



New York COMMON CAUSE

Holding Power Accountable

THE ACTIVIST
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Reform Day 2007: Join Us for a Day of Spring Cleaning in Albany!

This spring, New Yorkers from all across the state will converge on Albany to demand real reform of state government. We hope that you will be one of them!

This year, it's time for lawmakers to finish the job of reforming state government. That's why we hope you'll join us and our many co-sponsoring organizations for this exciting day.

To register for Reform Day, simply fill out and return the coupon found on the back of this newsletter, call our office at 1-800-300-8707 or visit www.commoncause.org/SpringCleaningInAlbany.

For those of you who don't leave near the capitol district, we will have FREE buses leaving from cities across the state. Reserve your seat today and join us for a day of education and action.



Letter from the Executive Director

It's Only the Start of the Session, but What a Year!

By: Rachel Leon

January is just now ending, but already in Albany, it's been quite a year. The issues Common Cause/NY cares about, making our democracy work for the people, have been front and center within the new administration, and lawmakers are talking about reform more loudly than ever.

Continued on Page 2

Mark your Calendar: A Discussion with Kevin Phillips and Paul Krugman in NYC on March 29th:

Join us for this fabulous event!

On March 29th, Common Cause/NY will host a lunch discussion featuring author and political strategist Kevin Phillips. The discussion will be moderated by economist and *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman. To learn more and to RSVP, see page 8 of this newsletter.

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Some of that talk has generated results. Here's the recap of what's happened thus far:

In his State of the State address, Governor Spitzer started the year off with a bang, promising to push new ethical standards, an independent redistricting commission and public financing of state elections.

"To neutralize the army of special interests, we must disarm it," he said. "In the coming weeks, we will submit a reform package to replace the weakest campaign-finance laws in the nation with the strongest."

From instituting his own executive orders on ethics issues to beginning to open to bring new openness to the Capitol building, Governor Spitzer has been following through on his campaign pledges to open up state government

In mid-January, Spitzer and the Assembly Speaker and Senate Majority Leader announced a three-way agreement to reform the budget making process. Reformers applauded the good, if incremental, reforms, which will require that previously secret "member item" money be lined out in the budget, require adoption of a balanced budget by the legislature, and make the Comptroller the arbiter of any disputes over revenue forecasts, among other things. Notably absent from the package was an independent budget office – something that Common Cause/NY has been advocating for years.

And just last week, the three leaders announced another deal, this time on ethics reform, which included many positive provisions to ban gifts from lobbyists to lawmakers, restrictions on lawmakers accepting honoraria, and extended "revolving door" prohibitions.

However, while Common Cause/NY applauded these strengthened ethical standards, we also expressed concern about a proposed new entity, the Commission on Public Integrity, which will consolidate the authority of the current Lobbying Commission and State Ethics Commission into one body.

We fear that the new commission may ultimately lose some of the best attributes of the current Lobbying Commission, and we were disheartened to see that oversight of the legislative branch would continue to be separated from oversight of the executive. The Lobbying Commission has arguably been the most effective government watchdog agency in Albany, and we are concerned that attempts to remake this commission could result in a less independent and effective body.

All in all, however, the Governor's actions on reform represent the best steps forward we've seen on reform in many years, and we're optimistic that he will continue to show leadership on reform issues through this session and many more.

Attorney General Cuomo has not been shy about his reform ambitions either. From meeting with local district attorneys across the state to announcing his own effort to review all of the "member item" spending approved in 2006 to ensure that funds were only expended on projects that have a true "public purpose," he made it clear that he too promises to be a cop on the reform beat

"The taxpayers of New York must be assured that their hard-earned dollars are used for legitimate public purposes --period," said Attorney General Cuomo. "Without this guarantee, the public trust in our state government will continue to erode. It is time to restore this breach and we will not rest until we return our state government to one of the highest integrity."

The Attorney General laid out an ambitious agenda of three action items that the Office will undertake to help bring accountability and transparency to the system in which taxpayer dollars are awarded throughout the state.

Cuomo hopes to bring the same type of reform to State Street as Spitzer did to Wall Street, and we stand ready to work with the newly elected Governor, Attorney General and legislature to ensure that 2007 lives up to its promise as the Year of Reform.

We know the thaw can't last forever, but this moment of sunshine and scrutiny of the way our government conducts the public's business is long overdue. We must keep the momentum going and not let this window of opportunity slip by without passage of comprehensive new reforms in New York.

To that end, I hope you'll join us for our annual springtime "Reform New York Day" – a day on which a diverse group of individuals and organizations from across the state gathers at the Capitol to let our lawmakers know that we want real reform. Everything we have accomplished, and everything that we will accomplish, is as a result of your commitment to our Common Cause!

WAMC listeners can hear radio commentary from Rachel Leon every week. Go to <http://www.wamc.org/comleon.html> for more information and to access an archive of past commentaries.

