

Quinn Rejects Paid Sick Leave Bill

by Courtney Gross

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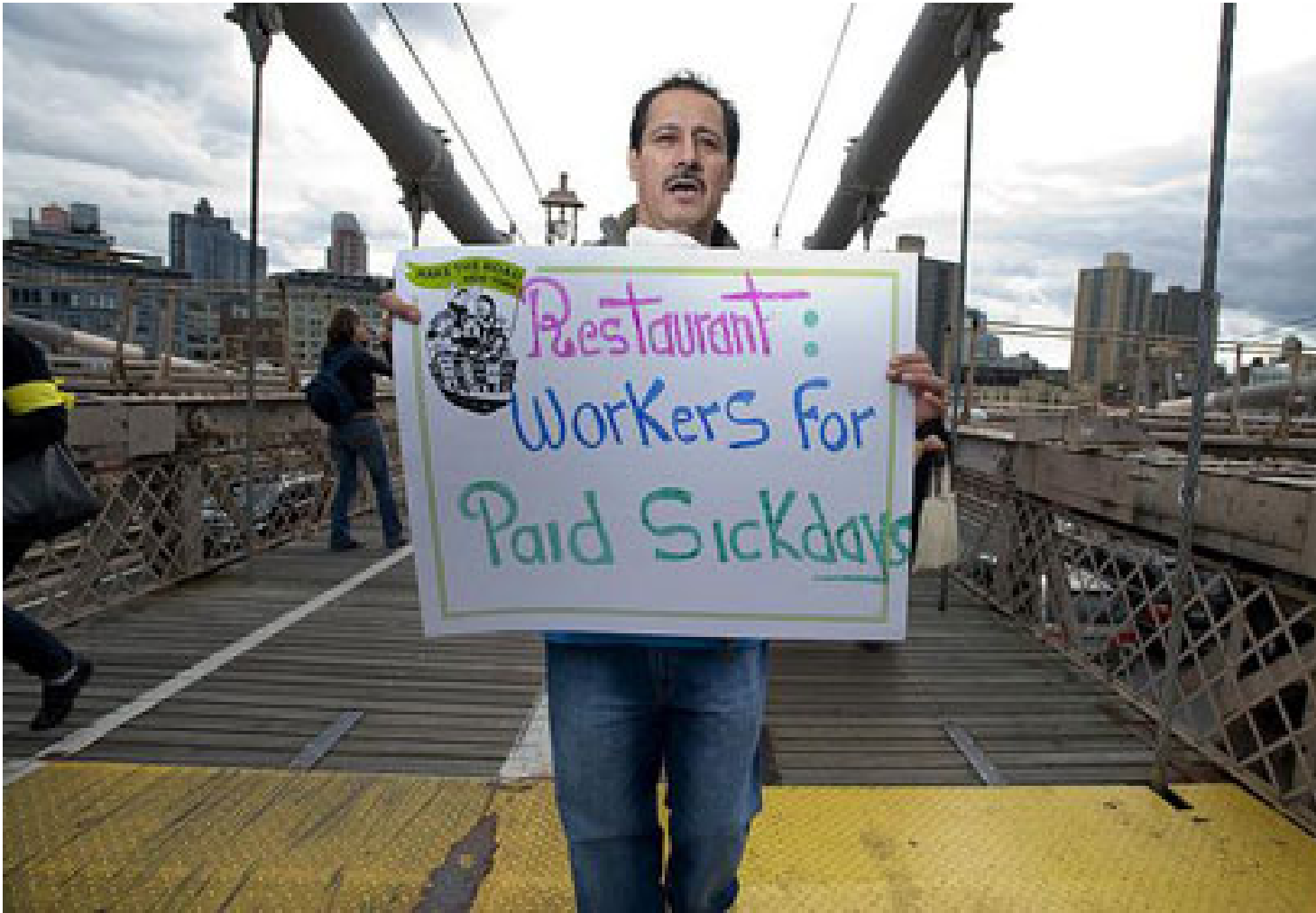


Photo William Alatrisme

Council Speaker Christine Quinn said Thursday she would not support legislation to require [paid sick leave](#) for every worker in New York City, effectively killing the proposal and giving a boost to businesses that lobbied vigorously against it.

Citing the economy, Quinn said the city could not afford to put another mandate on small businesses that are already struggling to make ends meet.

"It would be a great thing if we could mandate every worker got paid sick leave," said Quinn, dressed in a sharp black suit. "But if we do that and it causes people to in fact lose their jobs, what benefit have we actually forwarded?"

