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Yankee Stadium Burdens Mayor's Campaign

By [DAVID M. HALBFINGER](#)

With a vote set on Friday on whether to extend \$372 million in additional tax-free financing for the new Yankee Stadium, challengers to Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#) are trying to halt the subsidies. State lawmakers have subpoenaed team and city officials to an emergency hearing on Wednesday, and what once looked like a gleaming example of the mayor's financial skill is suddenly looking like one of his biggest vulnerabilities.

On Tuesday, City Comptroller [William C. Thompson Jr.](#) accused the mayor of mismanagement and demanded a postponement of Friday's vote by the city's Industrial Development Agency.

Mr. Thompson, a member of the agency's board who is running for mayor this year, voted in 2006 to issue nearly \$1 billion in bonds to pay for the stadium. But cost overruns, extras and "financial incompetence," he said, had turned the Bronx ballpark project into "simply a bad deal for New York," and "at a time when we can least afford it."

Mr. Thompson's likely Democratic rival in the race, Representative [Anthony D. Weiner](#), said on Monday that "enough is enough" and that the city had more than amply subsidized the stadium by providing, along with the state, \$500 million in tax breaks for the team.

And in a swipe at the team's costly player acquisitions this winter, as well as the stadium's expensive amenities, including a \$10 million video board, he added: "Maybe [C. C. Sabathia](#) can buy the big-screen TVs."

Voters may recall a similar controversy: four years ago, Mr. Bloomberg's push for a West Side stadium gave his Democratic opponent what seemed like a huge campaign issue — until the stadium project was killed by state legislative leaders, and the issue quickly evaporated.

What could give the stadium issue traction this year, however, is the city's dire financial condition — presenting a stark contrast between struggling, insecure New Yorkers who don't earn major league salaries, and the hundreds of millions of dollars the new stadium complex is costing them.

"Bloomberg is the businessman mayor, that's been his big claim to competence, and here they're whacking him where he is the strongest," said Maurice Carroll, director of the [Quinnipiac University](#) Polling Institute.

"My guess is this won't be the end of it by a long shot," he added. "These are tough economic times, people are being told we've got to economize, we've got to tighten our belts, and the Yankees are blowing money by the carload for players."

Having the Industrial Development Agency issue the bonds is desirable to the Yankees because the team would pay tens of millions of dollars less in interest, since payments to bondholders are exempt from city, state and federal taxes.

A spokesman for the mayor, Andrew Brent, dismissed Mr. Thompson's attack as "political theater."

Mr. Bloomberg is already distancing himself from the more controversial parts of the deal with the Yankees. After embarrassing e-mail messages surfaced that showed his aides zealously pursuing a luxury suite in the new stadium, his administration announced that it would give the luxury box back to the Yankees in exchange for payments of at least \$100,000 a year.

But in a news conference on Tuesday, Mr. Thompson seized on that move. He said the city had given away too much to get the suite in the first place, including 250 parking spots worth \$500,000 a year, and \$750,000 in yearly revenue from three billboards that the Yankees hope to use for advertising.

Mr. Thompson said the city's capital outlays for the stadium complex were originally estimated at \$129 million but had jumped to \$325 million, including an extra \$12 million for a park on the roof of a garage, and \$5 million in work on a recreation building because early estimates omitted the cost of its interiors.

Randy Levine, president of the Yankees, said on Tuesday that the team expected to recover at least \$550,000 for the city by reselling the suite on the open market, but that the \$100,000 was a "sign of good faith" in case the luxury-suite market collapsed entirely.

Mr. Levine — who, along with Seth W. Pinsky, president of the Industrial Development Agency, is to testify under subpoena on Thursday at a hearing called by Assemblymen [Richard L. Brodsky](#) and James F. Brennan — went further, disputing Mr. Thompson's numbers on the billboards and other items, and accusing him of playing politics with a project that he said had created thousands of construction jobs.

"Surprise, surprise — Billy Thompson is running for mayor," Mr. Levine said. "Billy voted for this deal in the beginning, I continually briefed him, and only after the term-limits law does he now decide to criticize the deal. What a

coincidence.”

Michael Barbaro contributed reporting.

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