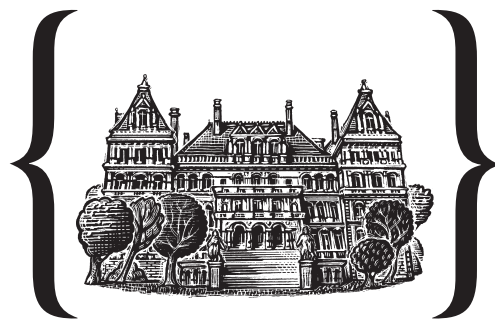


STATE SENATOR LIZ KRUEGER'S *Albany Update*

*Reporting to residents of Midtown and the East Side
on how the sausages are made in the State Capitol*



As you read the newspapers, you may have thought I needed to bring boxing gloves to Albany this year.

Yes, things are contentious. And that's fine if/when we spend our energy debating substantive big picture issues and transforming state government to deal with 21st century problems. Unfortunately, those issues are not often enough the focus of our arguments.

Looking forward, 2008 will be a historic year for shifting the direction of the United States—what better time to push the envelope in Albany? That's why this Albany Update is a look at my reform agenda for the year ahead.

While the new Governor has succeeded in advancing a number of important measures—many of which I discussed in September's update—it's clear to everyone by now that not everything has changed in Albany.

Those who are committed to advancing reform must be aggressive and keep the pressure on both the legislative leaders and the Governor to bring more fundamental change to the way we do business.

What kind of change? Read on.

Liz Krueger

{ LEGISLATIVE RULES REFORM }

At the beginning of the last two legislative sessions, the Senate minority conference—Senate mailing rules don't allow me to print party names—offered a rules reform package designed to enhance the power of committees, equalize staff and research resources among Senators and make it easier to bring legislation that has broad support to the floor for a vote.

Unfortunately, the Senate majority has been unwilling to lend their support to these proposals. They think the rule that requires we be in our seats to vote was as far as we needed to go. I disagree, and will continue to introduce my rules reform package as independent bills.

My frustration over the failure of legislative leaders of both parties to reform the rules on their own led me, Tom Kirwan (a member of the As-

sembly minority), and the Urban Justice Center to bring suit against the legislative leaders in an effort to enforce reform. Unfortunately that case was dismissed by the state Court of Appeals; courts have been historically hesitant to step into the legislature's business. It's too bad the legislature isn't better at self-policing to ensure a truly democratic process.

{ CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM }

As I mentioned in my last newsletter, early this summer the Governor and legislative leaders announced an agreement on a very modest campaign finance reform bill. However, in the end, neither house acted on even this minimal reform package. I continue to believe that what we really need is a system of full public financing of campaigns, similar to the systems adopted in the

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reform-minded states of Arizona and Maine.

Under such a system, candidates who agreed to participate would have to show their seriousness by raising a significant number of small contributions (\$5 to \$100) from voters in their districts and agree to strict campaign spending limits. By removing large donors—corporations, labor unions, lobbyists and special interest PACS—from the equation, full public financing would encourage candidates to spend more time talking to the people they are supposed to represent and less with the large donors.

The proposal also provides for an increase in the spending cap if a candidate faces an opponent who doesn't participate and spends more than the cap. This amount of additional public financing is limited, and can't necessarily control for the rare case of someone spending millions of his or her own money on a race, but such outlying cases do not outweigh the significant benefit to the public of elected officials accountable to the voters rather than to their donors. Don't you want me spending more of my time working for you, and less time fundraising? (I sure do!)

I'm happy to report that Gov. Spitzer has recognized the need to move beyond tinkering, and is currently working on language for public financing legislation that should be introduced next year. Passage of this legislation must be a key component of any reform agenda for 2008.

{ REFORMING PENSION MANAGEMENT }

The recent revelations regarding the admitted misdeeds of the former State Comptroller have led me to conclude that we need to change our pension management system to eliminate the concentration of decision-making authority that I believe led to this situation. New York State's Pension Fund is worth over \$150 billion, and there needs to be a better system of checks and balances to ensure that none of it—or profits made off its management—is diverted for political or personal reasons.

To do this, most states assign fund management to an independent board of trustees, rather than just one person. While those defending the current system have argued that such an arrangement slows the ability to react to rapidly changing

{2} conditions, the current scandals have convinced me that this is less of a problem than the complete independence we currently give the State Comptroller. It used to be said that the fund management should not be changed because "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." Now we know: it was broken. I'll be working to establish an independent review board to ensure that our state pension resources are protected.

{ REDISTRICTING REFORM }

The 2010 census is getting closer and closer, and yet in 2007 redistricting reform legislation went nowhere. It's not surprising—if action is not taken soon, we will again face a situation where legislators are effectively drawing the boundaries for their own districts. The potential for abuse of such a system should be clear—leaving redistricting to the legislature just perpetuates the incumbent-protection racket. As with campaign finance reform, other states are way ahead of us—12 states now have independent redistricting commissions, similar to legislation I cosponsor in the Senate (S1155). New York should join that list.

{ IT'S TIME FOR HEALTH CARE COVERAGE FOR ALL NEW YORKERS }

We must aggressively address the health care crisis we face in this state by joining other states—such as Maine, Massachusetts and Vermont—in recognizing that we cannot wait any longer for federal action. The current market-based system leaves 2.8 million New Yorkers without coverage—and most of the rest of us paying escalating premiums with decreasing assurance of actual access and coverage for illness.

