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A message from  
Assemblywoman  
**SANDY  
GALEF**

**FIXING ALBANY**  
Reform Roundtable • Thursday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>

LATE SPRING 2010

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Dear Constituent,

I want to thank my constituents who attended my town meetings and those who have been communicating with me about the difficult issues we are dealing with in Albany this year. At the Croton Town Meeting I hosted earlier this year, community members expressed great concern about how our legislature is functioning and what steps we must take in Albany to ensure that our government works better for the people. As a result of that input and my on-going commitment to reform, I am hosting a forum in June called "Fixing Albany...It's About Time" where good government groups and I will be speaking about what steps need to be taken to accomplish this goal.

Reforming Albany has always been one of my priorities. Finally, this issue is getting the attention it deserves from the press, the public and my colleagues. Recently, good government groups have asked legislators to sign a pledge to overhaul our state government. I have included my signed copy in this newsletter so you can see some of the areas they are calling upon us to reform.

On the back of the newsletter, I am once again asking for your valuable feedback specifically on government reform and transparency. What are the areas of government that do not work for you? How do you think we could improve the structure to make it easier to get information, offer feedback, and act on important matters to keep our house in order and keep our state running smoothly?

I have also highlighted some legislation I have introduced which is finally starting to get more broad-based support, and other bills that I endorse which would help fix some of Albany's problems. I encourage you to reach out to other state legislators and ask them to support measures which would change our structure and ensure a more effective, democratic, open and fair process.

Sincerely,

Sandy Galef  
Member of the Assembly

Assemblywoman Sandy Galef  
Hosts a Roundtable on Government Reform

**FIXING ALBANY**  
...It's About Time

Thursday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>  
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

**Croton Village Hall**  
1 Van Wyck Street, Croton-on-Hudson

with

**BARBARA BARTOLETTI**

Legislative Director – League of Women Voters of New York State

**DEANNA BITETTI**

Associate Director – Common Cause/New York

**ALFRED B. DELBELLO**

Former Lieutenant Governor and Chairman of Westchester County Association

**RACHAEL FAUSS**

Policy and Research Manager – Citizens Union of the City of New York

**BLAIR HORNER**

Legislative Director – NY Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG)

Topics to be discussed:

**Holding Government Officials Accountable  
to Higher Ethical Standards**

**Making State Government More Transparent**

**Fairly Allocating Resources Throughout New York State**

**Assuring Accountability for Our Tax Dollars**

**Making Campaigns Work for the People – Not the  
Special Interests**

**Stopping Legislators from Drawing Their Own District Lines**

There will be a Q & A opportunity following the panelists' discussion.

**Contact Information for Forum Participants**

Citizens Union • www.citizensunion.org • (212) 227-0342

Common Cause • www.commoncause.org/newyork • (212) 691-6421

League of Women Voters • www.lwvny.org • (518) 465-4162

NYPIRG • www.nypirg.org • (518) 436-0876

Westchester County Assoc. • www.westchester.org • (914) 948-6444

# PLEDGE FOR CHANGE NEW YORK

It's Time to Make Albany Work for the People

## LET NEW YORKERS KNOW WHAT REFORM ISSUES YOU SUPPORT

New Yorkers are fed up. Scandals have driven from office the former governor, the former comptroller, the former Senate Majority Leader and a growing number of state legislators. Some elected officials are currently under investigation. Many of these abuses of power were rooted in the absence of effective and independent ethics and fiscal watchdogs, tough ethics laws and adequate transparency in government.

Albany must respond by producing concrete reforms to show the public that lawmakers have gotten the message and are working to bolster confidence in state government.

**We urge elected officials to pledge to enact meaningful reforms. Our groups will be publicly releasing the responses we receive. Below, please clearly check the proposals in which you are in agreement (feel free to send us any additional comments):**

### *Restore the public's trust.*

- Ensure that ethics, lobbying and campaign finance watchdogs are independent and powerful.
- End the practice of legislators drawing their own district lines during the redistricting process.
- Provide fairness in allocating legislative resources and "member items," and amend the legislature's rules to create a more open and accountable body.

### *Reform the states finances.*

- Close obsolete public authorities through the creation of a "base closing commission," which would review all authorities and close down obsolete ones.
- Establish an independent fiscal watchdog, along the lines of the Congressional Budget Office.
- Open up the government's budget books and put them on-line, greatly expanding the amount of available information beyond the Comptroller's "Open Book New York."