Suggestions for future newsletters?

We hope you will find that this newsletter is full of useful information about our activities. We are always looking for suggestions for how to make these newsletters more engaging for you as our members. Please feel free to email suggestions to cocauseny@aol.com. We look forward to hearing from you!

MAKING YOUR VOTE COUNT BEFORE THE ELECTION

Learn More About CC/NY's Work to Make Your Vote Count Before You Go to the Polls!

CC/NY Releases Report on Soft Money Loophole in New York

By Kailin Clarke

The ability of businesses, unions, advocacy groups and individuals to give unlimited donations to party "housekeeping accounts," donations commonly referred to as "soft money," constitutes one of the most egregious loopholes in our state's campaign finance law.

Last August, Common Cause/NY released a comprehensive report examining the problem of soft money in New York, including who gives it, who gets it and how it is spent. The report, entitled "The Life of the Party: Hard Facts on Soft Money in New York State," concludes with the simple conclusion that, for the same reasons that Congress removed the taint of soft money from federal elections five years ago, New York State should do the same today.

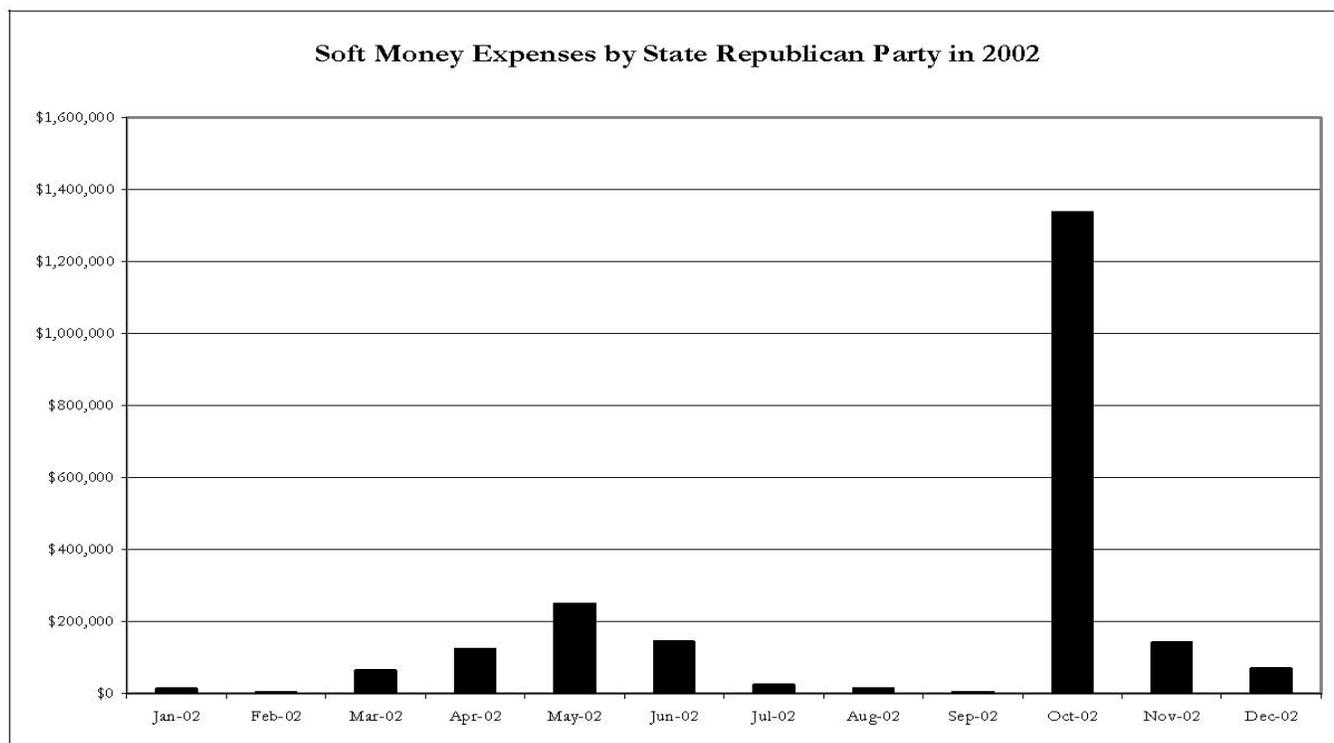
Our report paints a disturbing portrait of the soft money problem. Soft money is booming in New York, with \$53.2 million contributed to party housekeeping accounts from January 1999 through July 2006. Given the sizes of many of the donations (NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg gave the single largest soft money contribution, a check for \$705,750 to the New York State Republican Committee), it is apparent that soft

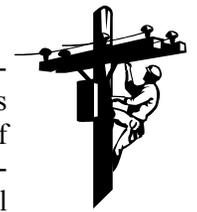
money is not given by the average party-supporter but by an elite few. Barely one half of one-tenth of a percent (.056%) of New York's voting age population has made a soft money contribution to a state or local party committee since 1999. The soft money donor population is also not representative of the geographic diversity of our state, as 55% of all soft money raised since 1999 came from just three counties – Manhattan, Albany, and Washington D.C.