The legislation ([Intro 97](#)), which was initially introduced by Councilmember Gale Brewer [in](#)

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[2009](#)

and has

[languished](#)

ever since, would require businesses with fewer than 20 employees to provide five paid sick days per year per employee. Businesses with more than 20 employees would have to provide nine days off. Any other paid leave could be counted towards the sick time minimum under the current version of the bill. According to a council analysis, it would have cost businesses between \$700 and \$1,200 a year per employee.

A veto-proof 35 members have signed on in support of it.

The move not to support the proposal shocked some supporters of the legislation and of Quinn, a presumptive mayoral candidate in 2013 who built her legislative record on fighting for working class New Yorkers.

Both supporters and opponents of the proposal said the speaker's decision would likely set her apart from the other potential Democratic candidates for mayor, many of whom are drifting left.

In killing sick leave, Quinn has become a friend of small business, but has simultaneously angered some of the city's progressive leaders, like one of the bill's strongest supporters, the Working Families Party.

"The first possible woman mayor has just turned her back on a critical but modest lifeline that families around the city need -- a stunning abandonment of working mothers and parents and the progressive women who have supported her from day one," said Donna Dolan, chair of the NYS Paid Leave Coalition, in a prepared statement. "Our efforts to make the Paid Sick Time Act a reality are far from over."

Sick Goes to Dead

In defense of her position yesterday, Quinn said she did not turn her back on anyone.

Standing alone behind a podium in a standing-room only conference room downtown, Quinn,

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confident and sharp-spoken, said she had struggling small businesses in mind when she came to her decision.

"There are businesses on the brink, and they fear any new cost will put them under," the speaker said during a press conference that lasted barely 20 minutes.

For months, if not years, opposing sides of the sick leave fight have [dueled](#) over numbers, economic impact and job growth. One

[study](#)

, commissioned by the

[Partnership for New York City](#)

which opposed the bill, put the legislation's cost at \$789 million a year. Another

[conducted](#)

by the

[Drum Major Institute](#)

, a major supporter of the bill, said it would not affect the city's job growth.

Supporters of the bill looked at similar laws in San Francisco and Washington D.C., citing their success. Meanwhile, detractors pointed to the city's [nearly 10 percent unemployment rate](#) and staggering economy.

Nearly all of the other Democratic mayoral hopefuls, [including](#) Public Advocate Bill de Blasio, Comptroller John Liu, Borough President Scott Stringer and Rep. Anthony Weiner, have [voiced support for the legislation](#)

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Ultimately, Quinn said a compromise could not be reached.

Brewer disagreed. She said calling it quits was premature and a deal was attainable. But Brewer said she would not use the [council's rules](#) to bring it to the floor for a vote without the speaker's support -- a rare but doable process.

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Nonetheless, Brewer and other members of the City Council have vowed to continue to fight for the sick leave bill.

"It's not dead," Brewer said. "I have three more years on the City Council. I've been in this game for a very long time. I will not let it die."

But already some members appear to be backing away from the proposal.

Councilmember James Sanders Jr., who chairs the council's Committee on Civil Service and Labor, where the bill is slowly drowning, said he plans to sit down with the speaker to hear her out.

"I have further questions about [the speaker's] position," said Sanders, who is listed as a sponsor on the bill. "She may have information that I don't have."

2011 to 2013

Some political observers see Quinn's decision as smart.

In the 2009 election, both Liu and de Blasio sailed into office on the backs of the Working Families Party. By siding with small business on this fight, Quinn could potentially receive their support come 2013.

"This allows her to become the friend of small business, which creates an area that the others really haven't broached," said political consultant [Hank Sheinkopf](#). "She has to appeal to those folks if she's gonna be mayor."

In business circles yesterday, Quinn's move was applauded and called courageous.

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Quinn's decision also evokes the position of the city's current chief. Mayor Michael Bloomberg has said the approval of a paid sick leave bill would be "disastrous."

Quinn, however, vehemently denied her decision had anything to do with political motives.

"I have to go to bed tonight as the speaker of the New York City Council," she said. "I have to go to bed tonight knowing that I made a decision that was not easy based on the requirements of the job that I hold."

The decision she made could make the job she has now more difficult. Many of the new members who joined the council in January were elected with a promise to get paid sick leave approved.

Some of them aren't ready to give up.

"I will say I think it shows how important the Progressive Caucus is," said Councilmember Brad Lander, who co-chairs the council's newest faction. "We clearly need to keep pushing hard and working for public policy that may make life better for hard working New Yorkers."