



New York

COMMON CAUSE

Holding Power Accountable

THE ACTIVIST

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Mapping Democracy

By Susan Lerner and Brian Paul

When we at Common Cause/New York decided to draw model redistricting plans for New York State, we wanted to demonstrate what a non-partisan independent process (one that nearly every legislator pledged to support back in 2010) would look like in practice while following all the applicable federal and state constitutional laws.

There’s no question that redistricting is a complicated task with a complex web of laws that must be followed. However, we’ve shown with the Common Cause Reform Maps that these laws are not a barrier to drawing fair districts based on communities of interest. They are not a barrier to following village and school district lines. Neither are they a barrier to keeping districts reasonably compact and to maintaining lower population deviations.

It’s been frustrating to hear some members of LATFOR, (the legislative task force charged with drawing the new district lines), blame politically gerrymandered lines on the requirements of the Voting Rights Act or the one person, one vote rule. We don’t buy it and the public shouldn’t either. Our experience shows that these laws are no impediment to drawing fair districts. Our goal in drawing these maps has been to help improve the district maps that will set the political stage for the next 10 years and to provide a model for improving the future process through a constitutional amendment.

The Common Cause Reform Maps have garnered significant attention and positive comments, from the New York Times, The NY Daily News and Newsday, to radio and tv commentators and the members of the redistricting panel themselves. As we write this, we are in the lull between the conclusion of the final round of public hearings and the release of the Legislature’s final maps. We are waiting to see if the maps will be improved over the highly partisan gerrymandered drafts that were initially released, and if not, whether the Governor will veto the maps. Your calls and letters will be key to how this plays out.

Of course, once the Legislature and the Governor have completed their roles in the redistricting saga for this cycle, the story will not yet be over.

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Amend 2012 By Sam Massol

Since January 21, 2010, corporations have been legally allowed to spend unlimited amounts of money in our elections. This new-found power gives corporations even more influence over public policy than they already have with their armies of hired lobbyists and PAC contributions. Corporations do not have a constitutional right to vote, nor should they have a constitutional right to spend unlimited amounts of money influencing our elections. So even though “we the people” go to the polls and vote for our elected officials, once they are in office they now must work on behalf of the corporate interests that helped elect them -- not the interests of our American families!

Just looking at today’s newspaper shows what a mockery our political system has become thanks to the influence of Super PACS. Citizens United opened the flood gates for corporations to exert the most direct influence on our elections in over a 100 years. These well-funded assaults undermine our democracy. It is urgent that this reckless high court decision be addressed. However only a constitutional amendment will resolve this.

Voters need to have their voices heard now more than ever. A constitutional amendment is the best way to overturn Citizens United and help to restore public confidence in our political system. “Amend 2012” is a bold initiative by Common Cause to give voters a direct opportunity to call for overturning Citizens United by calling for a constitutional amendment. By using

“voter instruction” measures on the ballot in as many states as possible, we can make the change we need across our country.

We urge you to join us in the most important fight of our time!

- Here are some things you can do to help defeat Citizens United:
- Check out and follow our amend 2012 website (www.amend2012.org)
- Sign our petition to support this effort (www.amend2012.org/toolkit)
- Meet with a legislator and share your concerns
- Talk to your friends and family about this issue, being informed is being empowered

It is imperative that we have a federal amendment addressing this issue. Some states have already begun. On February 18th New Mexico became the second state, after Hawaii, to formally urge passage of a constitutional amendment. Dozens of cities, towns, and county councils and boards - including those in New York City, Los Angeles, Oakland, Calif., Boulder, Colo., Missoula, Montana, and Troy, New York - have already passed similar resolutions.

Contact Sam Massol for more information, smassol@commoncause.org or 212-691-6421 x203



“Redistricting and You” continued from page 1

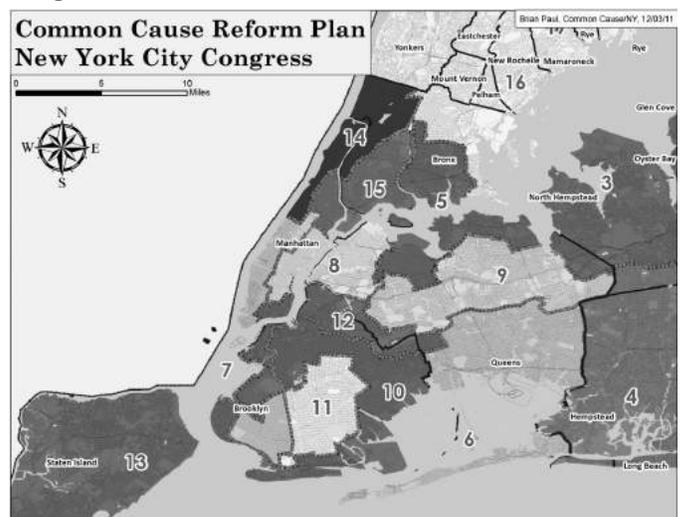
Two lawsuits have already been filed, challenging the maps drawn by LATFOR. In one case, *Favors v. Cuomo*, a Special Master has been appointed to draw congressional district maps and has asked the parties to comment on the Common Cause Reform Congressional Map. Common Cause/NY is monitoring the progress of both lawsuits and will participate as appropriate.

