



A message from  
 Assemblywoman  
**SANDY  
 GALEF**

**EDUCATION FORUM**  
 Thursday, April 29<sup>th</sup>

SPRING 2010

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Dear Constituent,

Over the past three months, I have been in Albany, Westchester or Putnam listening to your concerns at my town meetings, open houses, in-person meetings, by phone or by e-mail, and I have been working on a variety of ways to address them. As you are aware, the economy is foremost on people's minds and my attention is squarely focused on improvements we can make to government to reduce overall costs and cut back in all areas to maintain a balanced state budget.

Decisions have not been easy. Many of the valuable services we have worked so hard to build up in the good years are now bearing the brunt of severe cuts. These cuts are necessary as state revenue is not available to fully support programs at their current levels. Government must downsize. This affects everyone, from our neediest, to our disabled, to our school children, to ourselves.

In the past year and a half, we have reduced the state workforce by over 5,825 positions. Just like we do at home, we have had to find ways to do more with less. I have been focusing on the recommendations from some of our state commissions which we put in place to study high costs. Those recommendations include finding ways to share and consolidate local government and schools to create property tax savings.

My forums over the past year and a half have focused on shared purchasing; local government efficiency grants offered by the state; legislation that allows community members to petition governments and schools to consolidate; sharing and consolidating local justice courts, highway departments and police forces; and property valuations and their impact on counties' shares of state dollars. Local governments are starting to make progress in these areas. If you have not had an opportunity to attend these meetings, I encourage you to look at some of the information available in this newsletter and on my NYS Assembly web page.

I will continue my work to reform government, improve transparency and accountability, reduce mandates, restructure how we deliver services, and cut waste so that all of us in New York State will remain well positioned to grow and thrive as the economy improves. I encourage you to continue to share your thoughts and suggestions with me on this important goal.

Sincerely,

Sandy Galef  
 Member of the Assembly

Assemblywoman Sandy Galef's  
**2010 EDUCATION  
 FORUM**

with  
 New York State Education Commissioner  
**Dr. David M. Steiner**

**Thursday, April 29<sup>th</sup>**  
**7:00 - 9:00 p.m.**

Cortlandt Town Hall  
 1 Heady Street, Cortlandt Manor

Topics to Discuss with the New Commissioner:

**Goals & Priorities for New York State**  
**Changes to State Standards and Testing**  
**Mandate Relief**

**Race to the Top Federal Funding for New York**  
**Sharing & Consolidation of Schools and Services**  
**Special Education, Early Childhood Education**

**PUBLIC Q & A Session will follow**



David M. Steiner was appointed by the Board of Regents as President of the University of the State of New York and Commissioner of Education in October 2009. Most recently the Dean of the School of Education at Hunter College CUNY, he previously served as Director of Arts Education at the National Endowment for the Arts and also Chairman of the Department of Education Policy at Boston University. Dr. Steiner has a Ph.D. in political science from Harvard University and a B.A. and M.A. in philosophy, politics and economics from Balliol College at Oxford University.

**Education Forum Sponsors:** Westchester Putnam School Boards Association (WPSBA), Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES, Carmel Central School District (CSD), Croton-Harmon Union Free School District (UFSD), Garrison UFSD, Ossining UFSD, Peekskill City School District, Westchester East Putnam Region PTA, Pleasantville SEPTA (Special Education PTA), NYASP (NY Association of School Psychologists), Westchester County Association, The Business Council of Westchester, League of Women Voters of Westchester.

# Assemblywoman Sandy Galef's January 2010 Survey Results

Below represents the results of the 732 responses I received from you to the Constituent Questionnaire on the back of my January Newsletter. I thank those of you who submitted these responses. Your input is extremely valuable to me, as it allows me to better address the pressing issues of today keeping your opinions in mind. Here are the percentage results for both yes and no responses as of March 1, 2010.

