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News :: RNCWatch

## City Council RNC Hearings: Mainstream Media Roundup

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by chris

16 Sep 2004

(No verified email address)

The NY Times | The Daily News | Newsday | The AP

Mayor stiffens probe

of RNC arrests

BY FRANK LOMBARDI

DAILY NEWS CITY HALL BUREAU

A City Council hearing to probe the way cops handled protesters at the Republican convention was boycotted yesterday by the Bloomberg administration.

City Hall refused to send anyone to testify, citing pending litigation stemming from the nearly 2,000 arrests during the convention two weeks ago.

Councilman Bill Perkins (D-Harlem) angrily accused Mayor Bloomberg and Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly of stonewalling.

"They cannot choose the venue in which they will decide to respond to the concerns of the public," Perkins fumed. "We will have a subpoena action taken against them."

But Council insiders doubted subpoenas would be issued.

Critics have complained the NYPD violated the rights of protesters by using such tactics as trapping people with orange netting to make mass arrests and using scooters and metal barriers to "micromanage" protests.

Arrested demonstrators were corralled at a former bus garage on a West Side pier that some said was filthy and hazardous. The city has denied anyone was in danger.

"It's the NYPD that's, in my opinion, the culprit here," said civil rights lawyer Norman Siegel. "And I think it was by design."

The city faces a contempt-of-court hearing Sept. 27 for allegedly failing to arraign several hundred arrested protesters within 24 hours. Several civil suits also have been initiated, with more on the way.

Perkins came under fire from Councilman Peter Vallone Jr. (D-Queens), a member of Perkins'

Governmental Operations Committee and chairman of the Public Safety Committee.

"I think that this hearing was just the usual Perkins parade of police bashers," Vallone said during a break. "And if I were the administration, I would not show up either."

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RNC Protesters Claim Police Abuse  
Addressed City Council On Wednesday

Sep 15, 2004 9:25 pm US/Eastern

NEW YORK (AP) Republican National Convention protesters told a City Council hearing on Wednesday that the police department engaged in a series of abuses, including using unnecessary force against them, refusing to allow them medical attention and arresting people who weren't taking part in demonstrations.

The New York Civil Liberties Union said hundreds of the 1,800 arrests made during the four-day convention were unjustified.

"Twenty percent of the people who were arrested were not demonstrators, they were bystanders," said Donna Lieberman, executive director of the NYCLU.

No representatives from the police department or the Bloomberg administration appeared at the hearing before the council's Committee on Government Operations.

The committee chair, Councilman Bill Perkins, said he might try to subpoena police Commissioner Ray Kelly or Mayor Michael Bloomberg to testify.

"There doesn't seem to be a justifiable reason for them not to be here," he said. "They are hiding something."

Bloomberg spokesman Ed Skyler said the administration could not take part because the city faces litigation, including accusations that it held protesters too long and arrested innocent people during the protests surrounding the Madison Square Garden convention, which ended Sept. 2.

"We can't send people to testify about matters which are in litigation," Skyler said. "We explained this to the council member last week, but he is more interested in grandstanding than accomplishing anything of substance or real value."

Several people told the committee they had been unfairly arrested and mistreated.

Father Johnathan Harris, a member of the War Resisters League, a pacifist group, said he and others were arrested during a protest for no apparent reason. He said he asked a police officer whether he was being detained and on what charge.

"The officer said, 'I don't know what the heck's going on,'" Harris said.

Simone Levine, a representative from the National Lawyers Guild, which monitored many of the demonstrations, said 15 of her group's legal observers were arrested during protests, including one who was hit by a police club and another who was thrown to the ground.

Civil rights attorney Norman Siegel said one man who'd just bought a pastrami sandwich at a delicatessen stepped outside, was arrested and was held for 27 hours. Other arrestees, including a man who had his jaw broken, a pregnant woman and a man who suffered a collapsed intestine were denied medical attention, he said.

"This needs to be discussed instead of being denied and minimized," he said.

The NYCLU also questioned the widespread use of police videotaping of protesters, which it said might be a violation of city law, and the detainment of some demonstrators for nearly three days at a pier building they claimed was contaminated.

Lawyers for the protesters alleged during the convention that people were detained to keep them off the streets the night of President Bush's acceptance speech. The police department denied that accusation, but a judge ordered the city to release hundreds of detainees within hours.

City lawyers said the delay in processing the detainees occurred because there were so many of them in such a short time, including more than 1,000 on one day.