Soft money is ostensibly used for "party building" purposes and not to support individual candidates or campaigns. Yet we found that soft money is often spent on or near the same day as hard money (money contributed directly to candidates or political committees' regular accounts) to pay the same vendors for services and products including campaign mailings and "issue ads." Even in cases where the parties do not seem to coordinate their soft money expenditures with candidate campaigns, soft money frees up candidates' funds by shouldering some of the administrative burdens they would otherwise have to bear.

In 2002, incumbent Republican Governor George Pataki successfully ran for his third gubernatorial term. He faced two general election challengers, H. Carl McCall on the Democratic line and billionaire Rochester businessman Tom Golisano on the Independence line. Their race made for the most expensive gubernatorial election in New York history. All together, the candidates on the general election ballot spent over \$140 million during the campaign cycle.

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That same year, the New York Republican State “Houskeeping” Committee reported the largest annual expenditure by any soft money party committee since at least 1999. Of the nearly \$2.2 million in soft money the party spent that year, over 61% was spent in the month immediately preceding the November election.

CC/NY also examined how soft money is raised. Candidates for state office, like former Governor Pataki, are often actively involved in raising soft money, and have been known to reward large donors with perks such as dinner with the candidate.

Soft money corrupts for a simple and obvious reason. Donations are given in such huge amounts that the donors typically expect to receive something in return for their investment. While the 2002 Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act effectively banned the solicitation and use of soft money by candidates for federal office, the practice is alive and well in New York State. The state legislature owes it to the public to follow Congress’s lead.

The Energy Industry’s Political Spending—It’s Electric!

By: Jill Bunting

At the height of the summer heat wave last July, Common Cause/NY released a new study showing that the energy industry spent more than \$10.7 million in lobby and campaign contributions at the state level between 2003 and 2006. The industry gave an additional \$1.19 million in campaign contributions to New York politicians between 1999 and 2002.

While New York’s energy grid has always had problems, some have argued that deregulation, a policy actively pursued by the Pataki administration over the last decade, has worsened the situation. There can be no doubt that New York was hit hard by blackouts last summer. In July, hundreds of thousands of Queens residents sat in the sweltering heat for more than a week as Con Ed scrambled to repair fried cables. Outages left thousands more in the dark further upstate and on Staten Island. These outages show an electric system bursting at the seams, plagued by ineffective power plants and an antiquated transmission system.

Critics say that New York’s deregulated electric market has been marred from the start by a lack of both oversight and consumer protection. These factors have combined to help create the current, precarious state of New York’s energy system; a system that may or may not be

able to keep pace with rapidly growing demand. As New Yorkers grapple with the issues raised by the blackouts, the question arises of whether energy companies will be held accountable to the public or if heavy political spending will buy them a free pass.

The politicians in the best position to influence New York’s energy policy are also the ones who have taken the most in energy industry donations. Then-Governor George Pataki led our list of recipients when we released this report last July. Between 1999 and 2006, energy companies gave the governor \$315,850 in campaign contributions. As Governor, Pataki controlled the Public Service Commission (PSC), the agency responsible for overseeing energy policy in our state.

As the 2006 gubernatorial election drew closer, however, energy companies seemed to have switched their focus from Pataki to his apparent successor, then-Attorney General Eliot Spitzer. From 2003 to 2006, Pataki received \$53,700, while Spitzer’s contributions jumped to \$90,000 during the same period. Top recipients from 1999-2006 also included Senate Energy Chair Jim Wright (\$116,515) and Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno (\$51,000).

The PSC is supposed to oversee electric power service, but some have argued that Governor Pataki’s appointments stacked the commission with partisans and energy insiders. For example, the first Pataki-appointed PSC chairman, John O’Mara, became a registered lobbyist for the utility Niagara Mohawk after overseeing deregulation, the plan that pulled NIMO from the brink of bankruptcy. The next Pataki appointed PSC chairwoman, Maureen Helmer, left the PSC to work for the lobbying firm Couch & White, often appearing on behalf of clients before the PSC. And John Reese, the former director of the PSC Office of Economic Development, was previously the Vice President of Government Relations for energy giant Orion. Reese also served as the Deputy Director of the Independent Power Producers of New York (IPPNY). The IPPNY is an energy trade group that has contributed over \$190,000 to New York candidates since 1999.

“Deregulation has left us with an agency - the PSC - that has been unwilling to take utility companies to task. Our current lack of planning and oversight has clearly failed us, as any resident of Western Queens can tell you,” said Jason Babbie, Energy Policy Analyst for NYPIRG at the time of the blackout.