QUESTION	YES	NO
1. Should there be a cap on state spending based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI)?	84%	16%
2. Would you support a freeze in state spending for the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 budget years?	85%	15%
3. Would you support my bill calling for removing member items (i.e. legislator's discretionary spending, also known as earmarks or "pork") from the 2010-11 budget?	97%	3%
4. Would you restore the STAR rebate check if it meant raising state taxes?	46%	54%
5. Do you favor the continuation of the new income tax rates on people making \$200,000 and above?	70%	30%
6. Do you believe that there is inequity in property assessments in your community?	72%	28%
7. Are you in favor of county wide reassessment of property to curtail the cost of court challenges and offer more equity in taxation?	69%	31%
8. Should we amend the law to allow more than the 200 charter schools already permitted in New York State?	55%	45%
9. Would you support a stricter law on driving while text messaging that would make it a first offense rather than a second offense?	92%	8%
10. Would you support the merging of local courts and/or developing a larger regional court system?	81%	19%
11. Are you in favor of a unicameral (one house) legislature?	48%	52%
12. Should we call for a New York State Constitutional Convention before the next one is scheduled (2017)?	64%	36%

## My Comments on Your Responses to My Survey

### Question #1

There is a proposal which I support which would use the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to control state spending. This proposal has been tied together with a circuit breaker property tax program. The circuit breaker proposal looks at property taxes in relation to one's income, and caps the amount at a certain percentage based on ability to pay instead of property value alone. I have separately introduced circuit breaker legislation and will continue to push for property tax relief, as well as capping state spending based on the CPI.

### Question #2

Although this newsletter was printed before the state budget passed, I absolutely agree with you that a freeze in state spending is necessary. We are working hard to cut spending in many areas of the budget, including the size of state government. A number of state agencies will be combined to save money.

### Question #3

As you will see on the back page of this newsletter, I am actively advocating that the legislature eliminate member items for the upcoming budget year. I agree with you that this year they should not be distributed at all, given the current fiscal crisis. I introduced legislation, A.9427, which would eliminate member items for the 2010-11 budget. I have never taken member items and believe the system in which they are distributed is inherently flawed.

### Question #8

As you may know, the current charter school cap created a lot of controversy while New York State was applying for the Fed-

eral "Race to the Top" program. If our state wins, we would receive upwards of \$700 million from the federal government for education funding. One of the suggestions to help our application was to amend the charter school cap, to either raise the amount of charter schools or eliminate the cap completely. There was no consensus on the charter school issue at this time, but we are currently finalists for the first round of funding, and we will see where we stand in June when the deadline for the next round is set.

### Question #9

I fully support making text messaging while driving a first offense rather than a second offense. I am currently a co-sponsor of A.2453, which would do just that. If you would like to view this bill, please visit the Assembly homepage at [www.assembly.state.ny.us](http://www.assembly.state.ny.us) and enter the bill number under the "Quick Bill Search" box.

### Question #10

Please refer to my comments on the next page of the newsletter. I do support this concept and recently held a town hall meeting on why local court consolidation is beneficial.

### Question #12

I believe that a New York Constitutional Convention should be held before 2017. Some very important state issues must be addressed, including the order of succession of power of elected officials. As you know, Governor Paterson appointed a Lieutenant Governor last July and a lawsuit developed over the constitutionality of that appointment. I have also introduced legislation, A.5277, which would prohibit elected officials from serving as delegates to a constitutional convention.

# Update on Municipalities & Counties in My District Working Hard to Share Services

In February 2009, I invited Municipal and County leaders to a roundtable to discuss sharing services and consolidation. Some municipalities have provided me an update on their progress in the area of sharing since then. The State also offers a grant program through the Department of State to encourage municipalities, schools and libraries to study and implement shared services initiatives. Here is a sample of what is happening in my assembly district to support efficiencies and savings. I will continue to keep you informed about local initiatives in future newsletters and on my Assembly web page, and I encourage you to follow up with your local elected officials to find out more.

- **Putnam County** has applied for a grant to study expanding municipal group purchasing and procurement, and to include local non-profit agencies as well.
- **Westchester County** along with others, including the **City of Peekskill, Buchanan and Briarcliff Schools**, has applied for a Shared Services grant to study how they can share valuable GIS mapping services which could generate savings. Local governments and schools are limited in their abilities to develop these programs on their own.
- **The Villages of Ossining & Briarcliff Manor and the Town of Ossining** are continuing to use grant money to study consolidating police departments, highway and public works services, and municipal justice courts.
- **The Village of Croton** has joined the Northern Westchester Energy Action Consortium (NWEAC) along with the Towns of Cortlandt and Ossining, and the Village of Ossining and 10 other municipalities to collaborate on energy efficiency and conservation, waste management and other regional approaches to environmental issues.
- **Philipstown** has started exploring court consolidation with other local justice courts.

