



New York COMMON CAUSE

Holding Power Accountable

THE ACTIVIST

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NEW YORK'S ETHICS LAWS

Ethics in New York State, already on the ropes, took a beating in January. Following the appointment of a newly elected Democratic State Senator accused of slashing his girlfriend's face with a bottle to chair the Senate Consumer Protection Committee, former Senate Majority Leader, Republican Joe Bruno, was indicted on federal corruption charges. This after the federal indictment last fall of Queens Democratic Assemblyman Anthony Seminerio for allegedly soliciting \$1 million in bribes in the form of "consultant fees." These persistent and embarrassing series of scandals in state government are really not surprising.

New York's ethics laws are shockingly lax. Legislators are required to provide little information about the sources and amounts of their outside income – and the information they do provide is not made public. Other states make this information from elected



officials available through the Internet, but not New York. The Legislature jealously retains ethics oversight over its own members, assigning that responsibility to committees that rarely meet – and when they do, it's in secret.

What needs to be done is not difficult to identify: a complete overhaul of New York's ethics laws.

Common Cause/New York and its allies have drafted a bill that would do just that. Our bill would:

- Create a new, independent ethics oversight agency for both the executive and legislative branches;

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Common Cause/New York members, staff and interns gathered to watch the Presidential Inauguration on January 20 at Gatsby's in Little Italy.

Indicted, continued from page 1

- Establish more stringent requirements for financial disclosure for public officers;
- Strengthen the ban on use of campaign contributions for personal use;
- Restrict campaign contributions from lobbyists and those receiving government contracts (“pay to play”); and
- Toughen ethics enforcement.

We are aggressively seeking legislative sponsors for the bill. In

the meantime, you can help.

Call or write your Assembly Member or State Senator and tell them you are tired of endless corruption scandals (www.CommonCause.org/FindElectedOfficials). It’s time for the Legislature to clean its own house by requiring full financial disclosure for elected officials, adopting pay to play restrictions on lobbyist and state contractor campaign contributions and establishing an independent ethics commission.

And don’t forget to email us and tell us what response you received. ✓

Be part of the Common Cause/New York Volunteer Team!

Common Cause/New York has many opportunities that you can help with either in our offices in SoHo (Manhattan) or remotely on your own schedule. **How will you get involved?**

Volunteer opportunities ideal for working professionals, retirees, students, and homemakers:

- **Organize:** Start locally by reaching out to your neighbors and friends to organize a small group to meet with your local legislator or educating others on the issues that need their attention.
- **Event Support:** Be sure to wear your smile and staff a CC/NY event, or maybe you can help with mailings or calling members to be sure CC/NY events are on their calendars.
- **Office Assistance:** Join us in our NYC office for a few hours of volunteer time on a regular schedule or as needed basis.
- **Technical Design:** Put your computer skills to use by creating reports or databases to analyze campaign finance expenditures.
- **Graphic Design:** Put your artistic skills to the test by designing graphics for CC/NY reports, website and social networking sites.

Sign up today to be a Common Cause/New York volunteer!

www.CommonCause.org/NY/Volunteer

Or contact **Christine Murray, Director of Outreach & Development,**
(212) 691-6421 x204 or cmurray@commoncause.org

Join the Common Cause/New York Intern Team!

We have internship opportunities for dedicated, mature graduate or college students in our NYC office for summer 2009. It is not too early to apply. Interns will be exposed to a variety of government reform issues on the federal, state, and city level.

Depending on background, interns will have an opportunity to handle media relations, write and edit online publications, help plan and produce public events, design grassroots outreach activities, interact with other organizations in coalition, design and conduct research in relevant areas, including money in politics, media consolidation, and election reform, as well as update the membership and media databases.



CC/NY Staff and Volunteers and Interns.

Contact **Chris Keeley, Associate Director,** (212) 691-6421 x203 or ckeeley@commoncause.org

Hold power accountable by volunteering with Common Cause/New York.

Common Cause/New York's Legislative Priorities for 2009!

Rules Reform

1. Transparency, with all reports, votes, attendance on the Internet
2. Vigorous and active committees
3. Break the stranglehold of the leadership

Election Reform

1. No-fault vote by mail
2. Early voting
3. Same-Day Election Day Registration
4. National popular vote
5. Enforcement of existing laws

Campaign Finance Reform

1. Improved disclosures
2. Meaningful enforcement

3. Reasonable contribution limits, including "pay to play" provisions
4. Public funding of elections – Unique hybrid model under development

Redistricting

1. Independent redistricting commission with clear criteria for drawing districts
2. Limit variance between districts to 1%
3. Count those in prison at their home addresses, not where prisons located

Public Service Commission

1. Better oversight
2. Meaningful public participation
3. Better representation on commission



Letter from Our Executive Director



2009 promises to be yet another inimitable year in New York. With the Democrats forming a new Senate Majority, this is another year which starts with promises of reforming the way business is done in Albany. But, New York's government never ceases to be "interesting" in the same way as the apocryphal Chinese curse about "living in interesting times." Confusion as to who

would be the newly Democratic State Senate's Majority Leader, followed by confusion about who the Governor would choose to be our next U.S. Senator, followed by the federal indictment of former State Senate Majority Leader Republican Joe Bruno. The headlines kept piling up.