The report was released as the New York City Council began hearings on the Queens blackout. Con Ed, the utility responsible for distribution in Queens, has spent \$745,151 on political spending in the past 3 years. With a new governor having recently arrived in Albany, it remains to be seen if he will end the influence of energy companies on political commissions and make certain that the public’s voice is heard in the policymaking process.



Pharmaceutical Industry Loses in 2005, But Fights Back in 2006

By: Wesley Moore

Governor Pataki's decision to include the preferred drug list (PDL) as part of the New York State health budget in 2005, was a major loss for the pharmaceutical industry. The PDL allows the government to obtain steep discounts on pharmaceuticals by creating a list of "preferred drugs" (usually the drugs that a committee has deemed the most effective from each class) and requires that doctors get prior authorization when prescribing a drug not on the list to a Medicaid patient. Manufacturers who want to have their drugs also included on this list must offer the state much lower prices on their product – a system strongly opposed by the drug industry.

The path to a PDL was not a straight or short one for New York. First, in 2000, the legislature adopted a "prior authorization requirement" in an attempt to curb drug prices. The measure forced doctors to get state approval before prescribing drugs with the potential to be abused or over-prescribed. In 2003, Governor Pataki attempted to enact a PDL, but the legislature voted down the bill and also banned the Health Department from requiring prior authorization for any new drugs. Legislators argued that Pataki had attempted to bypass them, and that their steps were necessary to ensure that they would control the fate and content of any PDL.

Finally, in 2005, Pataki forced the legislature's hand by including the PDL in his budget. Because of the legislature's limited power to alter budget language, they would have had to reject the entire health budget in order to reject the PDL.

Common Cause NY's research shows that proponents and opponents of the PDL spent a total of \$24,479,383 in lobbying expenditures and \$12,752,325 on campaign contributions between 2003 and 2005.

Despite this big defeat, 2006 saw a change of tide in the favor of pharmaceutical interests. The industry blocked two bills that they strongly opposed – one that demanded more detailed disclosure of the gifts given to doctors and another that would have created a system of bulk purchasing of pharmaceuticals. "The question is," says CC/NY's Rachel Leon, "what role does [the industry's] increased political spending play in that victory?"

Having been defeated once, the industry ramped up its political spending and made an aggressive effort not to let that happen again. The industry's lobby expenses by approximately \$100,000 annually between 2003 and 2006 (when comparing data available for January – April of each of those years), and its campaign contributions mounted steadily as well. The failure of the gifts disclosure bill came at the very end of the 2006 session, with the Senate Republicans' introduction of a watered down version of the proposal. Consumer interest groups argue that the public has a right to know what gifts pharmaceutical representatives are giving to officials, but the industry has so far rebuffed those efforts.

Overall, the pharmaceutical industry has spent \$2.6 million in campaign contributions since 1999. The Senate Republicans are the single largest beneficiary, collecting over \$850,000 (approx. 1/3 of total contributions) during these years. The Republican Party (including Senators, Assembly Members, the state party itself, Governor Pataki, and gubernatorial candidate Faso) got the majority of pharmaceutical campaign funding – over \$1.5 million since '99, or 59% of total contributions.

To learn more about this and other "Connect the Dots" reports, please visit our website at www.commoncause.org/ny.

"ASTROTURF"

Pharmaceutical companies were accused of funding nonprofit organizations to raise objections to the PDL that would be seen as originating from the grassroots.



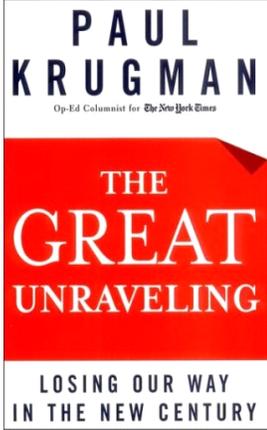
The National Alliance for Hispanic Health, an advocacy group in Washington that is heavily financed by pharmaceutical companies and has a corporate advisory board whose members are mostly industry executives, issued a report arguing that Hispanics as a group can react differently to drugs than others. The report concluded that coverage plans must include a wide range of drugs. The Alliance partnered with the National Pharmaceutical Council, an industry trade group, on the report.

The Hispanic Federation: coalition of health and social services agencies; said proposal endangered patients. Board member is senior VP of Pfizer; received multiple contributions from Pfizer, including a \$50,000 donation in 2004.

