

## CONNECT THE DOTS: Money in Politics

# Lead Poisoning Legislation Stalls as Campaign Contributions Flow

**Popular lead poisoning legislation has been languishing in a New York City Council committee for over a year. The bill, Intro 101, would replace current lead paint regulations with stronger protections for tenants. It is supported by a majority of Council members and the medical community. It was introduced in the Council in March 2002 . But the bill has yet to receive a hearing or a vote.**

The real estate industry has taken a strong stand against the bill through its trade associations, the Rent Stabilization Association (RSA) and the Real Estate Board of New York (REBNY). These groups have donated heavily to city candidates in recent years:

**Since 1996, these powerful real estate interests have made over \$1.3 million in donations to New York City campaigns, plus more than \$300,000 through their PACs.**

### Campaign Donations

#### 1996-2003

**REBNY Staff and Directors:**

**\$1,152,360**

**RSA Staff and Directors:**

**\$356,317**

**Real Estate PACs:**

**\$308,050**

In the 2001 elections alone, REBNY leadership made contributions totalling \$734,000, and RSA board members gave \$240,000.

### Has Money Influenced Council Support?

**Of the nineteen Council members who are not sponsors of the bill, seventeen received donations from real estate PACs. Only five recipients of real estate PAC money are sponsors.**

### The Speaker's Role

The bill's sponsors have pressed Council **Speaker Gifford Miller** repeatedly to arrange a hearing on the bill. The speaker's support almost always means a bill will at least get a hearing: in 2002, every bill introduced with Miller and a majority of council members as sponsors had a hearing. However, **Miller has not shown support for Intro 101 and is the only Manhattan council member who is not a sponsor.**

### 2005 Campaign Cash Already Adding Up

Miller has set up a campaign account for an unspecified run in 2005, the year of the next mayoral race. As of January 15, 2003, **Miller had raised more than a million dollars for this campaign.**

## UPDATE:

Victory for Democracy!

After this fact sheet was released to the public and the press, Speaker Miller announced that a hearing on Intro 101 would be held early this summer.

**Donations from members of the RSA and REBNY boards total \$31,150, and Miller has received an additional \$67,000 from various other real estate interests.**

**History shows that real estate interests are willing to give generously extensively to their chosen candidate for mayor.** Peter Vallone, former council speaker who ran for mayor in 2001, received more than \$125,000 from REBNY and RSA leadership, plus \$15,750 from their boards. In addition, REBNY and RSA presidents collected hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign donations for Vallone (see chart on back).

The industry was equally generous to Rudolph Giuliani when he ran for mayor in 1997. REBNY and RSA board members gave Giuliani \$184,000, and industry PACs gave another \$25,100.

### Other Council Members Missing in Action

Councilman **Erik Dilan's** district in Bushwick has **the most new cases of lead poisoning in all of New York City**, according to research by the New York Public Interest Research Group. Yet Dilan is not among the bill's sponsors, and has spoken publicly against it.

Of the 20 biggest donations Dilan received for his 2001 campaign, fifteen were from real estate interests. Seven of these were collected for him by REBNY staff member John Doyle. (Over...)

**Of the twelve donations Dilan collected that were worth \$1000 or more, ten were from real estate.**

Dilan received more than \$7900 from members of the RSA and REBNY boards for his 2001 campaign, making him **one of their top ten favorite recipients**. He also received \$1750 from real estate PACs.

Councilman **Leroy Comrie's** district in southeast Queens has **the most new cases of lead poisoning in the borough**, but Comrie is also not a sponsor of the bill. Comrie received over \$5900 from the RSA and REBNY leadership for his 2001 campaign, and was **the second favorite recipient** (tied with Councilman James Oddo) for industry PACs, which gave him \$3500.

## Will History Repeat Itself?

The New York City Council passed the city's current lead poisoning law, Local Law 38, in 1999 under extremely strong pressure from then-speaker Peter Vallone. Local Law 38 has been roundly criticized as a "landlord protection bill" that could put children at greater risk for lead poisoning.