Also essential will be your involvement when we urge the Legislature to pass a constitutional amendment to set up an independent redistricting commission. It will take all of our efforts and that of good government advocates throughout the state to demand that any proposed

amendment provides real reform and that it passes the requisite 2 sessions of the Legislature.

We’ll also be taking the knowledge that we’ve gained working on New York State’s re-districting to help community activists participate in municipal redistricting in places like New York City, Newburgh and Poughkeepsie. These cities will all undertake redistricting for their city councils or county legislatures in 2012.

Check the Common Cause/NY redistricting website for regular updates and action alerts: www.citizensredistrictny.org



Participatory Budgeting in NYC By Brian Paul

Four New York City Council Members are taking part in an exciting experiment in local democracy. Brad Lander (D-Brooklyn), Melissa Mark-Viverito (D-Manhattan), Eric Ulrich (R-Queens) and Jumaane Williams (D-Brooklyn), are engaging in a process called “participatory budgeting” that will allow constituents to develop proposals and vote to decide how over \$6 million in government funding is spent.

Since last fall, constituents in these four districts have met at local neighborhood assemblies and selected delegates and committees to develop specific proposals on how to spend each Council Member’s “capitol discretionary funds.” This includes projects like improvements to schools, parks, libraries, public housing, and other public or community spaces. Constituents are currently meeting in a second round of neighborhood assemblies to propose project ideas and receive feedback on them before a final vote on which projects to fund takes place in March.

This is a groundbreaking initiative. Before this year, participatory budgeting throughout the United States had only been conducted in one Chicago aldermanic district. Participatory budgeting has the potential to be a powerful tool to inspire civic participation, empower citizens, and completely clean up the often dirty and obscure process of allocating legislative members’ discretionary budgets.

That’s why Common Cause/NY is a member of the initiative’s citywide steering committee. We’ve been involved in crafting the rules for the process and have provided detailed demographic maps of each Council District to help constituents decide where projects are most appropriate and needed. So far the process has been a great success and we are anticipating that more City Council Members will come on board next year. To learn more about Participatory Budgeting, visit www.pbnyc.org

2011 Award Dinner



From left to right: Master of Ceremonies Dylan Ratigan, Civic Advocacy Award Recipient Adelaide P. Gomer, Common Cause/NY Board Chair Susan Rubinstein, Presenter Amb. William vanden Heuvel, Common Cause/NY Executive Director Susan Lerner, Democracy in Action Award Recipient Bill Samuels, Presenter Geraldine Laybourne, John Gardner Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient Leo J. Hindery, Jr.

On November 29th, we honored three extraordinary New York leaders in the fight for accountability at its annual awards dinner. Leo Hindery Jr. received the John Gardner Lifetime Achievement Award; Bill Samuels received the Common Cause Democracy in Action Award; and Adelaide Gomer received the Common Cause Civic Advocacy Award. The event was hosted by MSNBC’s Dylan Ratigan and closed by the legendary Bill Moyers. Speeches and pictures are available here: www.commoncause.org/ny/2011awards

Deep Drilling, Deep Pockets – Campaign Contributions by the Natural Gas Industry

By: Brian Paul and Deanna Bitetti

In January 2012, Common Cause/NY published our third “Deep Drilling, Deep Pockets” report on the role of money in politics in the controversial debate about allowing hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) gas drilling in New York State’s Marcellus Shale. As with any important policy decision, we believe that regulation of fracking should be based on objective science in the public interest and we are concerned about the undue influence of private industry dollars.