NYTimes 11/23/05

Limited liability fact sheet

Limited liability fact sheet pg. 2



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A

DISCUSSION WITH

KEVIN PHILLIPS
AUTHOR OF AMERICAN THEOCRACY

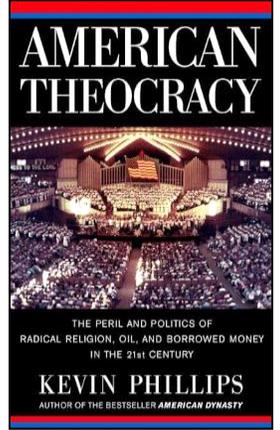
MODERATED BY

PAUL KRUGMAN
NEW YORK TIMES COLUMNIST

ASSOCIATION OF THE BAR OF NYC, MEETING HALL
42 WEST 44TH STREET (JUST OFF OF 5TH AVE.)
NEW YORK CITY

THURSDAY, MARCH 29TH
NOON— 1:30PM

THIS EVENT IS FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC



Discussion with Kevin Phillips and Paul Krugman

March 29th from noon to 1:30pm

Association of the Bar of the City of New York, Meeting Hall (42 West 44th Street)
New York, NY

Yes, I will join you for a discussion with Kevin Phillips and Paul Krugman on March 29th in New York City!

Name: _____ # of Guests: _____

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Enclosed is my contribution for \$ _____ to help make this and other Archibald Cox Memorial Lectures a success!

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Please return to CC/NY by mail at 155 6th Avenue, 4th Floor; NY, NY 10013 or by fax at 212-807-1809.

MAKING YOUR VOTE COUNT DURING THE ELECTION

Learn More About CC/NY's Work to Make Your Vote Count At the Polls!

More States Denounce Electronic Voting; NYS Has Yet to Select New Voting System

By: Rachel Leon

As the national saga continues and states struggle to implement changes to their electoral systems as required by the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA), more delays are the name of the game in New York.

New York was the last state in the nation to put legislation in place to modernize elections, as HAVA required, and we still have not replaced our voting machines. But the news from the empire state isn't all bad. New York did pass legislation mandating that any new voting machine produce a voter verifiable paper trail to help ensure that votes are being recorded properly. In fact, the State Board of Elections adopted voting machine standards that are so strong that many of the companies that make new voting systems can't meet them.

Because many of the systems on the market don't pass muster under our state's tough new regulations, the process of selecting a new machine has been particularly difficult. Furthermore, serious questions have been raised about Ciber, the company hired by New York to test potential voting machines to ensure their proper functioning. A *New York Times* article reported recently that the federal Election Assistance Commission had not accredited Ciber. The firm is working for New York under a \$3 million contract.

The NYS Board of Elections is now considering whether to fire Ciber, and this new delay means that New York won't have a list of approved machines until May 2007, at the earliest. The Jan. 1, 2006, deadline under the Help America Vote Act to replace machines has long since passed, jeopardizing \$50 million in federal funds.

It is unlikely new voting systems will be in place for the fall elections, and 2009 is being discussed as a new possible time-frame. It is a complex process. First the State has to certify systems. Then the Counties are to select from an approved list. Then they must buy equipment, test it, and train local poll workers and get them in place before the election.

Civic and voting rights groups have pushed hard and failed to get the state to enact uniform systems for localities. A growing number of groups have been urging the state to select optical scan systems instead of electronic voting.

If the state misses the fall 2007 deadline that would violate an agreement with Department of Justice. The consequences are unknown, but could involve losing more federal funds at a minimum.

NYS must be a leader and get this right. The chaos that could ensue if New York is experimenting with untested new voting machinery during a busy national election is unimaginable. Hopefully, a compromise can be reached with the Department of Justice to expand the number of accessible voting systems at polling places in the interim and then continue a strong independent testing system to come up with a list of acceptable new systems.

In other elections news from across the nation, the more things change, the more they stay the same. In this past November's election, 18,382 votes were lost in Sarasota County, Florida, on touch screen voting machines with no paper trail. 2006 is the third election in a row shadowed by questions about the integrity of voting machines. 2007 should be the tipping point—the moment when Congress acts to ensure votes are counted in a manner that is secure and accountable. With a new congress now sitting, there is an opportunity to right past wrongs.

Today, 27 states — including such large ones as California, New York, Illinois and Ohio — require electronic voting machines to keep a paper record of how people voted. There is paper-trail legislation pending in a dozen more states. There is no reason why the federal government should not follow suit.

LEAVING A GIFT OF LEGACY TO COMMON CAUSE

By including Common Cause in your will, you ensure that we have the resources to make each vote count and each legislator accountable.

There are several ways to provide a gift to Common Cause/NY that will endure beyond your lifetime - include a bequest to Common Cause/NY in your will or living trust; name Common Cause/NY as a beneficiary of a life insurance policy, a retirement account or IRA; or through Life income gifts that involve making a gift to Common Cause/NY and receiving income for life or for a term of years.

We would be happy to help you structure your estate to best meet both your personal and philanthropic goals. Many of the plans listed above can provide significant tax and financial advantages. Your gift will help ensure a legacy of democracy...for today and tomorrow.

For more information, please call us at 1-800-300-8707 or email us at cocauseny@aol.com.

MAKING YOUR VOTE COUNT AFTER THE ELECTION

Learn More About CC/NY's Work to Make Your Vote Count Once Elected Officials Are in Office!

