



New York
COMMON CAUSE
Holding Power Accountable

THE ACTIVIST
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The gridlock in Albany has gone on for way too long. It is increasingly clear that working in Albany to bring about change in the way Albany operates is not enough. This election year, which may bring historic change to the State Senate, provides us with a perfect opportunity to use the election and campaign events to move reform issues back to the center of political discussions in New York. We have to show our elected officials that the issues that we work on to bring effective and accountable state government to New York are supported by ordinary New Yorkers throughout the state. We can't do that simply by lobbying officials once they've arrived in Albany. We have to move the discussion into districts throughout the state.

The Pledge for Change campaign is designed to do precisely that. The Pledge for Change, which you see inside, announces our legislative priorities for next year's legislative session. Joining with our partners Citizens for Better Government in New York, The League of Women Voters of New York State, The Interfaith Alliance of Rochester and NYPIRG, we have mailed it to every candidate running for the state legislature this year. We are asking every

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Letter from our new Executive Director

By Susan Lerner

When I joined Common Cause/NY in December 2007, returning home to New York after some years in California, I certainly had no inkling what changes 2008 would bring to New York. It certainly has been an exciting and interesting time to join Common Cause/New York. A year ago no one would have predicted the changes that have taken place in Albany: a reform governor resigning in disgrace after a sex-scandal, the swearing in as governor of a former state senator with a history of supporting government reforms such as public funding of elections, the retirement of the Republican leader of the state Senate after serving many decades, perhaps presaging the election of a Democratic majority in the state senate for the first time in 40 years.

As a result of this seemingly constant officeholder turbulence, the reform agenda which had been a central objective for the Spitzer Administration seemed to fall by the wayside. A strong turn-out for Reform Day in the Spring garnered ringing statements of support from legislative leaders and the governor, but no actual legislative action. Under prodding from Common Cause/New York and its allies, there was a flurry of end-of-session activity with campaign finance and public funding of elections bills introduced by the Speaker of the Assembly and the Governor. Typically, these bills were introduced too late in the session for meaningful action.

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Letter from our new Executive Director CON'T FROM PAGE 1

While various reform bills had been introduced earlier in the session, under Albany's dysfunctional system, until the leadership gets involved nothing can happen.

Common Cause/NY has been a consistent and effective voice for reform in Albany – that's one of the reasons I am so excited to be working with you. But that effectiveness comes from the involvement of you, our members and activists. It's our grassroots base – concerned New Yorkers who make their voices heard in Albany – speaking out for effective, accountable and responsive state government that allows staff people like myself to get things done. Because, once again, our elected leaders in Albany want to push reform measures to the back of the line, we are turning to you, our members throughout the state, to help us institute a new strategy: Pledge for Change NY. I am excited about this campaign and want to be sure that you read the newsletter article about it in this issue and join us in moving reform efforts back to the center of political discussion in New York!

As is too frequently the case, the up-coming primary and general election present many challenges to our strained election system. We continue to work to insure that all eligible New Yorkers will

be able to cast their votes and that their votes will be counted. We won a significant victory earlier this year with the selection of optical scan systems as the approved machines for counties to purchase to use as ballot marking devices instead of the now widely discredited touch screen computerized machines. We are working closely with our coalition partners and groups doing registration and GOTV work in the neighborhoods and precincts to identify potential problems *before* election day and to suggest practical solutions to them. Please watch for Action Alerts and the next issue of our newsletter for ways that you can become involved in our election-related work.

Making Your Vote Count During the Election

Every election day in towns and cities throughout New York we face the same perennial problem: not enough trained volunteers to work at the polls. The statutory and regulatory changes that Common Cause/NY advocates for are important, but not as important as having enough people working the polls. A lack of adequate numbers of poll inspectors, translators, and door clerks and information clerks ultimately means longer lines and more confusion at poll sites. While it is a long day, there is little that makes as strong a statement about your commitment to good government and civic engagement as being a poll worker!

***Contact your local Board of Elections
to sign up for poll worker training today.***

Meet the Common Cause /New York Program Staff

SUSAN LERNER is the executive director of Common Cause/NY. Prior to her recent return to New York, Susan was the executive director of the California Clean Money Campaign. She served as a member of the Steering Committee of the Commonwealth Club's Voices of Reform Project and on the Board of Trustees of the California State Summer School for the Arts. She founded and chaired the Committee for Judicial Independence, a grassroots organization dedicated to educating and activating Americans to the importance of an independent federal judiciary, and led a statewide coalition of groups active on federal judicial nominations. For almost 20 years, Susan was a trial lawyer in Los Angeles specializing in complex commercial litigation and intellectual property. She is a graduate of the University of Chicago and NYU School of Law. She is enjoying Fort Green's lively restaurant scene and farmer's market and looking for a chorus to sing with.



