

THE FAM I- LY MAN

In the first of a series of interviews with Hell's Kitchen's most prominent politicians, **Claudia Chung** talks to State Senator **Brad Hoylman** about parenthood, gentrification, and Trump

Photograph: Nacho Guevara



This page: Senator Hoylman with husband David Sigal and daughter Silvia. Plus bunny.

S

tate Senator Brad Madison Hoylman looks like your typical politician. Tall, handsome, dressed in perfectly pressed suits with power ties. His hands move with ease as he offers to shake your hand. His smile is warm, yet a tad suspicious. And he looks directly into your eyes as if he is trying to hypnotize you into believing: "Yes, friend. Trust in me."

When researching Hoylman, one can't help but be impressed. Born and raised in rural West Virginia, the youngest of six children, he attended public schools through college, won a Rhodes scholarship, and put himself through Harvard Law School. As a state senator representing New York's District 27th, which includes Hell's Kitchen, he promises he wants what we want. He cares about what we care about. Better public schools, affordable housing, neighborhood preservation, more open spaces, keeping transit fares low ...

"Daddy! Daddy!" The spell is broken.

Clinging to Hoylman's leg is Silvia, his young daughter with filmmaker husband David Sigal. Watching Hoylman with his daughter is like a mash-up of *The Candidate* and *Mr. Mom*. Accessorizing his suit and tie is a tiny pink patterned backpack. Instead of a cell phone, he carries around a stuffed pink version of Velveteen Rabbit – raggedy with use and love. And in-between posing for our cameras, Hoylman swings his little girl around while messing up his perfectly coiffed hair.

"Can you hand me the hair brush," he asks his little girl. With giggles and a wide smile, Silvia hands her daddy a pink hairbrush that she had thrown into a water fountain only moments before. The family man.

"Urban life is expensive," he says of family living in Manhattan. "New York is one of the most expensive cities in

the world. The city needs affordable housing. These homes [pointing to buildings around us on 11th Avenue and 48th Street] in glass high rises just can't be for millionaires."

A long-time advocate of tenants' rights, neighborhood preservation and open community spaces, he notes that "neighborhoods like Hell's Kitchen need to be defended." He's also a keen advocate for public transportation. "We don't have a car. We use public transportation. It's wonderfully convenient and leaves more money in our pockets."

One pet peeve: the new Hudson Yards station on the 7 line. "It should not be leaking already."

"Silvia, smile! We'll get you an ice-cream sandwich later," promise her dads.

Just this summer, Hoylman joined other Hell's Kitchen officials celebrating the reopening of Ramone Aponte Park on West 47th Street, which has received a \$1.3 million face-lift. The project opened up the space, added a spray shower, a new play unit and house, swings and benches. To top off the makeover, the works also addressed some drainage issues by installing a sustainable rain garden.

"Raising a child in Manhattan is like being a kid in a candy store. There's always something to do," he says. "We like to explore different neighborhoods – restaurants, retail shops and parks. Hell's Kitchen is always evolving, from its storied past to new development that's going on right now."

His family's favorite spots? Well, he likes all of them: long-established Amy's Bread on 9th Avenue to newcomer Meme on 10th. He even halts our conversation about Mayor DeBlasio [more on that later] mid-sentence to say: "You can't talk about Hell's Kitchen and not mention Rudy's."

He's also a big supporter of the 52nd Street Project. And Hoylman and Sigal are frequent theater goers. "We managed to see *Hamilton*. We are now all Ham heads," he says proudly of his family. And others? "I will have to ask my husband but I think it was *Disaster!*"

"Daddy again! Daddy again!" Without missing a beat, Hoylman is on his feet and the little girl goes flying.

When I ask him about the LinkNYC wifi kiosks all over Hell's Kitchen and Broadway, and if he thinks they serve a purpose, Hoylman cautiously says they do. "We are replacing outdated payphones with wifi. Everyone is on their devices. It's crucial to bring wifi to those who

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don't have access at home and to the residents. It's free."

LinkNYC has had a rocky start and continues to be controversial. From the homeless and teens skipping school to watch porn on its screens to the sidewalk congestion caused by those camping out next to the kiosks, the first round of installments has been mostly unwelcomed by locals. [Internet porn watching has since been resolved with a new filtering system, much to the grumbling of a few patrons.]

As a Hell's Kitchen resident myself, when I say that I've only seen the machine properly used twice while the rest are used as home entertainment systems for drifters and homeless, Hoylman says his office has yet to receive any complaints. But he hopes his constituents will let him know how it's affecting their lives.

"As an idea, it's good," he concludes. "It's too early to tell. We have to give it time. But the jury is still out."

"If you want your dollar, you will have to sit still," says Sigal to Silvia, who is squirming in between her two dads.

Elected in 2012, New York's only openly gay state senator is still considered a newcomer, bearing in mind some senators have served for decades. But his time in the political arena coincides with this year's presidential election, which feels more like the Wild Wild West than democracy at work. This year, along with nine other gay and lesbian New York elected officials, Hoylman endorsed Hillary Clinton. "Her experience as First Lady, Senator and Secretary of State makes her the most qualified candidate."

As much as Hoylman supports Clinton, he detests Donald Trump. "Trump belongs on a reality show, not the Oval Office," he says. "His name is on a few atrocious real estate projects in New York City, but Trump does not represent my New York. His notion of building a wall around a country..." Hoylman pauses to collect his words. "Trump is a clown in a nice suit," he concludes.

His thoughts on His Honor? Since becoming Mayor, Bill DeBlasio held his first Town Hall in Staten Island just this past April. Hoylman would like to see him do more. "He should be holding more town halls," he says. As public officials, we need to "hear from the city's residents and get their feedback" to better serve the city.

With Silvia safely at the toy store with Sigal and our afternoon coming to a close, I ask Hoylman if he has any final thoughts. He looks into my eyes and says: "I wasn't born a New Yorker, but I plan on dying one."