

With new budget comes speculation over political punishment

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The City Council meets Thursday to enact a budget for the fiscal year that begins Friday -- amid fevered speculation over which members might suffer political payback for having defied Speaker Gifford Miller.

Internal tensions already were apparent Wednesday.

Councilman David Yassky (D-Brooklyn), who last week sided against Miller (D-Manhattan) on a trash-policy bill, was removed as top sponsor of a high-profile bill to use hybrid gas-electric cars as city taxis.

Suddenly, Transportation Committee Chairman John Liu (D-Queens), a supporter of the measure -- also due to be approved Thursday -- became its lead sponsor.

Miller and Yassky stopped short of an open fight. Yassky said, "I'm delighted that we're taking this great leap forward toward clean air."

Miller and Mayor Michael Bloomberg shook hands Tuesday on the final outline of a \$50-billion budget plan that includes \$229 million in spending to restore and add to special programs for members' districts.

Usually the handshake prompts an immediate flurry to print bills and vote up the budget in the council, but this year, Miller's last as speaker, it did not.

Lists that tell community groups and nonprofits and their City Hall lobbyists if their programs were funded and for how much were not due out until Thursday morning, said Finance Committee Chairman David Weprin.

Councilman Tony Avella (D-Bayside), who's bucked the speaker before, said he wasn't surprised by rumors Miller would punish those who dealt him his trash defeat.

"I had heard that Miller was threatening members if they voted for the garbage proposal and against him, that they would suffer when it comes to member items," Avella said.

But Miller allies say rather than cut programs and hurt citizens, the speaker would likely just deny publicly crediting the spending to members he deems undeserving. He might instead let local interest groups know that others got them the funding.

Besides, a Miller loyalist warned, Bloomberg allies in the council may have gotten their member items funded already by the mayor -- "so we're just not going to let them double-dip."

"You can't please everyone," the source said.

Of the speculation, Miller said at a City Hall news conference: "I look at all budget decisions through one lens, and that is what is in the best interests of all New Yorkers."