While our first two reports looked at lobbying expenditures, this third report examines the natural gas industry’s campaign contributions to New York State politicians and parties. We discovered that from January 2007 to October 2011, the industry gave over \$1.34 million in contributions. Top donors included corporations directly involved in the drilling such as Chesapeake Appalachia and National Fuel as well as those involved in the distribution and transmission of Marcellus Gas such as Con Edison and National Grid. Major

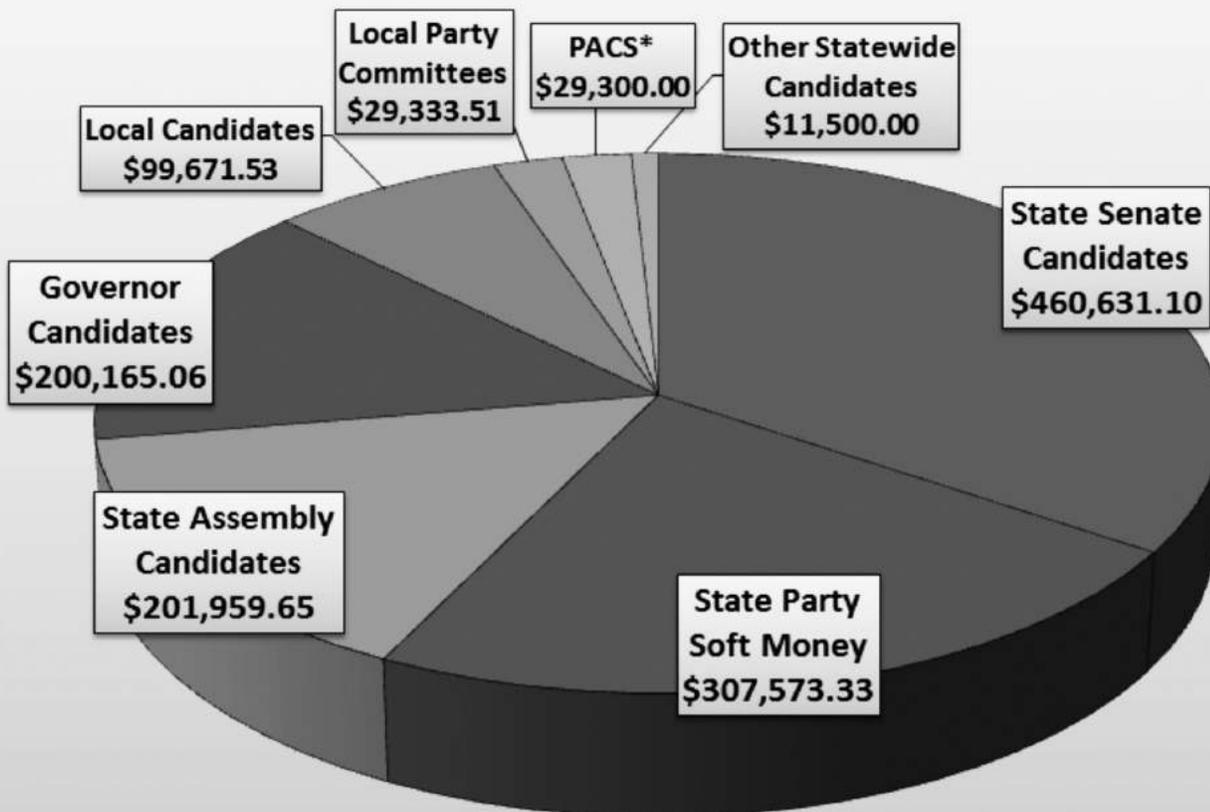
industry associations like the Independent Power Producers of New York (IPPNY) and Independent Oil & Gas Association of New York (IOGA) also gave generously.

The natural gas industry spread contributions throughout the state with almost 75% of the \$1.34 million in contributions going to candidates for the Legislature and the Republican and Democratic “soft money” accounts that are an important means of building influence with the Senate and Assembly leaders.

Overall there appears to be a strategy of targeting lawmakers with key decision making authority. In the Senate, natural gas interests favored Republican candidates and soft money accounts by more than 2 to 1. In the Assembly, natural gas interests donated more to Democratic candidates than Republicans. In addition to targeting the leaders of the Energy Committees in both the Senate and the Assembly, five of the top 10 legislative recipients of natural gas donations are Republican Senators from the Southern Tier and

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Natural Gas Industry Campaign Contributions By Type



Tracking Performance in Government Programs to Encourage Efficiency

By Susan Lerner and Deanna Bitetti

Starting in late 2009, Common Cause/NY convened a roundtable of government officials, advocates, academics and good government groups to discuss performance metrics and reporting for the New York State administered Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Programs (TANF). As good government advocates we are particularly aware of the public's need to understand and evaluate the programs that receive significant state funding and ensure that these programs are working effectively to reach their public policy goals.