Ethics Reform Agreement in Albany Represents Progress

By: Megan Quattlebaum

In January, Governor Spitzer, Senate Majority Leader Bruno and Assembly Speaker Silver unveiled a three-way agreement on legislation that aims to reform the state's ethics and lobbying laws and creates a new "Commission on Public Integrity." While good government organizations like Common Cause/NY, the New York Public Interest Research Group, the League of Women Voters of NYS and Citizens Union have been encouraged by the momentum for change that we have seen in Albany since January 1st, and while most elements of the proposal represent positive reforms, we expressed concern over the proposed new commission.

In the wake of the announcement, Common Cause/NY and our coalition partners sent a letter to the Governor and the legislative leaders expressing our support for the great majority of elements contained in the proposed legislation. But the letter urged legislative hearings to review elements of the proposal focused on creating the new commission, which we fear may actually weaken state oversight of lobbying.

Our organizations expressed unqualified support for the stronger ethical standards and lobbying regulations that are outlined in the legislative proposal. These measures will help reduce the influence that money and special interests play in the political process and take an important step toward restoring the public's faith in the integrity of the decisions being made by our elected officials.

A few of the key measures that we support include:

- Banning all gifts to public officials except those of a nominal amount.
- Prohibiting lobbyists from paying for travel, lodging and other expenses for any state official.
- Banning elected officials from appearing in taxpayer-financed public-service announcements.
- Restricting public officials' ability to receive paid honoraria for speeches given while in office.
- Prohibiting former legislative employees from lobbying until two years after they leave the public payroll.
- Increasing maximum penalties for lobbying violations available under law.

However, our organizations also expressed concern over

the aspect of the proposal that would disband of the New York State Temporary Lobbying Commission and form a new state agency, the "Commission on Public Integrity," that consolidates the authority and responsibilities of the Lobbying Commission and the State Ethics Commission into one body. We fear that the new commission may ultimately lose some of the best attributes of the current Lobbying Commission, and we are dismayed to see that oversight of ethics in the legislative and executive branches would continue to be needlessly bifurcated. (Currently, executive officials are overseen by the State Ethics Commission, while legislators are overseen by the Legislative Ethics Committee.)

The Lobbying Commission has arguably been the most effective government watchdog agency in Albany, and it has served the public well by investigating abuses and holding lobbyists and elected officials accountable for their malfeasance. We are concerned that attempts to remake this commission could result in a less independent and effective body.

We are particularly concerned that the new commission may be less independent than the current Lobbying Commission and that new barriers may be erected that compromise the commission's ability to investigate suspected wrongdoing.

Some of these more troubling provisions include:

- The new commission would be composed of 13 members, seven of whom would be appointed by the Governor, with the chairman of the commission serving at the pleasure of the Governor.
- Previous law stated that members of the commission could not "hold office in any political party." Under this proposal, they cannot be "a political party chairman."
- A majority of the Commission membership would have to approve an investigation in advance of agency action, which is not now required for the Lobbying Commission to act.
- Under this proposal, all monies recovered by the attorney general or received by the commission from the assessment of civil penalties shall be deposited into the general fund. Current law allows for the deposit of these funds into a lobbying act enforcement fund which provides some baseline funding for Lobby Commission activities thereby insulating the commission somewhat from political pressures.

Government watchdogs expressed fear that the combination of the measures outlined above could limit the ability of the commission to do its job without fear or favor. We urged that, before such a restructuring is undertaken, public hearings be conducted and the proposal further considered.

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Another disappointment with this proposal is what it doesn't include. Our organizations have also long supported the creation of an independent ethics commission with broader jurisdiction to monitor and enforce New York's ethics laws in both the executive and legislative branches. The current bifurcated system of ethics enforcement, under which the Executive and Legislative branches having separate agencies that

monitor themselves, remains in need of reform.

It remains to be seen whether the legislature will heed our call to subject this important proposal to public hearings before proceeding. Minor changes to the structure and functioning of the proposed Commission on Public Integrity could make it vastly more independent.

To learn more about how you can help to advance reform legislation in 2007, visit www.commoncause.org/ny.

COMMON CAUSE/NY NEWS

2006 Archibald Cox Memorial Lecture a Success!

By: Ahmed Bakar

On Tuesday, July 18, 2006, Spencer Overton, law professor at George Washington University and member of the board of Common Cause, gave a lecture on his new book, *Stealing Democracy*. The lecture was the second in our *Archibald Cox Memorial Lecture Series* and was co-sponsored by Common Cause/NY and one of our fellow civic organizations, Demos.

With many interested New Yorkers in attendance, the room was packed and countless people spilled into the hallways. The large number of local activists present listened attentively as Overton shared his "Matrix" theory, which constitutes the introduction of his book. Refraining from the urge to give a lecture on his favorite movie, Overton discussed how politicians create an invisible matrix, abusing the power at their disposal to control election outcomes.