CHRIS KEELEY joined Common Cause/NY in March 2008 as Associate Director. Chris has held several positions for legislators and electoral candidates in Southeastern Pennsylvania in recent years, including Interim Chief of Staff, Director of Community & Legislative Affairs, Campaign Treasurer, and Deputy Campaign Manager. Prior to that, Chris was Campaigns Organizer at



New York's nationally-renowned economic justice resource center,

Neighborhood Economic Development Advocacy Project. His responsibilities included coordinating the state-wide fair lending coalition, New Yorkers for Responsible Lending, and conducting detailed Census, SEC, and regulatory research. NEDAP's mission is to promote community economic justice and to eliminate discriminatory economic practices that harm communities and perpetuate inequality and poverty.

Chris attended NYU's Gallatin School, has served as an AmeriCorps volunteer, and currently lives in Central Brooklyn. He is pursuing a Masters in Urban Planning at NYU's Wagner School of Public Service.



CHRISTINE MURRAY is the Director of Outreach and Development for Common Cause/NY. She recently worked as the Donor Relations Manager for a Harlem based AIDS Service Organization where she developed their individual giving program. Prior to that position, she worked with many local non-profits to help them meet both fundraising and advocacy goals through events. Christine learned the ropes of fundraising by managing the "Dialing for Dollars" efforts for Mark Green's '98 Senate race. She went on to work in Green's Public Advocate's office till he was term limited out. She and her loyal Brussels Griffon are often seen out and about Williamsburg Brooklyn. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Marketing from Manhattan College and has done extensive study on outsider art.

I Love An Ethical New York Awards Dinner to Honor Ted Sorensen & Nancy Lublin



For the past decade, Common Cause/New York's signature event, *I Love an Ethical New York*, has celebrated the efforts of outstanding New Yorkers who share our values and have worked to invigorate and strengthen our democracy. This year, we have a very special evening planned. Common Cause/New York is pleased to honor Ted Sorensen with the *John Gardner Lifetime Achievement Award* for his dedication to the vigorous functioning of our democracy and Nancy Lublin, Chief

Executive Officer of Do Something and founder of Dress for Success, with the *Andrew Heiskell Award*. Both honorees have set a tremendous example of serving the public good.

This Awards Dinner is scheduled for Tuesday, December 2, 2008 and will include a sit-down dinner at the University Club. The reception begins at 6 PM followed by dinner. Common Cause/New York is delighted to have Bill Moyers serve as our Master of Ceremonies. Common Cause President Bob Edgar will join the program.

Common Cause / New York chose to honor Ted Sorensen because throughout his career he has exemplified the highest ideals of public service, being among the first to call for Americans to rise above deep partisan divides to serve our country's needs, as he did in his 1984 book, *A Different Kind of Presidency: A Proposal for Breaking the Political Deadlock*. His life has been dedicated to fostering

our common cause – a government that works for the good of all its people.

Nancy Lublin will be honored for her work in inspiring, supporting, and celebrating young people who see the need to help those less fortunate than themselves, believe in their ability to get something done, and then take action to achieve their goal.

Past honorees include such notables as Derek Bok, Dr. John Brademas, Ric Burns, Former. Pres. Bill Clinton, Walter Cronkite, Lewis B. Cullman, Richard D. Emery, Diana Fortuna, Margaret Fung, Andrew Heiskell, H. Dale Hemmerdinger, Seymour Hersh, Blair Horner, Nicole A. Gordon, Franz S. Leichter, Rachel Leon, Elizabeth Lubetkin Lipton, Brian O'Dwyer, Joseph A. O'Hare, S.J., Rock the Vote's NY Street Team, Larry Rockefeller Charlie Rose, Frederick A. O. Schwarz, Jr., Mike Wallace and Kathryn S. Wilde.



Invites will be sent out in late October. **Please mark your calendars to hold December 2, 2008 to celebrate our honorees and Common Cause/New York.** For updates or to purchase a table, place an ad in our celebration journal or obtain a ticket now, please visit <http://www.commoncause.org/ny/awards2008> or contact Christine Murray at 212 691 6421 or cmurray@commoncause.org.

We are looking forward for an exciting event and hope to see you there.

A Little More Light on New York State Government

By Logan Reed and Susan Lerner

In the past few months, New York State government has taken some important first steps towards true transparency with the unveiling of 2 impressive websites: Project Sunlight NY, www.sunlightny.com, set up by the Attorney General's office, and Open Book NY, set up by the Office of the State Comptroller, www.osc.state.ny.us/openbook. It's important that we not only appreciate but also use these websites. Both sites allow New Yorkers to become better informed and marshal information to help government perform effectively and efficiently. Keeping websites like these up to date requires constant attention and resources. When budget time comes around, how much support these sites get will be influenced by how popular they are and whether the State Comptroller and State AG can show that they are actually being used by the public. So, check these sites out, bookmark them in your web browser and visit them regularly.