### *Curb the power of special interests.*

- End "pay to play" for lobbyists and seekers – and receivers – of government contracts by dramatically lowering contribution limits for such donors.
- Require public disclosure of "independent" campaign contributions and close loopholes, such as ones that allow donations by LLCs to be treated as if they were contributions from individuals.
- Bolster the role of small donors in the campaign finance system. For example, a system of public financing enhances the role of small donors.

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

*Ann R. Gifford*

Date 3/30/10

Please fax this form, or email it to Anna Gifford, NYPIRG, 518 432-6178 or [agiff06@gmail.com](mailto:agiff06@gmail.com).  
For more information contact Blair Horner, NYPIRG, at 518 436-0876 x257.

***A Project of the Brennan Center for Justice, Citizens Union of the City of New York, Common Cause/NY, the League of Women Voters/N.Y.S. and the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG)***

*I have signed this pledge because I agree with these recommendations from good government groups. If you agree with this also, call state legislators in other districts to let them know how you feel and encourage them to sign the pledge too.*

*sandy*



*I am pictured here at a press conference with NY Senator José Serrano introducing bills S.7007/A.10116 which propose overhauling the member item process in the legislature (member items are also known as legislative "pork.") For more information on this bill, see page 3 of this newsletter. Pictured from left to right are Dick Dadey - Citizens Union, Barbara Bartoletti - League of Women Voters, Senator Serrano, myself, Blair Horner - NYPIRG, and Assembly colleagues Grace Meng and Amy Paulin.*

# Assemblywoman Galef's Legislative Reform Highlights

## FISCAL REFORM:

### Cutting Costs and Saving Money for New Yorkers

*A5789: End practice of imposing unfunded mandates on local and county governments.*

The State Legislature imposes numerous program and service requirements on local and county governments without fully considering the fiscal impacts. These unfunded mandates require localities already experiencing economic hardship to provide new or significantly expanded programs and services without the funding necessary to carry out these mandates.

*A5984: Ensure that each piece of state legislation includes the cost of the legislation.*

Fiscal impact notes that are currently included in pending legislation are brief statements that often fail to identify the anticipated economic impacts. As a result, legislators vote on bills with little or partial information, and therefore don't have a full understanding of the bill's economic impact on state and local government.

*A10116: Reform member item process so the money is equally distributed and system is transparent.*

The member item process is not equitable, open or efficient in the Senate or Assembly. Some legislators receive large amounts of funding for their districts, while others receive little or no funding. The current system does not include adequate measures to ensure that member item funds are dispersed or used appropriately. This bill would add fairness, transparency, and accountability to a closed and, to the public, mysterious process.

## EDUCATION REFORM:

### Changing the way business is done to cut costs and making the costs more transparent to the public

*A9208: Establish a Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) Restructuring Committee to investigate ways school districts can consolidate and share services.*

New York State's local property taxes are 79% above the national average, and are the highest of the large states in the country. School taxes account for close to 60%, with counties and municipalities contributing about 40% (20% each). Various Commissions studying this problem have recommended that the BOCES model be expanded upon to share and consolidate services, thereby cutting costs. This legislation would accomplish that goal.

*A6338B: Schools and all levels of government must publicize proposed collective bargaining agreements prior to school budget adoption*

The public's right to know and hold elected officials accountable is a hallmark of American democracy. Collective bargaining agreements, including those of school districts, are currently an exception. Collective bargaining agreements covering salaries and benefits of all school district personnel and public employees are made public after the contracts have been ratified by both parties. Salaries and benefits represent about 80% of school costs and a large part of municipal costs. Homeowners then are largely paying taxes to fund salaries and benefits. This legislation would make collective bargaining agreement costs known to the taxpayers who fund the contracts before the final contract is approved.

## ELECTION REFORM:

### Removing conflicts of interest and unfair advantages held by the few

*A6878: Create a non-partisan legislative redistricting commission through a constitutional amendment.*

Currently, the majority parties in the Senate and Assembly have de facto control of drawing the district lines. There have been charges that the redrawing of district lines is a politically charged process widely misused for political purposes. This bill provides for a process far less vulnerable to charges of politicization. It assigns the responsibility for drawing lines not to the Legislature but to a Reapportionment Commission composed of individuals who do not hold elective office.

*A6879: Require the disclosure of campaign contributions to judges by parties and their counsel in an action before those judges.*

Most judges run for office and are therefore dependent upon cam-

aign contributions to wage political campaigns. Many of their contributors are attorneys who appear before them. This has contributed to a public perception that a judge's decision can be influenced by campaign contributions. This bill would make those contributions public so that judicial decisions can be scrutinized.



