



May 3, 2009

## Monroe Dems want Outlet Bridge open in October

*Jill Terreri*  
*Staff writer*

Rebuffed by the Monroe County Legislature's Republican leadership, Democratic lawmakers will seek a change in Irondequoit Bay Outlet Bridge's schedule on their own.

Legislators Vincent Esposito and Carmen Gumina have sent a letter to the U.S. Coast Guard, asking that the swing bridge be open to cars during October, giving drivers bridge access for six months every year instead of five.

The bridge's schedule has been the subject of debate since it was built in 1998, as boaters seeking access to the bay, owners of bay-area marinas and commuters lobby for a schedule that suits their interests. The bridge is now open to traffic from Nov. 1 to March 31. The bridge closes to vehicular traffic in order to allow tall boats to travel into the bay, which, according to the Coast Guard, is a "harbor of refuge" for boats that are in trouble on Lake Ontario.

The Democratic legislators also are seeking \$8 million in federal funds for a study of a long-term solution that would accommodate boats and cars throughout the year.

Esposito, D-Irondequoit, and Gumina, D-Webster, submitted legislation, called a referral, that would have asked the Coast Guard to keep the bridge open an extra month, but Legislature President Wayne Zyra, R-Sweden, said it was out of order and rejected it before it could be debated.

"It's a referral that has to do with an authority that we have no control over," Zyra said.

Democrats are quick to point out that nine years ago, when a schedule change — to open the bridge to cars in November — was requested by Republican lawmakers, the measure made it to the legislature floor and was passed.

"This seems like a pretty obvious case of a double standard," Esposito said.

Zyra said he wasn't president in 2000 and can't speak to that referral but that if he detects something that is in conflict with the county charter, as he did in this case, he consults with the county's legal counsel for advice.

Legislature Majority Leader Dan Quatro, R-Webster, said he's looking for a permanent solution, not for the bridge to be opened another month. He also said he didn't ask Zyra to deny the referral.

Fifteen legislature seats are up for a vote this fall, and Democrats are angling for an opportunity to control the chamber after 16 years out of power.

The Republican leadership's latest action follows a series of rejections of at least nine Democratic

referrals during the current two-year term, many because Republicans had submitted similar legislation.

A rejection means that before lawmakers could debate a referral in committee or bring it to the floor for a vote, Zyra threw it out.

The rejected referrals include one calling for the 10 county documents that are most requested through the Freedom of Information law to be posted online and another that would have created a committee to have oversight of Renaissance Square spending.

Quatro said there's "plenty of evidence" that Republicans are willing to work with Democrats, including legislation banning text messaging and examining a four-day work week for county employees, both of which passed with sponsors from both parties.

Though Esposito is pursuing the same goal through a different route, he is still disappointed that the referral won't be debated by his colleagues.

"I didn't understand how any individual person could deny the introduction of a referral for consideration by another independently elected lawmaker," he said.

Republicans and Democrats agree that legislature approval isn't necessary to change the bridge hours. A group of lawmakers, including U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer, a Democrat; Rep. Dan Maffei, D-DeWitt; and state Sen. James Alesi, R-Perinton, signed onto the letter requesting the change.

The Coast Guard, however, isn't inclined to change the schedule.

"Unless there's a proposal to replace the swing bridge with a drawbridge, the November to April schedule will remain," Petty Officer Bill Colclough said, even though the Coast Guard hadn't received the letter yet.

A drawbridge would accommodate vehicle traffic but could be raised to make way for boats.

Maffei said he would seek a meeting with the Coast Guard to discuss their reasons for resisting the change.

"The United States Coast Guard works for the American people, not the other way around," he said.

As for the \$8 million in federal funds, Maffei said he would work on getting them but couldn't promise it would be funded this year.

[JTERRERI@DemocratandChronicle.com](mailto:JTERRERI@DemocratandChronicle.com)

---