Through it all, we've fielded press calls, commented on the ways we believe New York's lax laws can be improved, worked with legislators and other good government groups to draft changes to New York law, and attempted to keep you up to date on these

events. As we announce changes to New York's Ethics and Campaign Finance laws that we are recommending, there will be plenty for Common Cause activists to do to help support the sweeping changes that are needed to put an end to the seemingly endless list of corruption scandals.

There are numerous ways that you can help move the reform agenda in Albany. Please be sure to check the Common Cause/New York website (www.CommonCause.org/NY) frequently for news on our progress and ways in which you can help. The website has recently been re-designed to make it more dynamic and user-friendly. Check it out and tell us what you think. You can even sign up for updates on our activities and action items to be delivered to your email. And, of course, our CauseNets bring our action alerts directly to your email in-box.

We are working, with your help and support, to bring some important changes to the way Albany does business this year. But there have been promises from our political leaders before and it won't happen easily, so your activism is essential!

Regards,
Susan

Be involved. Take action.

- Visit our re-designed website and take action, www.CommonCause.org/NY - Page 4.
- Sign-up as a volunteer, or guide a young person to our internship program - Page 2.
- Invite Common Cause/New York to speak at your community or civic group - Page 4.
- Show your support by sending a special donation in the envelope enclosed.

Meet One of Our Interns: Spotlight on Mariangela Perrotta

by Chris Keeley

Common Cause/New York offers a number of internship positions each semester and summer. The positions include researching city, state and federal governmental issues, outreach to Common Cause membership, fundraising support and more. Month after month, these interns play a critical role in furthering the legislative agenda and mission of Common Cause.

Mariangela Perrotta is one of the outstanding student who has joined us recently. She first joined us in September 2008, and has been hard at work since.

Her intellect became apparent very early on in her time working with Common Cause/New York. Asked to be the sole notetaker of a meeting of dozens of New York City election-reform advocates and activists, Mariangela synthesized the detailed and complex conversation in almost no time at all. Her ability to grasp these sorts of complex issues is rare among interns and speaks volumes to her ability.

As she aptly puts it, she is dedicated to the idea of “government as an extension of the community.” It is this sort of wisdom that Mariangela has brought to her work at Common Cause, and surely to her se-

nior thesis on the role of New York’s public authorities within the democratic process. Not one to be shy from an ambitious task, Mariangela hasn’t picked just any public authority, but went for New York City’s Metropolitan Transit Authority.

Mariangela expects to graduate from Fordham in May 2009 with a degree in Political Science & Italian Studies. She has been awarded the Dean’s Scholarship at Fordham, as well as scholarships from The Columbus Citizens Foundation and Laborer’s Union Local 731. She was named AP Scholar with Honors by the College Board and is a member of Fordham’s National Political Science Honor Society (Pi Sigma Alpha) and Fordham’s National Italian Honor Society (Gamma Kappa Alpha). She is currently applying to New York City-based fellowship programs, and is keeping her eyes open for other job opportunities in the fields of public service and government reform for after graduation.

Mariangela summed up some of her lessons learned here in an application essay she recently submitted to a fellowship program. In it, she wrote: “I have been driven, through Common Cause, to recognize and strive for



the convergence of public interest and government action, to require accountability and responsibility (of myself and my government), to evaluate and present policy recommendations with increased knowledge and skill, and to communicate and collaborate with government officials and the public effectively.”

It’s been a pleasure to have Mariangela on the Common Cause/New York team over these past months, and she will undoubtedly be a valued member of any organization or agency lucky enough to bring her on board. ✓

— *For more information about the Common Cause/New York internship program, email Chris Keeley at keeley@commoncause.org or visit www.CommonCause.org/NY or check out page 2.*



New Common Cause Website

Check out the new Common Cause website. This freshly re-designed website includes interactive features and many news tools making it easier for Common Cause members and the general public to get active in the political process locally and nationally. Be sure to check us out at www.CommonCause.org/NY.

Looking for guest speakers for your local community or civic organization? Give us a call!

For years, Common Cause/New York staff members have traveled the state speaking to groups about our mission and legislative priorities in New York State. If you would like a guest speaker, or even materials about Common Cause’s mission and priorities to share at your next meeting, reach out to Christine Murray, Director of Development & Outreach, at cmurray@commoncause.org.

