough Bridge after Robert Kennedy, an admirable leader, but a man who had nothing to do with the bridge and little to do with the civic betterment of the city in which the bridge is located.

Then came the snubbing of no less a boldfaced name than George Washington. Washington led the American forces that defended the city at the outset of the Revolution and was the only president to serve here as the nation’s chief executive. That apparently was not good enough to qualify him as one of the New York City 400 , the Museum of the City of New York's newly formulated list of the people "who have helped define New York City for the past four centuries." Washington’s new slogan should read, "First in war. First in peace. But below 400 at the MCNY."

Washington wasn’t the only one to find himself on the chilly side of a velvet rope. New York State declared 2009 the Hudson-Fulton Quadricentennial year. Henry Hudson was celebrated all over the city thanks to boatloads of Dutch cash. But where was the love for Robert Fulton. There was only one â€“- one! -- tribute to Fulton in New York City: the one my office threw together at the last minute to help correct the oversight. Next time you decide to throw a party, fellas, it might be nice to invite the guest of honor.

OK, enough about '09. What about next year? Well, 2010 contains the anniversaries of two little-known historical footnotes that have long fascinated me.

One hundred years ago in August, James J. Gallagher, a disgruntled former city worker, shot New York City Mayor William Jay Gaynor. (The mayor would survive the bullet wound. A New York World photographer snapped the scene moments after Gallagher pulled the trigger; the resulting photo is a stunning example of early photojournalism.)

And 75 years ago in February, some East Harlem boys discovered a live alligator in the New York City sewer system.

I predict that neither Gaynor nor the alligator will have a bridge named for them. Nor will they appear on any revised edition of the NYC400 list. But they will not be forgotten by the Manhattan Borough Historian's Office. Stay tuned.

Gene Russianoff of the Straphanger's Campaign

Cash-starved MTA will put advertisements on backs of unsuspecting riders, as well as resort to florescent paints when agency becomes unable to afford to replace light bulbs.

In a desperate move to address the MTA's ballooning budget deficit, MTA Chairman Jay Walder will be a contestant on "American Idol." Sadly, he will not make it past auditions held in Kalamazoo, Michigan even though Simon liked him.

Countdown clocks will start appearing on the 1 through 6 lines, but will inexplicably be in Arabic.

New, improved MTA website WILL be unveiled. It's new URL â€“ Toughcookies.com â€“ will not be popular.

Following Oprah Winfrey's lead, the Straphangers Campaign announces it will close shop when New Yorkers get the subways and buses THEY DESERVE. Campaign assailed for fake announcement.

Nicole Gelinas, contributing editor, the Manhattan Institute's City Journal

The Atlantic Yards project in Brooklyn will finally die.

The MTA will find itself with a "surprising" $250 million surplus in mid-March, reviving the old criticism that it keeps two sets of books.

Mayor Bloomberg will take a trip abroad.

Amy Armstrong of the Furman Center

Next winter will be a little colder for the city's residents because of deferred maintenance on over-leveraged, or financially fragile, properties.

The Administration's efforts to "pedestrianize" and redirect car traffic on major thoroughfares like Times Square and Herald Square will be declared a great success and made permanent.

The foreclosure crisis will continue to cause physical deterioration, loss of wealth and displacement of residents in neighborhoods throughout the city, but particularly in communities

of color, which have seen the highest foreclosure rates.

City Councilmember David Yassky

We will see a charter reform commission to make a better, more good-government oriented city government. The council will continue to grow as a policy-making legislature that has its own voice.

Jonathan Bowles, director of the Center for an Urban Future

Few will realize it now, but 2010 will go down as a watershed year for entrepreneurship in the city as throngs of New Yorkers -- including many who have been out-of-work for an extended period -- start new businesses, laying the seeds for the city's economic recovery.

Responding to the City Council's defeat of his proposed Kingsbridge Armory development and New Yorkers' growing frustration over the proliferation of low-wage jobs, Mayor Bloomberg announces a series of efforts to support the growth of industries that have the potential to create new middle-income jobs.

Numerous artists and arts organizations struggle to survive amid declining audiences and sharp cuts in support from foundations, individual donors and government.

Azi Paybarah, reporter for the New York Observer

Andrew Cuomo runs for governor, talking about the need to "change the status quo" in Albany.

David Paterson runs for governor, talking about the need to "change the status quo" in Albany.

Tom DiNapoli quietly runs for a full-term as comptroller.

Bill Thompson gets drafted into a primary against Kirsten Gillibrand, but doesn't run, thanks to the magically persuasive Chuck Schumer.

Michael Bloomberg says he's staying out of Albany politics, but opens his wallet to a few people up there.

In City Hall, Bloomberg gets bombarded by criticism from Bill de Blasio and John Liu, who deny they're running for mayor in 2013.

Scott Stringer and Christine Quinn start traveling around the city more often, and tell reporters the 2013 race for mayor is too far in the future to speculate about.

Anthony Weiner gets his mail forwarded to his new address -- at an MSNBC satellite office.

Bradley Tusk opens Tusk Inc. and briefly struggles with managing clients who have less than $100 million to spend.

Half the Democrats who voted against same-sex marriage in the state senate are re-elected. State Sen. George Onorato retires.

Jimmy Siegel runs television ads that make us laugh, and cry.

The Independence Party fights the Working Families Party, using state legislative candidates as pawns.

Doug Muzzio ends the year as the most quoted man in New York politics, again!

Reporters wonder why the Quinnipiac, Marist and Siena polls over-predict the spread in all the races.

And readers wonder what it was like to hold a newspaper in the hands and get ink on their fingertips.