



NY1 Exclusive: Former Speaker Miller Emailed Speaker Quinn About High Line Project

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An NY1 exclusive report suggests that Former City Council Speaker Gifford Miller used emails to Speaker Christine Quinn to advocate a plan to transform an old West Side elevated railway into a park. NY1's Michael Scotto filed the following report.

Gifford Miller, who was City Council Speaker until 2005, has current Speaker Christine Quinn's personal email address, and he used it to discuss the High Line – a plan to transform a former elevated railway on Manhattan's West Side that was abandoned since 1980 into a park.

Miller was an unpaid board member of the group spearheading the park.

According to a Freedom of Information Law request, Miller sent Quinn 12 emails from November 2006 to May 2007, most of them seeking Quinn's assistance in helping to move along the project.

In one email, Miller asked for a meeting with her and talked about the possibility that Quinn could appoint someone to the High Line board. In another, sent in April 2007, Miller asked her to call a real estate lobbyist to push for the preservation of the northern part of the high line.

Miller then wrote, "A firm call from you, suggesting that this is not a fight that he needs to get in the middle of, might be a good idea."

Good government watchdogs said the emails highlight an important point.

"These emails show the kind of friendship that they have and the kind of access that somebody who is your predecessor has to you," said Susan Lerner, the executive director of Common Cause.

Quinn and Miller have been good friends for years. In the emails, Miller suggested their families get together and signed off "XO [kiss-hug]."

Miller reportedly operates a consulting firm, but the firm's website is minimal. He is not registered as a lobbyist with the city or state, and the emails do not indicate Miller did anything wrong.

Miller forwarded a voicemail message from NY1 to the co-founder of the High Line, who said Miller acts only a volunteer, and not as a lobbyist on a paid or pro-bono basis.

Quinn in one email to Miller said she "loves the High Line." The group received \$290,000 in council funding last year.

”These activities are a combination of community organizing and some degree of lobbying,” said Lerner.

Miller reached out to Quinn on several other occasions, including 2006, the year when Miller was not permitted to discuss city business with members of the council.

On that occasion, Miller wrote, perhaps in a joking manner, about a possible bill – “Just want to let you know I have been lobbying hard against the foie gras ban.”

In 2007, Miller asked about the status of a campaign finance bill and requested that Quinn consider the idea of selling the New York City Housing Authority to tenants.

His emails even mentions how one of his friends opposes the metal baseball bat ban, something Quinn supports.

Miller did not answer NY1’s request for an interview.

- Michael Scotto