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#### Newsday

A city lawyer testifying on her own time told a City Council panel yesterday that she was shocked at police handling of a protest during the Republican National Convention.

Michele Weinstat, an associate general counsel with the Administration for Children's Services, said she was threatened with arrest at a march at Ground Zero, where 200 people were arrested Aug. 31.

"I said, 'It's my First Amendment right to watch,' but the officer said, 'This is a frozen zone,'" she said. "I decided to sacrifice my constitutional rights and not get arrested. It indicates the far-reaching impact and chilling effect [of the police actions]."

A number of people detained for more than 24 hours testified they were either not doing anything illegal or were not protesting. The accounts portrayed an ill-equipped system for dealing with detainees.

Bloomberg administration officials declined to testify, citing potential litigation. Police Commissioner Ray Kelly has made several media appearances recently to defend the arrests.

Councilman Bill Perkins (D-Harlem) said he was extremely disappointed in their decisions, adding that the administration "can't choose the venue to be responsive."

Meanwhile, Christopher Dunn, a New York Civil Liberties Union lawyer, said the organization intends to file suit.

"You had a lot of people acting in a lawful manner who ended up spending a long time in filthy conditions," he said.

Dunn said 20 percent of 200 complaints he has received are from bystanders who were detained. More than 100 complaints allege wrongful arrest.

Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau said prosecutors will release hundreds of bicycles seized during a protest before the convention. Last week, police insisted the bikes were needed as evidence.

Bike owners should take their police vouchers to the district attorney's office for an official sign-off, and then to the Police Department.

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NY Times

Council Subpoenas Threatened Over Mass Arrests of Protesters  
By WINNIE HU

City Council leaders yesterday sought more public scrutiny of the mass arrests of protesters during the Republican National Convention, and one councilman angrily threatened to seek a subpoena to compel Bloomberg administration officials to answer their questions.

The threat was made by Councilman Bill Perkins, the deputy majority leader, who repeatedly criticized Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly for neither attending nor sending representatives to a Council hearing yesterday that drew dozens of elected officials, civil rights lawyers and convention protesters.

"They have a responsibility to respond to the people," Mr. Perkins said. "We have subpoena powers to make sure they get here, and we will be exercising them."

While council members have threatened to issue subpoenas in the past to compel city officials to testify, they have rarely done so. The last time was in 1995.

A subpoena would have to be approved by a majority of the committee holding the hearing and signed by the committee chairman or the Council speaker. David K. Chai, a spokesman for Council Speaker Gifford Miller, said Mr. Miller did not believe a subpoena is necessary now, but instead would informally press the administration.

Aides to Mr. Bloomberg and Mr. Kelly said that, at the time of yesterday's hearing, they were attending a funeral Mass in East Islip, N.Y., for one of the two police detectives killed last week in the line of duty.

Ed Skyler, the mayor's press secretary, pointed out that people arrested during the convention

were suing the city. "We can't send people to testify about matters which are in litigation," he said. "We explained this to the council member last week, but he is more interested in grandstanding than accomplishing anything of substance."

Mr. Chai said city officials had previously testified on issues on which the city was being sued. "They should just come in and decide what they want to answer, and what they don't want to answer," he said. "But not coming at all is simply unacceptable."

Mr. Perkins's threat of a subpoena capped off an unusually contentious hearing before the Committee on Governmental Operations, which was punctuated by cheering from protesters and disputes among council members.

Donna Lieberman, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, said they estimated that roughly 300 of the more than 1,800 people arrested before and during the convention were "wrongly arrested" because they were following police officers' directions or were simply bystanders swept up during the arrests.

Norman Siegel, a veteran civil rights lawyer, demanded to know why Councilman Peter F. Vallone Jr., the chairman of the Public Safety Committee and the Council's leader on police issues, had not been present to witness the mass arrests.

Mr. Vallone said later that he was at his district office in Queens, monitoring the protests through phone calls to police officials and others. He characterized the hearing yesterday as "the usual Perkins parade of police bashing."



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## Comments

### Re: City Council RNC Hearings: Mainstream Media Roundup

by Shazbot

(No verified email address)

Current rating: 0

16 Sep 2004

Modified: 03:38:34 PM

Love how the city belittles this whole thing as if rights mean nothing.

### Re: City Council RNC Hearings: Mainstream Media Roundup

by NYer

(No verified email address)

Current rating: 0

16 Sep 2004

In the scheme of things ....? Less than protecting the other 9,999,000 New Yorkers.