I Love an Ethical New York: Bringing Back Good Government

By Christine Murray

On Tuesday, December 2, 2008, Common Cause/New York held the I Love an Ethical New York Awards Dinner -- our annual fundraising event that honors outstanding New Yorkers. This year's event was very special because it featured two of America's greatest speech writers -- Ted Sorensen and Bill Moyers -- and it was the first time the event was a formal a sit-down dinner.

The University Club in Midtown played host to our celebration which began with

of change and renewed promise," she said. She went on to introduce Bill Moyers, the Master of Ceremony, who gave an inspired speech about the promise of government when he first went to serve in the Kennedy administration and the great lessons of Democracy. To read Mr. Moyers' remarks, please visit www.commoncause.org/ny and click on the I Love an Ethical New York link under Events.

Mr. Moyers's speech helped set the stage for the evening and the first award present-

"If we are to prove our worth as a free and self-governing people; you and I and millions of others must once again believe America is our common cause." -- Bill Moyers

a cocktail reception where old friendships were rekindled and new friends were made. The guests mingled before making their way to the grand ballroom where Common Cause/New York Executive Director Susan Lerner started the evening with a warm welcome. "What a pleasure it was to be here with friends, new and old, at the conclusion of this extraordinary year

tation -- the Andrew Heiskell Youth Democracy in Action Award to Nancy Lublin, CEO, of Do Something. Founder of Alloy Media + Marketing and Do Something's Board Member, Matt Diamond, shared with everyone what an inspiration Ms. Lublin is with her founding of the Dress for Success when she was a law student, and how she is now empowering a generation of



Bill Moyers delivering his keynote address.

teen "doers" who recognized the need to do something to help others, believe in their ability to get it done and then take action to produce results. Ms. Lublin accepted the award on behalf of herself and the young people involved with Do Something. She shared how one teenager was able to get

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Emily Nemens joined by Common Cause/New York Board Members Ben Shuldiner and Mary Holloway.



Ted Sorensen delivering his acceptance speech.

a stadium in tobacco country to be smoke free and how another is working to lower the voting age.

After the first act of the evening concluded, dinner was served and guests had another opportunity to enjoy the company at their tables. After desert, Mr. Moyers' gather everyone's attention for the introduction of Jeh Johnson, who was on leave from Paul Weiss as he advised then Presi-

In his acceptance, Mr. Sorensen spoke to the importance of working for the common cause and how even Lincoln had understood the significance of it.

Bob Edgar, President of Common Cause, closed the evening by introducing our special musical guest, Peter Yarrow. Mr. Yarrow led everyone in songs and hope for the future.

As guests began to leave, they expressed how they found the evening to be "inspiring" and "moving," and impressed with the tone of the evening which featured two

"Common Cause is still conducting that fight. I don't want to tell you all what you know and what you have heard a hundred times about the goals that must be achieved, and will be achieved, with help of everyone in this room... I say to you tonight, Common Cause and all that it stands for, with your help, all of you are bringing candles to light our way toward progress." – Ted Sorensen

dent-elect Obama, and the presentation of the John Gardner Lifetime Achievement Award to Ted Sorensen. Mr. Johnson spoke about his relationship with Mr. Sorensen and all that his work in bringing back good government during the Kennedy Administration and his lifetime of work.

of John Gardner's peers speaking to the importance of Common Cause now and back then. It was an amazing evening that touched everyone who attended. You can watch portions of the speeches at the Common Cause/New York website (click on events and I Love an Ethical New York).



Common Cause/New York thanks Susan Rubinstein & Mary Holloway, Co-Chairs of the event as well as all the supporters of the event. Funds raised from the I Love an Ethical New York Awards Dinner are used to support the efforts of Common Cause/New York both in the state and city.

Planning has already begun for 2009's dinner. Please contact Christine Murray, Director of Outreach & Development, at 212 691 6421 x 204 or cmurray@common-cause.org to be part of the committee or for more information. ✓



Honorees Nancy Lublin & Ted Sorensen with Common Cause/New York Board Member Susan Rubinstein.



Guests singing along Peter Yarrow performance.

Election Day HelpLine

By Susan Lerner

Long lines at poll sites, voting machines that remained broken for hours, voters given incorrect information about their registration status and rights; these are just a few of the many problems New Yorkers faced at the polls during the 2008 presidential election.

This past Election Day, November 4th, Common Cause/New York volunteers gathered at the NYPIRG call center in downtown New York City to help operate our voter HelpLine. Common Cause/NY and NYPIRG have run hotlines for the last several presidential elections. Volunteers received training on the spot and immediately started fielding calls providing useful information to voters, such as the location of their poll site, informing callers of their rights and identifying Election Day problems. Common Cause/NY staff use the information coming over the phone lines to press the Board of Elections for quick remedial action and to gain an understanding of conditions across the city to help identify areas in need

of improvement and reform.