*Interns and I are hard at work to get out a letter to constituents in response to those who answered my January 2010 newsletter survey (I shared these results in my last newsletter.) For more information about my intern program, please contact Dana Levenberg in my office at (914) 941-1111.*

***These are pieces of legislation my colleagues have introduced which I co-sponsor and for which I will continue to advocate:***

#### LEGISLATIVE REFORM:

##### Enforcing Ethics in the New York State Legislature

*A1542:* Provides that a member shall forfeit his or her retirement rights and benefits (i.e. lose pension benefits) if he or she is convicted of or pleads to certain crimes related to public employment.

*A9472:* Removes public officials from office who are convicted of misdemeanor offenses against any person, which involve physical injury, sexual assault, restraint or intimidation.

#### CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM:

##### Ensuring Fair Elections and Eliminating the Influence of Special Interest Groups

*A477:* Limits the dollar amount of political contributions that lobbyists can give to members of the legislature, and which members can receive from lobbyists.

*A8728:* Strengthens disclosure requirements by requiring public officials to make detailed disclosures about business relationships with lobbyists.

*A8814:* Requires additional disclosures from lobbyists including: campaign contributions to elected officials; existing business relationships or associations with public officials; and the names of family members of a public official, who received over \$500 in pay from a lobbyist and the amount the family member/s received.

#### OPEN GOVERNMENT:

##### Making Public Documents Easily Accessible to the Public

*A3584:* Requires all state public records to be accessible on the Internet.

*A7686:* Requires public bodies which are required to publish their scheduled meetings to post the time and place of their meetings on their internet website, if they have one.

*A9911:* Requires records, such as proposed resolutions, laws, rules, regulations, policies, or amendments scheduled to be presented and discussed by a public body at an open meeting, be made available for review by the public on the public body's website at least 24 hours prior to such meeting and a reasonable number of copies of such records made available prior to or at the meeting.

*A10052:* Requires the secretary of state to compile, make public and keep current certain information about state boards.

# Constituent Questionnaire

## (Room for two respondents)

*As you may know, I always share your collective responses to my questionnaires with my colleagues. I intend to do the same with the results from the survey below. You should know that you are a part of how to fix our state government. I also encourage you to reach out to other legislators and let them know your views about fixing Albany.*

1. In my last poll, 97% of those of you who responded agreed that member items (also known as “pork” or legislator’s discretionary funding) should be removed from the budget in this tight budget year. If member items remain, however, *should the assembly members and senators receive equal shares* of the total apportionment rather than having the money distributed based on seniority or political favoritism as is currently done?

Yes  No

Yes  No

2. *Should assembly and senate districts be determined by an independent redistricting board* as opposed to being determined by the party currently in power, as is the current practice?

Yes  No

Yes  No

3. *Are we at a point where we should consider total or partial public funding of campaigns* as opposed to candidates receiving large donations from special interest groups?

Total Public Funding  Partial Public Funding  
 No Public Funding

Total Public Funding  Partial Public Funding  
 No Public Funding

4. *Should we establish an independent legislative budget office*, like the federal Congressional Budget Office, which would oversee the fiscal impact or total costs of proposed legislation? Currently each house of the legislature has an office that estimates these costs so the Senate might estimate a different cost than the Assembly.

Yes  No

Yes  No

5. If you were a legislator, *would you sign onto the good government groups’ Pledge For Change?* (see page two of this newsletter for a copy of the pledge)

Yes  No

Yes  No

6. On the NYS Senate’s website, there is a way to view legislation, comment on it, and read other collected comments as well, at [www.nysenate.gov/open](http://www.nysenate.gov/open). *Do you think the Assembly should offer a similar option for feedback on our website?*

Yes  No

Yes  No

7. If an elected official is convicted of a violent misdemeanor unrelated to his or her official duties, *do you think he or she should be removed from office?*

Yes  No

Yes  No

8. Do you think that records to be discussed at a public open meeting should be made available to the public 24 hours prior to the meeting on its website and/or in photocopy form at the meeting when the records are to be discussed?

Yes  No

Yes  No

9. In this newsletter, you’ve seen ideas from good government groups and proposals from some legislators about reforming New York. *What are your ideas for improving our state government?* You can include bill numbers or ideas you’ve seen here which you support, or add other ideas of your own. Feel free to attach more pages if needed.

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**E-mail 1:** \_\_\_\_\_

**E-mail 2:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
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*Place  
Stamp  
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Assemblywoman Sandy Galef  
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Ossining, NY 10562-4802