Project Sunlight is ground-breaking because it links several different public databases together into one source of information. We're not aware of any government websites that do what Project Sunlight NY does. Project Sunlight allows you to search data by elected official, see what legislation they have sponsored, who lobbied on the legislation, and what campaign contributions the elected officials received and to search for member item spending by locality. Former Common Cause/NY researcher Liam Arbetman is one of the people who helped develop Project Sunlight NY.

Open Book NY is designed to provide New Yorkers information about state contracts. It has descriptions for EVERYTHING (there are little question marks besides everything that explains each part of the website), and someone who knows very little about government or contracts or state agencies could easily work the website. The only problem at the moment is that, according to the site, "only those public authority contracts that the Office of the State Comptroller approves are on Open Book New York. Currently the Comptroller's Office approves contracts for a small number of public authorities, with the three largest being: the Long Island Power Authority, the Thruway Authority, and the Canal Corporation."

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Pledge for Change New York

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candidate to pledge that, if elected, he or she will work in their house *and* caucus for real progress in our 4 key initiatives:

- **Restore Faith In New York's Ethics**, by establishing a Legislative Ethics Commission and insuring that the Commission for Public Integrity is independent and effective
- **Make Elections Fair**, by adopting public funding of election campaigns and meaningful campaign contribution limits
- **End the Practice of Legislators Choosing Their Voters**, through the creation of an independent redistricting commission
- **Open the Legislative Process and Let the People See and Participate** by changing the way that legislative committees operate

Here's where Common Cause members and supporters come in. *Each one of you* can be an agent for change in Albany by signing the *Pledge for Change Citizen's Petition* and agreeing to demand a Governor and Legislature that will fight for change in these 4 key areas. You'll find the *Pledge for Change Citizen's Petition* at the new website we've set up, www.PledgeforChangeNY.com.

You can also print out copies of the Pledge for Change and personally deliver them to your legislative candidates, urging them to sign on. Take the Pledge to candidate forums and public events. Describe the four points of change laid out by the Pledge and ask your candidates publicly if they will commit to signing the Pledge. If you'd like to get together with other Common Causers in your area to schedule group visits to candidates to urge them to sign the Pledge for Change, call the Common Cause/NY office, 800/300-8707, or sign up on the PledgeforChangeNY.com website asking to be put in touch with other interested New Yorkers in your area.



Volunteers at the Common Cause/New York office helping with the Pledge for Change mailing.

As importantly, the voters of New York need to know which of the people running for office actually support real change in Albany. The website lists candidates who have signed the Pledge for Change. Look for the listing of all candidates and whether they have signed the Pledge for Change in our special elections newsletter in October.

It's time to make Albany work for the people!

(see the Pledge for Change mailed to all NYS Assemblymembers, Senators and candidates on the facing page)

HAVE YOU VISITED THE COMMON CAUSE/NEW YORK WEBSITE RECENTLY?

**THE SITE IS UNDERGOING A MAJOR OVERHAUL.
BE SURE TO CHECK BACK OFTEN FOR THE MOST RECENT UPDATES!**

**SAVE TREES AND SAVE US MONEY:
VISIT THE CC/NY WEBSITE TO SIGN UP TO RECEIVE THIS QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER BY E-MAIL.**

WWW.COMMONCAUSE.ORG/NY

Making Your Vote Count During The Election

PLEDGE FOR CHANGE

It's Time To Make Albany Work for the People

State government in Albany is hobbled by gridlock, unable to conduct the people's business. Study after study, news reports and editorials decrying the situation form an ever-growing stack. Members of the public are cynical about the ability of state government to take action on important issues. Yet, the situation remains unchanged. One-house bills, introduced to impress constituents and the public – but not to actually become law – have been the norm for years. And, there is an alarming lack of public comment, debate or transparency when things do pass the Legislature or are acted on by the governor.

The public's faith in state government is further eroded by controversies and corruption scandals involving both parties. Yet, there is no effective ethics oversight of the Legislature, which excluded itself from the jurisdiction of the Commission on Public Integrity. Instead the Legislative Ethics Commission is merely an extension of the legislators' own team of lawyers and operates completely in secret. Moreover, the legitimacy of the Commission on Public Integrity itself has been challenged since the majority of its membership is appointed by the governor.

Additionally, under pressure to fundraise to win and keep their offices, politicians focus on donors rather than the people they are supposed to represent. Too many politicians appear to care more about what lobbyists and powerful interests think than they do about the critical problems faced by most New Yorkers.