This year, the HelpLine received more than 1,400 calls from across the City. The majority of calls came from voters inquiring about their poll site location, an indication of how insufficient current efforts are to inform voters of basic information before the election. The HelpLine also logged in 245 detailed complaints from voters encountering more serious problems with casting their ballots, a higher proportion than in past elections. Many of these complaints indicated a variety of problems at a particular site. For example, long lines as a result of broken machine or a voter's name not appearing in a poll book, as well as voters experiencing a problem with poll workers. The primary problems reported for each complaint category were:

- A. Voting Equipment Problem, Broken Machines;
- B. Registration Problem, Affidavit Ballot Problem;
- C. Poll Worker Problem;



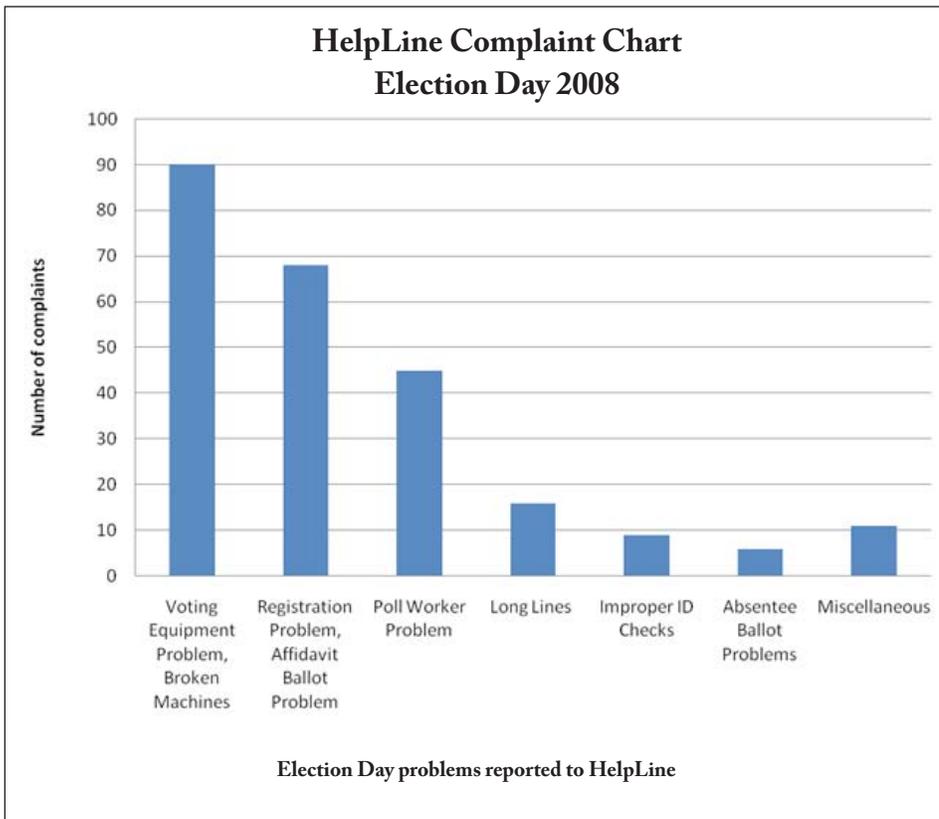
HelpLine volunteers in action.

- D. Long Lines;
- E. Improper ID Checks (by a poll worker);
- F. Absentee Ballot Problems; and
- G. Miscellaneous.

The chart on this page shows the distribution of these problems.

The vast majority of detailed complaints were immediately followed-up with direct contacts with the Board of Elections where remedial action was possible. HelpLine complaints were also entered into the national Our Vote database.

Thanks to all of our dedicated volunteers – some of whom got to the call center at 6 am (!!) to help. ✓





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Go Green with Common Cause/New York by providing your name and email in the space below and send us the whole page (with the mailing label) either by fax to (212) 807-1809 or mail to Common Cause/New York **Go Green**, 155 Avenue of the Americas, 4th Floor, New York, NY 10013. To be really green, scan it and send via email to cmurray@commoncause.org.

Name: _____

Email: _____

- Yes, I want to also receive *CauseNet*, Common Cause's action alert emails.

Thanks for helping Common Cause/New York Go Green!

CHECK OUT THE NEW COMMON CAUSE/NEW YORK WEBSITE



Common Cause/New York has a freshly re-designed website – come by and check us out!

The new site was unveiled in February 2009, and includes interactive features and tools, helping Common Cause/New York members and the public **GET ACTIVE** in the political process both locally and nationally.

Come by to check out the new design and, as always, be sure to visit the TAKE ACTION page before you leave!

www.CommonCause.org/NY

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