Addressing such abuses as gerrymandering, disenfranchisement and "anti-fraud" measures, Overton explained his conclusion that we no longer have a system that protects our right to a fair vote.

Redistricting, Overton argued, is one of the less subtle methods employed by incumbents to facilitate their reelection. Because much of the U.S. works on a single member district system, and the responsibility of redrawing districts often falls into the hands of the incumbents, countless Americans are getting less than their fair vote. Following the 2000 Census, 49 congressional districts were notably altered, giving 92% of the incumbents more secure districts.

Other factors collude to further weaken voters' voices. The United States Federal government does not institute regulations to govern the manner in which we vote; across the U.S. there are around 4,600 different election

systems. As a result, millions of Americans are disenfranchised by their local governments.

In preparation for the 2004 elections, for example, the Franklin County board of elections, in Columbus, Ohio, determined that they needed 5,000 voting machines. However, only 2,866 units were ordered. In the face of this shortage, elections officials resolved to move machines from urban areas to the suburbs. The predictable result?: Tanya Thivener waited four hours in line to vote in Columbus, while her mother waited only 15 minutes to vote in a Columbus suburb.

Even government action that seems reasonable on its face can have negative consequences. The concept of anti-fraud, for example, seems great. Why not prevent those who jeopardize our democracy by casting multiple votes from doing so? However, Overton pointed out that the measures that have been developed to deal with fraud are less than superb. One "anti-fraud" measure, a photo ID requirement, serves only to disenfranchise some 19 million potential voters, as an estimated 6% to 10% of voting-age Americans do not have a state issued photo ID (2001 Carter-Ford Commission). In fact, proponents fail to show that it will prevent even one fraudulent ballot for every 1,000 legitimate voters who will be denied their right to vote.

What can you do about this nexus of policies that disenfranchises so many Americans? Overton believes that there is no great national conspiracy underlying the anti-voter actions of incumbents; many of the abuses we see occur on local levels. And on these local levels we can discourage misconduct through our participation in government reform groups, and, more generally, showing that we care. The hope for reform, he said, lies in the voices, opinions and actions of grass root activists.

For more information on this fantastic book, check out www.stealingdemocracy.com. And **for the latest information on the next event in our Archibald Cox Memorial series, see page 6 of this newsletter or visit www.commoncause.org/ny.**

Common Cause's President Pingree Announces She Will Step Down

By: Megan Quattlebaum

Common Cause National Governing Board Chairman Richard North Patterson announced on January 30th that Chellie Pingree is stepping down from her job as the organization's president and CEO to return to her home state of Maine, where she plans to pursue a possible run for Congress. Jon Goldin-Dubois, Common Cause's executive vice president, will assume Pingree's duties on an interim basis until a permanent successor is chosen.



Pingree's last official day as president and CEO of Common Cause will be Feb. 10th. A search committee comprised of board members and staff will look for a new president.

Under Pingree's leadership, Common Cause grew its membership, expanded its agenda and allocated resources to key reform efforts in the states, such as Connecticut and Albuquerque, N.M., where lawmakers and voters approved full public financing of elections. Pingree diversified Common Cause's agenda to include election reform and media issues as they affect democracy. She also continued working the organization's trademark issues of campaign finance reform and government ethics. We will miss her and wish her the best in all of her pursuits!

Text of Chellie's Announcement to the Common Cause Community

I am writing to you today with mixed feeling to let you know that I will be stepping down as the president of Common Cause. I am leaving our wonderful organization to return to my home state of Maine to pursue a likely run for Congress in 2008.

It has been a great privilege to lead Common Cause for the last four years. I have learned a tremendous amount, and am proud of the work our organization has accomplished, thanks to so many dedicated activists like you. Your vigilance on the health of our democracy is key to our success.

But I also leave with the confidence of knowing that Common Cause founder John Gardner had great reverence for the work of politicians and believed in the responsibility of those who feel called to public service to step forward to do the work that must be done.

I can't think of a more critical time to serve our country. We all feel the weight of the disastrous Iraq war; we worry about a health care crisis that has left all of us unable to feel secure that we are facing a future we can afford; and many of us feel that we are still unable to grasp the magnitude of the environmental challenges that may have already changed our planet in ways that cannot be undone.

Perhaps most importantly, we worry that our democracy isn't functioning as it should, and fixing it requires our constant watch.

I will leave Common Cause on Feb. 10 to consider how I can continue to play a role in fixing these problems. Jon Goldin-Dubois, our executive vice president, will assume my duties on an interim basis until a permanent successor is chosen. You will be hearing from Jon soon.

Rest assured that Common Cause will continue to work on the issues affecting the health of our democracy that you care about so deeply. Our commitment to holding power accountable remains as strong as ever.

Thank you for your dedication to this important organization and I hope that you will continue to give us the gift of your time and activism.