## Recent Local Government Efficiency Grants awarded through the NYS Department of State



*In January, I joined New York Secretary of State Lorraine Cortes-Vazquez, Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, and local elected officials to announce the Secretary of State's latest round of Local Government Efficiency Grants. These grants are awarded to local municipalities to study ways that they can become more efficient by sharing services or consolidating.*

**Putnam-Northern Westchester BOCES for a Shared Out-of-District Transportation Project – \$30,500 awarded** towards the total project cost of **\$33,900**. Putnam-Northern Westchester BOCES will conduct a feasibility study to determine the potential for lowering costs of mandated transportation to out-of-district private schools and to schools for students with disabilities by sharing transportation among the 18 school districts of the Putnam/Northern Westchester region.

**Briarcliff Manor for a Consolidated Water Services Analysis of the Villages of Sleepy Hollow, Tarrytown and Briarcliff Manor – \$26,000 awarded** towards the total project cost of **\$60,000**. The Villages of Sleepy Hollow, Tarrytown and Briarcliff Manor will conduct a feasibility study to evaluate the current condition of each village's drinking water system and examine consolidating the three water departments into one to save costs and improve service delivery and efficiency.

## Sharing Town and Village Courts



*From left to right: Chief Counsel, Special Commission on the Future of NYS Courts Elliot Moskowitz, Administrative Judge Alan Scheinkman, Assemblywoman Galef, New York Supreme Court Judge Fran Connolly and Deputy Executive Director, Fund for Modern Courts Denise Kronstadt. These distinguished guests joined me in February to discuss why local court consolidation is important for many reasons, including safety, efficiency, and saving tax dollars.*

This February, I hosted a forum to examine local court consolidation. My invited guests included experts who served on the Special Commission on the Future of the New York State Courts, as well as judges who have worked at a variety of levels and continue to work in our complex court system.

One of the motivations for this discussion was the overwhelming support for court consolidation which you communicated to me in two survey questions on this topic in my recent newsletters.

There are more than 1,800 judges servicing 1,250 justice courts in New York State for an average use of 23 hours per month. Many of our court facilities are aging, and/or do not have proper stenography equipment, docketing systems, or even court clerks. Others are not safe for trying criminal cases, lacking scanners or other means of security. Money is spent to outfit and maintain multiple courthouses, often situated within less than a mile or two of one another. Other times, courts lack these basic judicial necessities, jeopardizing public safety as well as due process. In addition, many courts throughout New York have judges serving who have no formal legal education. Surely we can do better.

One of the speakers at my forum, NYS Supreme Court Justice Fran Connolly, discussed her experience as a Town Court Justice working in night court. The court she presided over shared a courtroom with the local village. If someone was brought in for an arraignment while she was presiding, she was not permitted to hear the case. Instead, policy required that the village justice be contacted, and if he or she were not available, the alternate village justice would be next in line. If no village judge were available, the accused would have to be detained in village jail overnight to wait. All of the associated impacts such as police time, jail time, lost work time for the accused, and transporting detainees, result in excess costs to the municipality, delay the process of justice, and potentially compromise public safety.

Our court system has grown exponentially, much like other branches of government which originated when our state was first founded – in horse and buggy days. The system has not kept up with modern times or with the ability new technology and modern transportation affords us now to downsize and consolidate. We need to put our tax dollars to better use and lower them by creating a more efficient and effective court system. This system should offer appropriate training of judges, 21<sup>st</sup> century facilities for judges, lawyers, prosecutors, defendants, law enforcement officers, and witnesses, and a system that truly supports due process for all.

I heard loud and clear from experts and justices alike that our local courts need an overhaul. I am committed to make changes in our courts which will benefit us all by supporting legislation, and bringing together those who have an understanding of how to improve the process with those who have an interest in doing so. I will continue to advocate on this issue and welcome your feedback and participation in the process.