Governor Spitzer attempted to expand coverage for uninsured children this year, but even that plan has been jeopardized by the President's veto of funding for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), which would increase coverage among the "working poor" who have jobs yet can't afford or have no coverage from their employers.

With health care costs escalating in double digit percentages each year—regardless of who's



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paying—it's time to move beyond incremental solutions.

Among the cover-everyone options, I favor the single payer model, which has been proven to be the most cost effective at reducing overhead costs (3% in the Canadian system vs. 13.6% in our current private system), but I'm open to anything that will expand coverage and lower administrative costs.

{ PROTECTING REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS }

The Supreme Court's decision upholding laws banning certain abortion procedures raises the spectre that reproductive rights will be eroded even more by future court decisions. New Yorkers should respond to this attack on choice by strengthening our own outdated protections for reproductive rights.

In the State Senate, I'll be fighting for the Reproductive Health and Privacy Protection Act (S6045) which I cosponsor. This legislation would change the way New York state law treats abortion, by regulating it under the public health law rather than criminal law.

I will also be fighting for two other bills in this realm: passage of the Healthy Teens Act (S1342), which provides for age-appropriate sexuality education with accurate, scientifically reliable information to reduce unintended pregnancy and STDs, as well as my own Breastfeeding Bill of Rights (S1674B), which ensures that women are appropriately informed about the benefits of breastfeeding. Both these bills passed the Assembly in 2007, but were not acted on in the Senate.

{ SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE IN NYS }

In early September, I joined with colleagues and Commissioner Patrick Hooker of New York State's Department of Agriculture on a two-day tour of farms and agri-businesses in upstate NY to learn firsthand from farmers how government can help them produce and sell more farm fresh foods and products here in New York City. We learned of efforts to modernize family run farms and increase production without damaging the environment or overuse of pesticides; of models for

{3} agri-tourism (pick-your-own farms); of the possibilities of expanded bio-diesel fuel from crops; and we visited an incubator test kitchen for New York-created food products.

In turn I co-hosted the group here in NYC, starting at the Hunts Point Markets in the South Bronx and finishing up at the Union Square Farmers' Market. We visited the wholesale NY farmers' market where farmers sell directly off their trucks to bodegas, small- and medium-sized markets, and high-end restaurants. We also took tours of the New Fulton Fish Market with its 39 vendors and 400,000 square feet of selling space and the Hunts Point Produce Cooperative, which sells produce on four different "roads," each a third of a mile long.

It's clear from these tours that New York faces real challenges in connecting upstate growers with New York City's 8,000,000 residents. I'll be working for a more integrated approach to agriculture and food policy including:

—A permanent NYS wholesale farmers market at Hunts Point where restaurants, small food stores, supermarkets and individuals could purchase the broad array of "Pride of New York" products.

—Expanding shared trucking options and improved regional rail for moving upstate products down to New York City.

{ THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING CRISIS }

Few problems facing our state are more critical than New York's severe shortage of safe, decent and affordable homes. In recent decades, homeowners and renters in cities, towns, suburbs and rural areas across New York have seen its housing problems become a full born crisis. That's why I'm drafting legislation to establish a \$500 million State Housing Trust Fund to finance the planning, production and preservation of affordable housing, which would be fully funded by existing revenue generated by the housing market.

Locally, protecting rent regulation is critical to the preservation of affordable housing. I sponsor legislation (S1673) that would restore control of rent laws to New York City, rather than leaving it in the hands of upstate legislators who have no rent-regulated housing in their districts.



To get a copy of my "Resource Guide for Seniors," email me at lkrueger@senate.state.ny.us with "Senior Guide" in the subject line, or call my office at (212) 490-9535.

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{ FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE IN NYS }

This fall, I organized two events aimed at highlighting global warming issues. The first, “Cleaning Up New York City’s Waste Stream” brought together experts to discuss different approaches for reducing the amount of garbage that New York City produces. The second event was a presentation of Nobel Prize Winner Al Gore’s slideshow “An Inconvenient Truth” followed by a discussion led by State Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Pete Grannis on how New York State can address the issue of global warming.



Among my priorities for the coming legislative session are passage of the Bigger, Better Bottle Bill (S5850), which would expand deposits to cover those containers currently not covered by the bottle bill: water, juice and tea bottles and cans. I’ll also be working with advocates to pass a ban on Styrofoam (S6402). At my Waste Stream Forum I saw corn and sugarcane-based alternatives to Styrofoam that have similar costs, stood up to all sorts of serious testing, and also biodegrade within 2 months (compared to 500 years for Styrofoam). New York State also must implement a ban on the purchase of wood from rainforest trees by government and government contractors; deforestation is a major contributor to global warming.

Here are some small steps you can take to make a big difference for the planet:

- ✓ Instead of buying the cheapest new appliance, invest in energy-saving ones. Energy Star appliances use up to 40% less energy.
- ✓ Instead of putting a refrigerator next to the oven or dishwasher, separate them so the fridge works less, using less energy.
- ✓ Instead of using regular incandescent bulbs, use Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs.
- ✓ Instead of running your dishwasher and/or washing machines whenever you get around to it, plan ahead so you only run full loads. (And not all laundry needs hot water, so cold-wash when you can!)
- ✓ Instead of buying a bottle of water every day, carry a refillable bottle. And avoid Styrofoam at all costs.
- ✓ Instead of merely recycling the packaging you buy, make sure to buy recycled products in the first place. Stoop sales and consignment stores can be a great resource!