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HEADLINE: Bruno, Silver face stadium retribution;
Proponents speak loudly of payback

BYLINE: Anne Michaud

BODY:

With the clock running out on a plan for a West Side stadium, insiders are starting to threaten political retribution against the two powerful lawmakers holding it up: Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno.

Mr. Bruno, a Republican, may be the most exposed. Stadium proponents in the construction industry--among the top donors to Senate Republicans--are warning that they would withdraw support for candidates in 2006 and might back Democratic challengers. Mr. Bruno would forfeit his leadership position if the Republicans lose their four-seat majority.

On the other side of the aisle, the Democratic Mr. Silver risks offending key political allies. Assemblyman Ruben Diaz Jr. made that clear when he gave an impassioned speech at a recent Black and Puerto Rican Caucus meeting, charging the Assembly with failing to support a project that benefits minorities. He noted that 50% of black men in the city are unemployed.

"Potentially there will be a lot of payback if the stadium is not built," says the Rev. Al Sharpton, who has endorsed the project. "That could come back to bite a few people in the backside politically."

The stadium has become a line-in-the-sand issue in city politics, where the key players are savvy operators who remember their friends and punish their enemies.

At stake are a jobs program and incentives for women- and minority-owned businesses connected with the \$2.2 billion project. The stadium is part of a West Side development plan that includes new convention space, office towers, residential units and the extension of the No. 7 subway, all of which could expand New York's tax base for generations.

The stadium would not only bring Jets football back to New York, but it would also allow the city to host the 2010 Super Bowl and, if the city's bid is accepted, the 2012 Olympics.

Crucial vote coming soon

Opponents charge that the project would suck up city resources at a time when New York is facing budget deficits, and that the stadium would tangle West Side traffic and possibly depress economic development in the neighborhood. They say the threats of political retribution are simply a way to raise the stakes this week, as a crucial vote may come as soon as June 3.

Proxies for Mr. Silver, Mr. Bruno and Gov. George Pataki must vote unanimously to approve public spending for the project. While Mr. Pataki has made his support of it clear, the other two

leaders have held out.

Labor chiefs are not admitting as much in public, but behind the scenes in Albany, people working on their behalf are bluntly talking revenge. "With the Republicans holding onto a majority by a thread, the support of organized labor can make all the difference," says one stadium advocate.

Traditionally, labor and construction companies have supported Republicans in the Senate and Democrats in the Assembly--helping the leader of each house to retain his majority. In the 62-member Senate, Republicans lost three seats in the last election, leaving them with 35.

The New York Building & Construction Trades Council, which represents labor unions, plans to factor in lawmakers' positions on the stadium when dispensing campaign donations for the legislative elections, says council President Edward Malloy. The council is the second-largest contributor statewide, giving \$1 million to Assembly Democrats and Senate Republicans. Its member unions make additional donations along the same party lines.

Eyes on Silver

One stadium lobbyist raised the specter of a coup attempt against Mr. Silver, saying that the 43-member minority caucus is eager to install one of its own. Bronx Democrat Peter Rivera is being mentioned.

"Shelly's got to be very careful of his (black and Puerto Rican) minority caucus," the lobbyist says. "They're starting to get hungry for a minority speaker."

Mr. Silver's office says he has good relationships with both the construction industry and the caucus. Mr. Bruno's spokesman declined to comment.

Some dismiss revenge talk as so much chest-thumping. All told, pro-stadium forces would be no happier installing Senate Democrats in power, a group that is split on the West Side project. Mr. Silver would be difficult to unseat, especially after wresting an \$800 million plan to revitalize downtown Manhattan from Mr. Pataki and Mayor Michael Bloomberg last week. The governor and mayor are seeking Mr. Silver's support for the stadium.

Still, should Mr. Silver disappoint, he'll have to confront rivals with long memories.

"Political retribution is a time-honored tradition," says Douglas Muzzio, a political science professor at Baruch College. "Right now, there's a lot of anger. Whether this can be sustained and converted into punishment remains to be seen."