## Remove Member Items from 2010-11 Budget

I have recently introduced legislation, along with my assembly colleagues, regarding member items, also known as “pork.” I have never taken member items because they are unfairly distributed based on seniority and politics. My bill, A.9427, calls for no member items in the 2010-11 state budget. The state faces a large fiscal deficit that must be closed. The approximately \$200 million appropriated for member items is discretionary and not a fiscal necessity.



*Sandy is joined at a press conference about eliminating member items in the 2010-11 budget. From left to right, Assembly Members George Latimer and Amy Paulin, and from the Business Council of Westchester, Paul Vitale and Dr. Marsha Gordon.*

## Your Cen\$us Participation is Vital for Your Community Let Federal Dollars Follow You

The 2010 United States Census is here. Your participation is critical to ensure that everyone is counted. The federal government uses this information to determine how much money New York will receive, how many seats New York is represented by in the U.S. House of Representatives, and how state funds will be distributed. It is estimated that \$2,700 per person each year, or \$27,000 federal dollars over the 10 years of the life of the Census, follows the Census data to help your local schools, hospitals, roadways, fire and police stations, and more. This money helps offset your local property taxes.

Households should have received a Census questionnaire in March of 2010. The form is the shortest ever, with only 10 questions which can be quickly and easily completed and returned by mail. The form does not ask for proof of citizenship or income level. By federal law, your personal information on your completed Census form must remain confidential for 72 years. It may not be shared with anyone, including the IRS, the FBI, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services, or any other government agency. Please contact my District Office with any questions you may have, or if you did not receive a Census form for your household by April 1<sup>st</sup>.

## My Feelings on Unacceptable Behavior of Elected Officials

I share your frustrations, deep concern and embarrassment over the rash of unacceptable behavior which has been attributed to a slew of elected officials in both parties over the last couple of weeks, and in the past months and years. As elected officials, I believe we have to set an example for those we represent and especially for the impressionable youth in our state. We must hold ourselves to very high standards in our own personal lives as well as in our official duties for which the people elected us. While none of us is perfect, I believe that serving as a role model is part of our job and we must strive to serve as such without compromise. We are not above the laws we make. I believe you deserve excellent representation and honest government service and that is why I choose to work in public service. If there are elected officials who are not willing to live by those higher standards, I question if they are really fit to serve in public office.

## Repeal the Wicks Law

I recently met with Local School Board Officials along with Assemblywoman Amy Paulin and Senator Suzi Oppenheimer to call for New York State to fully repeal the Wicks Law to benefit our schools. The Wicks Law is another unfunded mandate on schools, requiring public construction projects to issue not just one, but four or more contracts to separate contractors for plumbing, electrical, heating and general construction. Studies show that the Wicks Law adds 15%-30% to the cost of construction projects. Repealing this nearly 100-year-old law could annually save school districts approximately \$200 million.



*From left to right: Karen Zevin, Croton School Board President, Willa Brody, Eastchester School Board Member, Senator Suzi Oppenheimer, Assemblywoman Amy Paulin, Assemblywoman Galef, and Lisa Davis, President of the Westchester Putnam School Boards Association at a press conference calling for repeal of Wicks.*

## Air Times for “Speak Out” and “Dear Sandy” TV Shows

### CABLEVISION

Starting April 1, 2010, Cablevision will air **all** episodes as follows:

“Dear Sandy” - Fridays at 9:00 p.m., “Speak Out” - Wednesdays at 8:00 p.m.

### CABLEVISION Channel 15

Briarcliff, Ossining, Scarborough, Buchanan, Cortlandt, Croton, Garrison, Montrose, Peekskill, Philipstown South, Verplanck

### CABLEVISION Channel 74

Lake Peekskill, Putnam Valley

### CABLEVISION Channel 21

Cold Spring, Philipstown

### COMCAST Channel 8

Carmel, Kent, Mahopac & Putnam Valley

“Dear Sandy” - Fridays at 7:30 p.m., “Speak Out” - Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m.

### VERIZON FiOS Customers Public Access Channel

Please check your local listings for specific air times.