All my best,

Chellie Pingree

Harvard Club Plays Host to the 2006 *I Love an Ethical NY* Celebration

By: Megan Quattlebaum

Thank you to all of you who were able to join us on November 30th, 2006 for our fabulous 9th Annual *I Love an Ethical NY* event. The evening was a resounding success, raising a record amount for CC/NY projects.

The evening was a wonderful testament to the work and mission of our organization. At the Harvard Club, which was beautifully decorated for the holiday season, Charlie Rose, Calvin Trillin, Mario Cuomo, John Brademas and others were on hand with lovely remarks about Common Cause and our evening's presenters and honorees. We couldn't have done it without the support and generosity of all of those who attended, and we hope you enjoyed it as much as we did!

Dr. John Brademas was the 2006 recipient of the *John Gardner Spirit Award* for his unparalleled dedication to public service and a stronger democracy in Congress, and at New York University. Dr. Brademas has cited Common Cause's founder Mr. John Gardner as a personal hero and the evening celebrated Dr. Brademas's extraordinary commitment to national service and campaign finance reform – two causes to which Mr. Gardner dedicated his leadership and energy. Former Governor Mario M. Cuomo presented this award at the event.

Mr. Gregory Long was the recipient of the 2006 *NYC Cultural Leadership Award* for his extraordinary leadership that has catalyzed the impressive resurgence of several of New York's leading cultural institutions, notably The New York Botanical Garden and The New York Public Library. With a unique understanding of the public/private partnership that is the foundation of today's cultural organizations, Gregory Long has developed innovative public programs, creative financing methods,

and best-practice strategic planning programs. Benefit Chair Lewis B. Cullman presented his award.

Kent Yalowitz was the recipient the 2006 *Holding Power Accountable Award*. Mr. Yalowitz's tremendous effort as pro bono counsel and outstanding victory in the recent *Lopez Torres v. NYS Board of Elections* case challenging New York State's undemocratic method of selecting Supreme Court justices (in which we served as a plaintiff) was celebrated. His efforts have led to a landmark decision by the U.S. District Court that will allow voters to have meaningful input in the selection process, increase the pool of lawyers seeking access to the judiciary and restore public confidence in the system. Jeremy Creelan and Fritz Schwarz presented his award.

The event also bid a fond farewell to Mr. Derek Bok (accepted via video), outgoing Chairperson of Common Cause National Governing Board with a special salute honoring his years of inspiring leadership and stewardship at Common Cause. Currently, Interim President of Harvard University, Derek Bok is the 300th Anniversary University Professor; University President, Emeritus; and Faculty Chair of the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations at Harvard.

Finally, we offered a salute to Nicole Gordon, the outgoing Executive Director of New York City's Campaign Finance Board, which administers the landmark campaign financing program.

Calvin Trillin and Charlie Rose joined us and shared their wit and wisdom with the crowd. Guests enjoyed a cocktail hour and silent auction, which fantastic items such as wonderful get-aways at the Friends Lake Inn in the beautiful Adirondacks and the Nebo Lodge in Northaven, Maine; beautiful jewelry from Tiffany, inc.; salon packages galore; and multitudes of restaurants like Nobu and Tribeca Grill, and Bouley.

You can see pictures from the event on the following page. If you weren't able to join us this year, we hope that you'll be able to attend our next event in 2007. Preparations are already beginning and it promises to be one of our best yet!

WHAT ACTIVITIES DO CC/NY'S ANNUAL *I LOVE AN ETHICAL NY* EVENTS SUPPORT?

When you support our annual *I Love an Ethical NY* events, you support all of the non-lobbying activities of Common Cause/NY. Here are just two examples of this work:

- **“Connect the Dots” money in politics research.** On pages 4 and 5 of this newsletter, you'll find two examples of our research, which documents how money in politics impacts issues New Yorkers care about. Whether it's the energy industry or the pharmaceutical industry or one of the many others we've researched, special interests spend big bucks trying to influence Albany. We shine a spotlight on their spending, and help to build the case for reform!
- **Election Reform.** Common Cause/NY co-chairs the New York Citywide Coalition for Voter Participation, and we've been an active force fighting for fair and accountable elections throughout New York State. We conduct research, monitor the polls and organize New Yorkers to take action in support of fair elections. See page 7 of this newsletter for more details on our recent activities in this arena.

Event pictures page

Event pictures page

Reform Day in Albany 2007

- Yes, I am interested in attending Reform Day. Please put me on your list to receive more information regarding the date, time and location of this event.
- Yes, I am interested in reserving a seat on one of the FREE buses leaving from cities across the state! Please notify me of the departure cities for the Reform Day buses.
- Enclosed is my contribution for \$_____ to help make Reform Day a success! *While seats are available on our buses free of charge, we will be asking those who can afford it to consider making a donation of \$10 to help offset the costs associated with the day.*

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Required information for credit card donations:

Please charge my(circle one): Visa Mastercard

Name on Card: _____

Expiration Date: _____

Billing address: _____

Authorized Donation Amount: _____

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