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## The Week That Was

02-16-18

### 1. Howe Are You Doing?

*Our Spin:*

"The Sopranos, Herbie, Ziti" and "your under arrest." Not even Tony Soprano managed to break the law while on the witness stand but Todd Howe did. Having pled guilty to eight felonies he decided to confess to his ninth while on cross examination and instead of returning to his new gig as groundskeeper in Idaho, he will return to the somewhat more Spartan environment of the Manhattan Correctional Center.

*The Story:*

The prosecution's star witness finished his testimony today in the bribery and corruption trial against former top Cuomo aide Joseph Percoco and three businessmen. Howe has pleaded guilty to eight felonies in connection with the case.

After seven days on the witness stand, including one day in which his testimony got him arrested and thrown in jail at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Manhattan, Howe left the stand in tears. "My ultimate goal was to help my family, help myself, not go to jail," Howe said, tearing up. "And be honest and truthful, because, at the end of the day, that's the most important to my family."

In his seven days on the stand, which ended late Thursday afternoon, Mr. Howe described a world of back-room schemes and deals that would be the envy of most Hollywood producers. And in doing so, he has also come to embody a sort of one-man public relations nightmare for Governor Cuomo, whose name has been omnipresent throughout the trial.

Howe said today he is not certain of the status of his cooperation agreement with prosecutors. The judge, Valerie Caproni, said prosecutors were not permitted to speak with him while he remained under cross-examination.

Caproni sent Howe off despite a defense lawyer's attempt to have another opportunity to interview him on his arrest. "Mr. Howe, go back to Idaho," Caproni said. "Oh no. Go back to the MCC, actually."

[NY Post](http://NYPost.com)  
[Syracuse.com](http://Syracuse.com)

### 2. In the Dark of Night

*Our Spin:*

The Governor's 30-day amendments to his budget proposal were released just before the midnight deadline. Perhaps the Executive did not want the bright light to shine on his controversial proposals of congestion pricing, a payroll tax and an attempted expansion of "charitable deductions," in lieu of local taxes.

*The Story:*

Additions to Governor Cuomo's executive budget were released online late Thursday evening, with the clearest proposal to date, to create a congestion pricing system in Manhattan.

The budget amendment would hand the issue to the state Department of Transportation and Department of Motor Vehicles "to jointly perform a comprehensive study as well as make recommendations regarding the impact on

congestion in the Borough of Manhattan from the operation of commuter, intercity, charter and sightseeing buses.”

Outlined in the proposal, New York City would install and operate cameras below 60th Street in Manhattan in order to better enforce “block the box” traffic laws. Meanwhile, the Fix NYC recommendations would be adopted to install uniform standards and equipment in for-hire vehicles in order to collect a surcharge on rides.

The Governor’s budget amendments also call for a decoupling from the new federal deductibility caps. While the state has historically patterned deductions on the federal rules, there is no requirement to do so and Cuomo doesn’t want to cap state deductions like the federal ones. The GOP-controlled state Senate has already voted to do that.

Fearing people from areas like Westchester and Long Island leaving for lower-tax states, Cuomo wants employers to be allowed to swap state income taxes for an employee-paid payroll tax which remains fully deductible. Under the plan, employees would get lower gross pay but pay no state income taxes, as that cost would be shifted to the employer’s payroll tax.

For the property and school taxes, Cuomo wants to allow homeowners to make charitable contributions toward, say, their local school district, which could then lower their actual school taxes.

These tax structures are complicated and, observers have said they could require a good deal of work by employers and local governments and schools to enact. They wouldn’t be mandatory however.

[Times Union](#)  
[State of Politics](#)

### 3. The Grinch Who Stole the Olympics

*Our Spin:*

Here at FWC we are all about GO USA! Bring home the Gold! Our friend Senator Gianaris however is all about go MTA! Bring home the strap hangers. Oh well, to each

his own, but remember Senator, we Upstaters like tracks too, just bobsled ones.

*The Story:*

Winter athletes and their neighbors in the Adirondack Mountains have long praised Albany for funneling subsidies to the upstate Olympic Training Facility. But last year some downstate lawmakers criticized Governor Cuomo for diverting almost \$5 million from the 2016 MTA budget to the Olympic Regional Development Authority (ORDA), the quasi-state agency that manages Lake Placid’s Olympic venues.

“The MTA is supposed to be for the mass transit system here in New York City and its surrounding suburbs, and yet millions of dollars were going upstate to finance a ski resort,” said state Sen. Michael Gianaris (D-Astoria). “It struck a lot of us as odd, especially at a time when the MTA is in a desperate situation. The trains are breaking down. They’re not running on time. Delays are increasing by the day.” However, it’s worth noting, \$5 million is a tiny fraction of the nearly \$7 billion Albany sends to the MTA annually.

If you ask Jon Lundin, spokesman for ORDA, those state subsidies aren’t just paying for a bobsled track, or an ice arena, or a speed skating oval. He said those state funds are investments in Olympic gold. “If you want to become a Winter Olympian, at some point during a stage of your development you’re going to wind up here in Lake Placid,” Lundin said.

The bobsled/luge/skeleton track in Lake Placid is one of just two Olympic-sized bobsled/luge/skeleton tracks in the entire country. The other one is in Park City, Utah -- itself the site of the 2002 Olympic Winter Games. There are only four such tracks in all of North America.

“The fact that we have one so close to home, it’s a real blessing,” Church said.

[NBC 4](#)