Voters are tired of "politics as usual" and a state government so mired in those politics that it is unable to address the very real problems faced by New Yorkers. In 2008, New York voters are demanding real change that goes beyond empty slogans. To ensure that New York State government is accountable to voters, we urge all candidates to sign this Pledge for Change, and agree to work for these changes in their party caucuses and legislative committees, as well as on the floor of their houses.

By signing below, if elected I pledge to be a force for change in Albany, working in my house and my party caucus for legislation and rules changes which would:

- **Restore Faith In New York's Ethics**

Establish a Legislative Ethics Commission – one independent of legislators – with investigative and enforcement authority, that would conduct its meetings in public. In addition, ensure that no one elected official dominates appointments to the Commission on Public Integrity and that its proceedings will be conducted openly.

- **Make Elections Fair**

Adopt public funding of election campaigns which would make grants available to candidates who agree to abide by spending limits and to not raise additional money from special interests, along with significantly lower limits on all campaign contributions and strong, non-partisan oversight with significant penalties for violation of the spending limitations.

- **End the Practice of Legislators Choosing Their Voters**

Legislators have a vested interest in the political boundaries of their own legislative districts. Given this obvious conflict, new laws must be enacted that take the redistricting process out of the hands of legislators and give it to those who have no vested interest in the outcome and are independent of the partisan, political process. Clear rules for forming districts must be prescribed and software used to create the districts must be made public.

- **Open the Legislative Process and Let the People See and Participate**

(a) Require public release of all staff reports on bills; (b) Require committees to conduct open meetings on the bills assigned to them with an opportunity for the public to testify and be heard; (c) Require that committee attendance and all votes be recorded and promptly made public; (d) Require Conference Committees to meet and resolve differences between adopted Assembly and Senate Bills when requested by any of the bill's sponsors; (e) Give committee chairs and ranking minority members authority over committee budgets and staff hires; and (f) Create a New York "C-SPAN" for all of state government.

Name _____ District _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Please return by fax to 212-807-1809
or by mail to Common Cause/NY, 155 Avenue
of the Americas, 4th Flr, New York, NY 10013

The Pledge for Change is Endorsed by Citizens for Better Government in New York, Common Cause/New York, The Interfaith Alliance of Rochester, League of Women Voters of New York State, and New York Public Interest Research Project. For more information, visit www.PledgeforChangeNY.com.

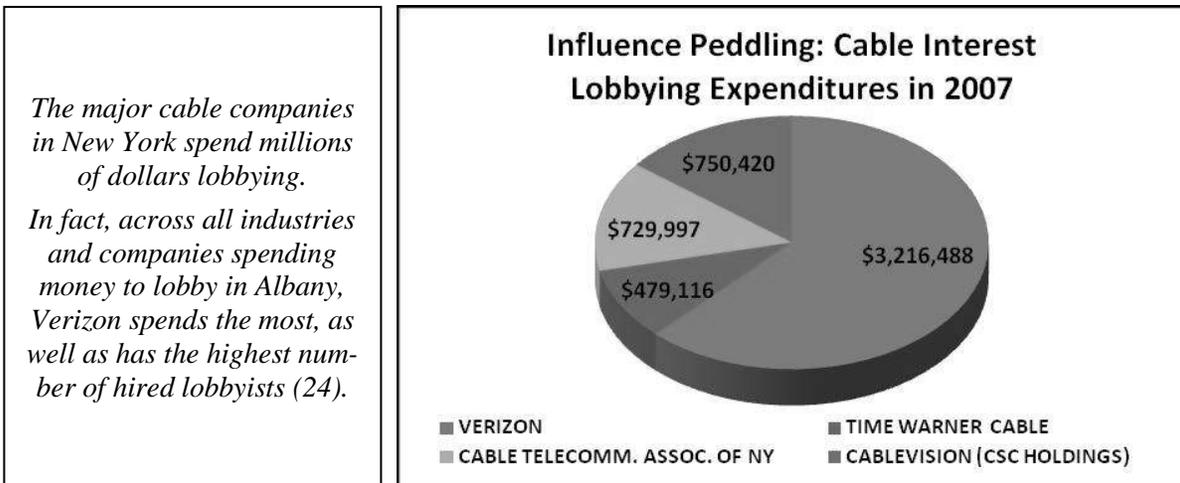
Ensuring the Public is Served by the NY Public Service Commission

Common Cause/NY fights to curb the special interest influence right where it's hitting home for New Yorkers

By Chris Keeley

The price of energy seems ever-increasing. The terms of your cell phone contract are infuriating. And, we learned recently, the safety of your home's cable TV installation may not be up to code with national electrical standards.