One of the more salient and ongoing questions posed by the roundtable was how to measure and monitor the work of the State in serving its neediest citizens. The recent statistics put out by the US Census Bureau reflected the urgency to address the increase in poverty in New York State and manage service delivery of programs meant to stem the tide of households facing poverty in tough economic times. According to a recent New York Times article "From 2009 to 2010, 75,000 city residents were pushed into poverty, increasing the poor population to more than 1.6 million and raising the percentage of New Yorkers living below the official federal poverty line to 20.1 percent, the highest level since 2000...Household income declined among almost all groups — by 5 percent over all since the beginning of the recession in 2007, to \$48,743 in 2010."¹

Governor Cuomo has initiated the Governor's Spending and Government Efficiency Commission (SAGE Commission) - a commission focused on increasing

the capacity to efficiently deliver necessary services. It is our hope that the report we have issued will inform the SAGE Commission's discussions and that our experience with the roundtable will provide insights into improving performance tracking and government efficiency for a program that serves New York State's neediest citizens.

We also believe that providing clearer and more objective performance information should allow the public to better understand the goals of these programs and to engage in a discussion regarding their continuation, improvement, and funding, which is often difficult to accomplish in a highly politicized budgetary environment.

The report received a favorable mention in an editorial in the Buffalo News on January 17, urging the Governor to follow our recommendations. The editorial can be found here: <http://www.buffalonews.com/editorial-page/buffalo-news-editorials/article712780.ece>

The full report can be found on our website, www.commoncause.org/ny/tanf.

¹Sam Roberts, "One in Five New York City Residents Living in Poverty." The New York Times, September 22, 2011. Accessed on October 29, 2011 <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/22/nyregion/one-in-five-new-york-city-residents-living-in-poverty.html>

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"Deep Drilling" continued from page 4

Finger Lakes regions that will be at the epicenter of drilling activity if fracking is approved. On the executive side, the Cuomo-Duffy 2010 campaign was by far the largest gubernatorial recipient of natural gas industry money, receiving over \$150,000 in donations.

This study once again highlights the problems with New York State's lax campaign finance regulations. New

York does not require corporate donors to identify their industry sector or parent companies and also fails to require individual contributors to identify their occupation, employer, and place of business. This makes it very difficult for the public to analyze the impact which special interest campaign dollars may be having on public policy. This simple fix is long overdue.

At the root of the problem, adoption of a public funding of elections program at the New York State level would help increase the number of smaller campaign contributions and shift our campaign finance system away from a dependence on large contributions from special interests.

You can read the full report on our website: www.commoncause.org/ny/DeepDrillingDeepPockets

Executive Director's Message

By: Susan Lerner



Susan Lerner

Dear Common Causers, The last 2 months have been busy, the culmination of the Mapping Democracy program we have been working on for the last year. Our redistricting work has been fascinating and has become virtually all-consuming. The response to the Common Cause Reform Maps has been overwhelming. Newspapers, groups, and activists – even the official map-drawers of the legislative

task force, LATFOR – have acknowledged the contribution which Common Cause/NY has made to the public discourse regarding redistricting. By providing a non-politicized alternative set of district maps, we have shown there is no impediment to drawing fair lines, only a political one.

The attention which the Common Cause Reform Maps have gotten is a tribute to the hard work of our Research and Policy Coordinator, Brian Paul, and the vision and support of the Common Cause/NY Board as well as the myriad supporters around the state who have made fair redistricting a priority issue. A special thanks go to our members Don Goulet of Syracuse, John Keevert and Dick Richards of Rochester, and Sam Magavern of Buffalo who testified on behalf of Common Cause/NY at the official redistricting hearing in each of those cities. They

helped us show the Legislature that it's not just an idle boast when we say that there are Common Causers who care about good government throughout the state!

Redistricting is not the only important reform issue that we're tackling this year. Here in New York, the chances of achieving public funding for state election campaigns, a program we're calling Fair Elections, is better this year than any time in recent memory. Governor Cuomo's support in this area as well will be key. Look for regular updates from us on ways that you can help. We're instituting new ways to keep you up to date on activism opportunities and important issues as they develop.

Together, we'll move reform issues in New York this year!

- Susan

Park 51 and Beyond: Building Community from Controversy By Natalie Chap

From smaller conflicts that play out in local papers and community meetings to international media frenzies, Muslims have faced increasing attacks on their right to freely practice their religion, build institutions and strengthen their communities.

In November 2011, Common Cause NY, in conjunction with New York Neighbors for American Values, released a publication entitled "Park 51 and Beyond: Building Community from Controversy". The handbook provided an analysis of the manufactured controversy surrounding the Park 51 project, featuring a toolkit for communities facing similar attacks.