Vallone's ties to the real estate lobby were notoriously strong. RSA president Joseph Strasburg had been Vallone's chief of staff before being tapped to lead the landlord lobby. Previous to that, Strasburg was counsel to the City Council Housing Committee. According to The Village Voice, Vallone allowed Strasburg to author Local Law 38. Vallone's 2001 mayoral campaign was run out of the same building as the RSA and rented to him by William Street Associates, a limited partnership with real estate mogul Leonard Litwin as a principal. Tenants advocates also reported that Vallone's gubernatorial campaign raised money out of the RSA office for a time.

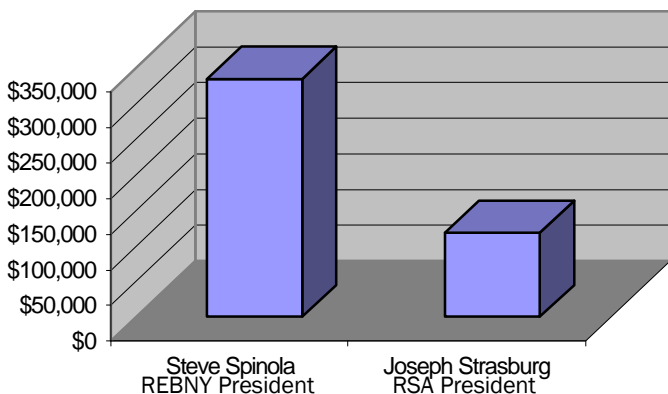
There was a viable alternative to Local Law 38—a bill sponsored by Councilman Stanley Michels that, like today's Intro 101, was supported by a majority of the Council and endorsed by health professionals. However, Vallone stalled the bill for two years, never letting it out of committee, and then pushed through his own pro-real estate proposal.

**Today, we see the same kind of delays blocking another bill with broad Council support, and protecting legislation favored by the real estate lobby. Will history repeat itself? Will the Council Speaker, with an eye toward a future mayoral run, subvert the will of the Council and kill a popular proposal to make real estate interests happy?**

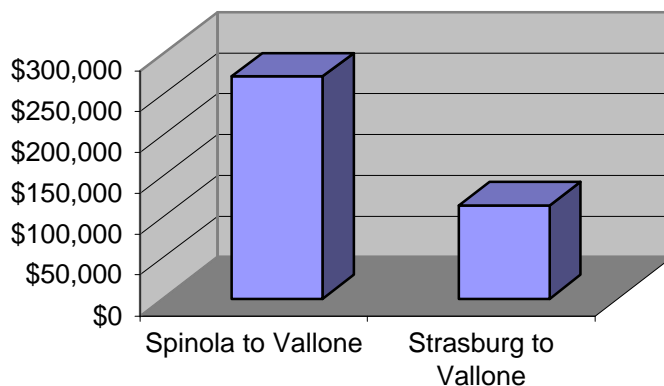
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**Key staff and board members at RSA and REBNY frequently collect campaign donations from others in the industry and deliver them to their favorite candidates, most notably their choice in the most recent mayor's race, Peter Vallone.**

**Biggest Bundlers...**



**...And their Favorite Recipient:  
2001 Mayoral Candidate Peter Vallone**



The majority of these donations are in addition to the more than \$1.3 million in donations made directly to candidates by RSA and REBNY board members since 1996.

This fact sheet was created in March 2003 as part of a series called CONNECT THE DOTS, which aims to show how money in politics impacts on issues New Yorkers care about. For more information, please call us for a copy of the report on which this fact sheet was based, or see our website: [www.commoncause.org/states/newyork/](http://www.commoncause.org/states/newyork/)  
To learn more about Common Cause/NY's CONNECT THE DOTS coalition, call 1-800-300-8707.  
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