The NYS Public Service Commission (PSC) has the power to regulate critical aspects within each of these industries and is responsible "to guarantee safe, secure, and reliable access to energy, telecommunications, and water services" in New York.



One particular case before the PSC that has recently raised flags here at Common Cause/New York is the cable franchise agreement between New York City and Verizon. This cable franchise, the largest such franchise expected nationwide for the foreseeable future, would bring much needed competition to the New York City cable marketplace, a win-win in our view.

The franchise, however, was approved through a poor process at the city level and an absolutely abysmal process before the state.

At the city level, franchise negotiations were held behind closed doors, the agreement was not readily available to the public for review, and the city provided little public notice about its lone public hearing. Only one week after this little-publicized hearing, the franchise was unanimously approved by the city's franchising committee.

Then, in July 2008, the PSC approved the franchise at the state level after allowing Verizon privileged access to PSC commissioners and senior staff, permitting new information into the proceedings which the public had no opportunity to review, and without giving due consideration to concerns raised by Common Cause and our allies.

It was at this July meeting that the public first learned that a large proportion of Verizon's existing fiber optic network installations are currently not up to snuff in terms of electrical code. This information, which amounts to a public safety hazard that should not be overlooked, became public at this July 2008 meeting, but the safety concerns had actually been flagged by PSC staff at least two years prior.

Through this two-year period, it seems, Verizon was permitted to leave these public safety hazards largely unaddressed. The problems are described in remarkably similar language in both the 2006 and the 2008 documents.

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Monitoring Campaign Contributions: Voter Support or Special Interest Dollars?

Following up on the analysis of out of district giving to state legislators in the 2006 election cycle - summarized on the facing page, Common Cause/NY is tracking contributions this election cycle and will issue a similar report in 2009, analyzing where campaign contributions for the 2008 election of state legislators originate. Preliminary analysis from the July, 2008 reporting period is inconclusive as to individual candidates. But looking at contributions over-all, the July figures show a much higher percentage of out of state contributions, 36.8%, than the 2006 full-cycle analysis, where only 9% of contributions came from out of state. Further analysis is necessary to determine whether the out of state contributions are concentrated in one house of the legislature or relatively equal between the Assembly and Senate.

Out-of-District Giving to New York State Legislators

Where do campaign contributions to New York State Legislators originate? Most often, the answer lies outside of the districts they have been elected to represent. This document highlights the findings of a study conducted by Common Cause/New York in collaboration with the National Institute on Money in State Politics and Avencia Incorporated tracking the geographic origins of contributions to New York State Senators and Assembly Members during the 2006 election cycle.

77.3% of campaign contributions to New York State Legislators originated outside of the recipient's district.
9% originated outside of New York State entirely.

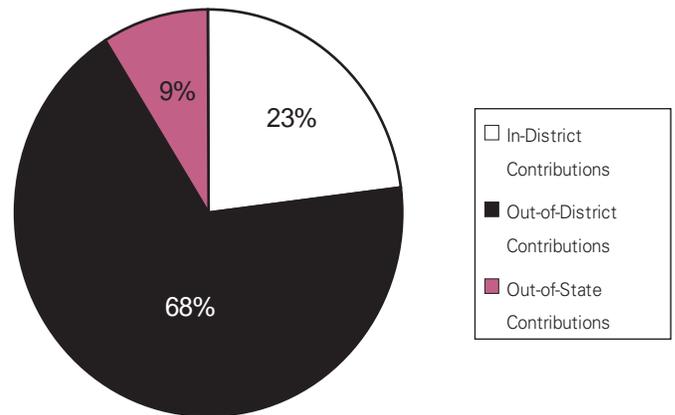
The average out-of-district contribution was nearly twice as much as the average in-district contribution (\$600 versus \$310).

Incumbents average a higher proportion of out-of-district funds than challengers or candidates for open offices (75.9%, 59.2%, and 65.8%, respectively). Incumbents also receive higher proportions of out-of-state funds than non-incumbents (7.6% vs. 5.4%).

Assembly Democrats receive higher proportions of out-of-district and out-of-state funds than Assembly Republicans (80% vs. 58.9% out-of-district; 7.8% vs. 4.7% out-of-state). **Senate Republicans receive roughly the same proportion of out-of-district funds but a higher proportion of out-of-state funds** than Senate Democrats (76.8% vs. 77.4% out-of-district; 9.6% vs. 6.8% out-of-state).

Legislators representing **districts in New York City** receive higher proportions of out-of-district and out-of-state funds than legislators elsewhere in the state (84.1% vs. 67.6% out-of-district; 8.3% vs. 6.6% out-of-state).