It also includes analysis of similar controversies in the New York City area, such as the forced resignation of Debbie Almontaser from Khalil Gibran International Academy, the uproar surrounding the purchase of a former convent on Staten Island as a new location for a mosque, and a mosque expansion project in Westbury, Long Island.

To celebrate the release of the handbook, we hosted a discussion at The Commons Brooklyn on the lessons learned from a decade of anti-Muslim rhetoric and hate-mongering, including an analysis of the organized and well-funded networks of Islamophobic activists and organizations that have insti-

gated many of these conflicts.

We were joined by Peter Montgomery of People for the American Way and Megan Putney of Muslim Consultative Network. Susan Lerner of Common Cause New York moderated the panel and introduced the content of our publication. Peter focused on the report that his organization recently released, entitled "The Right Wing Playbook on Anti-Muslim Extremism". This report outlined the strategy employed by many of the activists that were at the center of some of the most recent anti-Islam movements, giving specific examples of where these strategies have been effective. Megan highlighted the

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Volunteer Spotlight: Rosemary Faulkner

Why am I working as a volunteer at Common Cause NY? I have to do something to change the direction of our government! The recent shift toward supporting the interests of the wealthiest 1% or even the wealthiest 0.1% is clearer here in New York than in the country as a whole. Common Cause NY is working in several areas so that more people are represented more fairly in elections, resulting in wiser people getting elected and government working more fairly for all the people. These reforms are the key to making progress in all the other important areas, such as tax reform, health care, and the environment.

Right now Redistricting is the big issue; this affects the weight given to each party and each vote in the state. Common Cause NY has proposed a new fair map for voting districts that will be used to influence the process as the state agencies decide what to do in the next couple of weeks or months.

The Redistricting project was well under way when I joined last fall, so I have been working in another area- Campaign Finance Reform aimed at reducing the effect of money and thus distributing power more fairly among all voters in the state. We know that money influences what views are heard and therefore how votes are cast. The current system in New York allows the highest contribution limits in the country, going up in 2012 to over \$100,000! per individual to a party, and over \$40,000 to candidates in state wide elections (governor etc.) This is the old fashioned way of influencing, but certainly

competes at the state level with the more modern efforts by SuperPacs and grass roots issue oriented advertising. I have been surprised to see with my own eyes, as I look up information about large donors, how many contributions of tens

of thousands of dollars are coming in to candidates of both parties. Often these come from the top officers at financial institutions on Wall Street. This information will be used to support a move in Spring 2012 for lowering the contribution limits and instituting Public Financing of elections. We know that money buys influence, influence that works in favor of the already wealthy and results in cuts to education and other services for people throughout the state. I am doing something, and working with people who are thinking hard about what is the best way to work for a better government in our state.

Want to volunteer with Common Cause/NY?

Contact Sam Massol at smassol@commoncause.org or 212-691-6421 x203



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importance of community building as a means of combatting these kinds of attacks. She also shared anecdotes from her experiences during the summer of 2010 when she, along with so many other Muslims, was thrust in the middle of a media firestorm surrounding the Park 51 project.

Some of the major themes discussed in both the handbook and the discussion were:

1) A need for proactive engagement and community building to prevent the negative messages from getting traction in the first place.

2) Not allowing these issues to be seen as "Muslim issues"—it's important that non-Muslims speak out against Islamophobia and discrimination.

3) The importance of thinking carefully about the messages, word choices and spokespeople you choose to use.

You can read the full report on our website: www.commoncause.org/ny/Park51andBeyond

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Activists Corner

If you would like to find out how to get more involved with Common Cause/NY or for volunteer opportunities please call our offices at 212-691-6421 or email us at nyoffice@commoncause.org

MORE WAYS TO TAKE ACTION

- Sign up for our New York specific email list by emailing nyoffice@commoncause.org
- Sign our petition to make sure Governor Cuomo keeps his word to veto any unfair redistricting lines: www.citizenredistrictny.org/action/
- Join the Amend 2012 initiative to place “voter instruction” measures to overturn Citizens United at : www.amend2012.org
- Call your representatives in the state legislature and let him/her know that you are a member of Common Cause/NY and want public financing of elections NOW!
- Become a fan of ours on Facebook at www.facebook.com/CommonCauseNewYork and follow us on Twitter @commoncauseny

Public Financing in New York

*Common Cause/NY is continuing to fight for better campaign finance
and fairer elections in the Empire State!*

To learn more about our coalition work www.fairelectionsny.org and www.nyLead.org