Geographic Origin of Contributions to New York State Legislators as Proportion of Total Funds

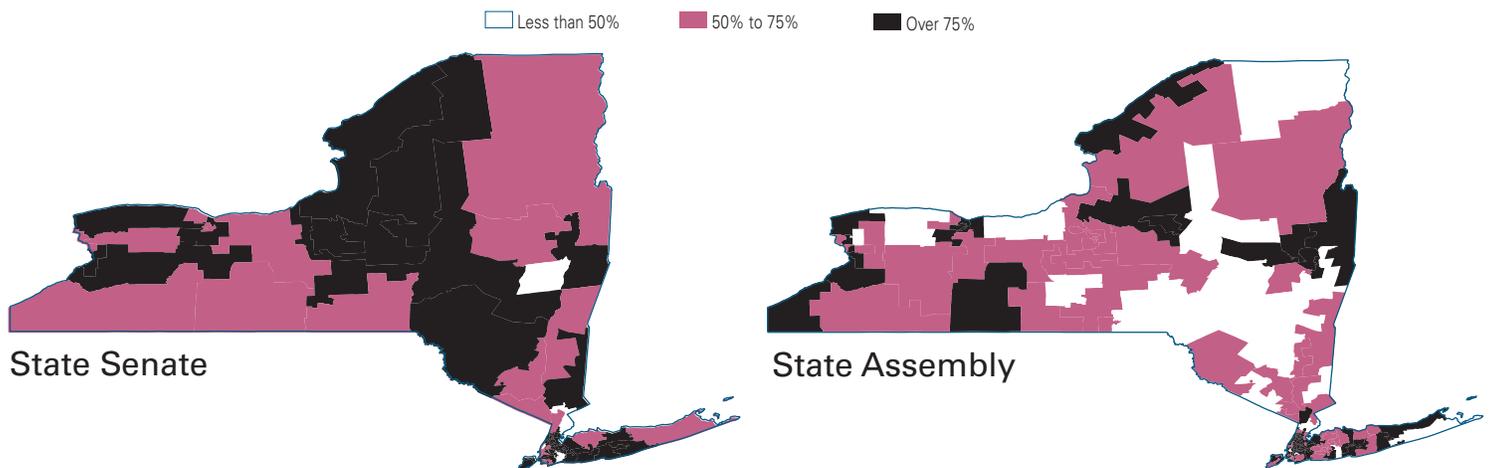


Out-of-district funds tend to originate in the vicinity of larger cities, particularly Albany, New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse.

Contributions with clear ties to **economic sectors** are more likely to originate out-of-district.

Washington, D.C. was the origin of most out-of-state funds (\$768,123), followed by New Jersey (\$646,071), Florida (\$377,544), and California (\$230,630).

Proportion of Funds Originating Out-of-District for Each Legislator



Ensuring the Public is Served by the NY Public Service Commission

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Outdated modes of public notification must be modernized. Above, you can see the miniscule public notice provided by the PSC regarding the largest cable franchise proposal in New York State history.

Verizon, perhaps expecting dissent amongst the Commissioners at the July meeting, was granted privileged, 11th hour access to PSC commissioners and senior staff to submit a plan to review each of its installations state-wide. This 11th hour submission quelled the concerns of at least one commissioner, while it did not meet the threshold of another commissioner who voted against the franchise approval.

The poor procedures through which this Verizon cable franchise was approved serve as an illustration of the need for deep-seeded reform in New York State government. Our experience leads us to suggest some changes to the PSC's procedures.

The 11th hour access that Verizon enjoyed should be explicitly prohibited. No petitioner should be granted privileged access to commissioners of the PSC or any other regulatory agency.

Within the New York PSC, the public notification of pending proposals should be improved. Out-dated modes of public notification, which consists of tiny blocks of information buried in just a few newspapers on a few days, must be modernized.

Information sharing should be improved. In order for local municipalities to make informed decisions, potential franchisees should be required to disclose any investigations relating directly to the product that municipality is considering. In this case, Verizon should be required to alert the New York City franchising authority that the PSC was heading a two-year investigation into safety of the very service the City was reviewing. After all, a reasonable person may wonder, how might New York City have approached its cable franchise with Verizon

differently had it been aware that a "surprisingly high proportion" of Verizon's cable installations were non-compliant with industry-standard electrical codes?

Bringing about an open process, prohibiting favored access, and improving information-sharing requirements is no easy fight, though, and it is not limited to just telecommunication issues. Verizon, for example, is the state's single largest corporate lobbyist in both overall expenditures (see charts) as well "boots on the ground," in the form of lobbyists on the company's payroll.

And, as we've shown through our Connect The Dots series which aims to show how money in politics impacts on issues New Yorkers care about, the power industry is no slouch either when it comes to peddling its influence in the halls of Albany and before regulatory bodies such as the PSC.

Procedures at the PSC must be improved if the public is going to be afforded an opportunity to provide meaningful input regarding the safety of its cable television, the terms and conditions of its cell phone contracts, or the price of its energy.

Common Cause will focus on these procedural concerns as we reach out to consumer rights, environmental, and media justice organizations to discuss reform at the PSC. We know that open, accountable government proceedings, whether they be before the legislature or an executive agency such as the PSC, are good for the public interest and only serve to strengthen the democratic process in our state.

Cable Franchise Agreements Approved by The NYS Public Service Commission, by Company January 2005 - July 2008		
	New Franchise Approvals	Franchise Renewals
Adams CATV	0	1
Cablevision	3	50
Empire Video Services Corporation	19	0
Haefele TV	0	6
Hilltop Communications d/b/a Valstar	0	1
Midtel Cable TV	0	7
Time Warner	1	255
Verizon	122	0
Grand Total	145	320

Source: NYS Public Service Commission File Room

Time Warner, through its partnership with Advance/Newhouse Communications, holds the largest share of cable franchises granted by the NYS PSC in recent years. Verizon, though, is clearly making strides regarding new franchise agreements throughout the state.

INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING IN THE COMMON CAUSE/NEW YORK OFFICE AT SPRING ST AND 6TH AVE?

KNOW A COLLEGE STUDENT THAT WOULD BE A GREAT INTERN FOR COMMON CAUSE/NEW YORK?

CONTACT US TODAY! LET'S MAKE IT HAPPEN!

CONTACT CHRISTINE MURRAY AT (800) 300-8707 OR CMURRAY@COMMONCAUSE.ORG.

A Celebration of Activism

By Susan Lerner



Justin Krebs

On March 11, an excited crowd of Common Cause supporters and activists gathered for a Celebration of Activism. The occasion was best-selling author and National Public Radio commentator Jim Hightower's visit to New York City to speak on the importance of holding power accountable and to sign copies of his new book, *Swim Against the Current: Even A Dead Fish Can Go With the Flow*. In the book, Jim profiles ordinary folks from around the country who have embraced activism.



Jim Hightower, speaking to CCNY activists and allies.

Given the topic of the book, it was a perfect fit with Common Cause/NY.

It seemed more than appropriate to expand the program beyond Jim and highlight the New Yorkers whom Jim profiled for their activism. An overflow crowd came to All Souls Church on Manhattan's Upper East Side to hear Jim and celebrate the New Yorkers whose activism he featured. We were fortunate to be joined by Martin Dunn of Dunn Development, a socially conscious real estate developer with expertise in affordable and supportive housing, who spoke movingly about what motivated him to be active and Justin Krebs of Drinking Liberally, who regaled us with stories of how his wildly successful idea is playing out in all 50 states. A highlight of the program was the performance of a song by The Granny Peace Brigade, a group born in 2005 when a group of women asked to enlist in the U.S. armed forces in order to replace grandchildren who had been deployed.



Martin Dunn



The Granny Peace Brigade
www.grannypeacebrigade.org

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 Christine Murray at cmurray@commoncause.org.

Meet our Volunteers – Spotlight on Herb Liebmann



One of Common Cause/New York's greatest strength is its active membership. Here is a profile of Herb Liebmann, both a member and volunteer.

Herb has been a member of Common Cause since 1971. At the beginning of this summer, Herb answered a CauseNet email looking for volunteers to help archive old files in the New York office. After a brief orientation, he was directed to the files and boxes. Herb dug right in and started indexing and organizing the files. While this is not the most fun task, he was dedicated and had a keen eye for important documents which he would share with the Executive Director and Associate Director, both of whom were relatively new to the office. He returned week after week because as Herb said, "everyone was so nice at the Common Cause/New York office."

Herb had been looking for some type of volunteering activity that had to do with government or politics since he retired as a CPA. He spent 28 ½ years at the State Insurance Department handling the liquidation of insurance companies and 8 years at a CPA firm. In addition to his career, he's been involved in local politics for more than 40 years. He has managed as well as volunteered for various campaigns for State Senate, Assembly and City Council races. Often he would bring his skills from the professional world and act as the treasurer to a campaign.

His interest in politics started with a curiosity about the mechanics of how someone got elected. Herb's first foray into politics was working on John Lindsey campaign for New York City Mayor. Then at an United Jewish Appeal event honoring his father, opportunity struck to get more involved. Herb received a personal invite to join one of the Northern Manhattan political clubs. He was active in the club from 1971 to 1990 when he moved to Queens with his wife.

And at the end of August, Herb traveled to Denver to serve as a delegate for Barack Obama at the Democratic National Convention. Herb was volunteering at the office for a few weeks before we discovered that he was a delegate, in fact the only Obama delegate from the 9th Congressional district. This was his first time attending the convention and we have enjoyed hearing his stories upon his return.

In addition to Herb's love of politics, he is a life-long fan of the New York Rangers, Yankees and Knicks. Those are just the New York teams he follows as an avid sports fan. He also likes to read and travel. He enjoyed the convention where he can participated in the democratic process as well as explored Denver, a city he had not visited.

Herb has boxed and indexed over 17 boxes of files containing Common Cause/New York's history. His next project is to help encourage our elected officials and candidates for state office to sign on to the *Pledge for Change*. Herb will be contacting every candidate for state office to encourage them to sign on. Herb even took a few copies of the *Pledge* to Denver to remind any New York State elected officials he saw how important it is to support the *Pledge the Change*.

If you are interested in helping Herb or volunteering in the Common Cause/New York Office, please contact Christine Murray 212 691 6421 or cmurray@commoncause.org. Also if you aren't already receiving our emails, please sign up to received our CauseNets -- Common Cause's action alerts-- by visiting www.commoncause.org/causenetsignup.

Thanks for a Great Summer

By Diarra Edwards

When I first walked into 155 Avenue of the Americas I was nervous. Really nervous. I took the elevator up to the 4th floor hoping that I would make a good impression and avoid any awkward teenager moments. My boss sounded pretty nice in our email correspondence but I had no idea what the office or building would look like or anything else for that matter. All I knew was that I would work as an intern for a woman named Chris Keeley, the associate director of Common Cause/New York.

I walked into the well lit office and my nerves didn't improve. Even with the mystery of a new environment removed I still had the new kid in the cafeteria feel. On the bright side my boss was nice, although there also must have been some sort of previous miscommunication because Chris Keeley is a guy.

Interning at Common Cause was a great first job experience because not only did I get to work on projects that New Yorkers would benefit from but I got to learn a lot about issues that the media doesn't sufficiently cover (and really should). It felt great that I got to do things that would help the staff members work towards Common Cause's mission. My supervisor was really flexible and I was able to go on trips during the day or after work. This summer I sat in on hearings and went to the demonstration for the new ballot marking devices that will be used in this November election. I also got to talk to people with disabilities about what they felt about the new machines. It was especially fun because I can't even vote yet and probably won't see another voting machine until I'm 18.

Kids, especially teenagers, should be concerned about Common Cause's issues like government accountability and open process not because we simply inherit them when we get older but because we deal with the effects of these problems now. Just because kids can't vote doesn't mean we aren't affected by poor leadership and bad government. The law applies to everyone, even the laws pushed by shady lobbyists and incumbents who have been in office since before we were born.

Tons of people I know wish they could do something for the world and the community but are often stumped by what they should do or discouraged by the minute impact that they'll have, so they throw some money at "Save The Children" and look away. But there are only 6 full time and part time people working in the Common Cause New York office and they do a lot.

The New York office of Common Cause is a great place to work and I highly recommend volunteering or interning at the office. But if you want to throw some money their way that would be cool too, just call John Briscoe.



Diarra interned for Common Cause/NY as a part of Prep for Prep's Public Policy Internship Project. Prep for Prep identifies talented students in the New York City area, from minority group ethnicities, to prepare them for placement in independent schools. CC/NY has been privileged to have participated in PPIP for a number of summers. Diarra will be a junior at Berkeley Carroll School this fall.

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\$2,634,000
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The amount spent on lobbying for each day the New York State Legislature was in session in 2007.
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A Little More Light on New York State Government *continued from page 3*

Both the Attorney General's office and the Office of the State Comptroller are to be commended for setting up these websites. However, the information that they provide is only as good as the information contained in the under-lying databases. In the coming months, we'll be looking at those databases in detail, to see if there are ways in which they can be improved so that these 2 excellent public information tools will be even more useful. If, after you've spent some time on these websites you have specific suggestions for improving the sites or the databases that they search, please send your suggestions to us at NYOffice@commoncause.org. We will incorporate them into our review and discussions with the designers of Project Sunlight NY and Open Book NY.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

To request materials, sign up for updates, or suggest a Connect the Dots topic, fax or mail this form back to us at 212-807-1809 or 155 6th Avenue, 4th Fl.; New York, NY 10013:

Name _____ Title _____

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E-mail* _____ Topic Suggestion _____

**Please provide your email address and return this form if you would like to have future bulletins sent to you via email.*

Add me to the list to receive updates

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Send me a Connect the Dots fact sheet on how money in politics is impacting these issues (circle your selections):

Lead Poisoning

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Rent Laws

The MTA

Power Plant Pollution

Liberty Bonds/Rebuilding Downtown

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA)

Indian Point

Garbage Grinders

West Side Stadium...

(updated!)

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