



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Liz Krueger

Senate Democratic Task Force on Legislative and Budgetary Reform Holds Fourth Hearing in Albany Today

LIZ KRUEGER February 28, 2006

Albany, NY – Saying “it is critical that we ensure that State government be held accountable to the people we represent,” State Senator Liz Krueger, Chair of the Senate Democratic Task Force on Legislative and Budgetary Reform, today led the Task Force’s fourth public hearing on ways to improve State Government.

Among the topics discussed were proposals to limit contributions from public contractors and lobbyists; establishing an independent State Ethics Commission; monitoring how debt is created, and the amount of debt created by public authorities; and evaluating the outcome of the budget reform ballot proposition.

“New York State is still home to the best and the brightest people in the nation. That we are not putting these great minds to work in and out of the Legislature to improve our State is simply unacceptable,” Senator Krueger said.

Among those testifying at the hearing were: Mark Bitz, President, Plainville Turkey Farm; Michael Rabinowitz, Political Director, NY Jobs with Justice; Rachel Leon, Executive Director, Common Cause NY; Barbara Bartoletti, Legislative Director, NYS League of Women Voters; Diana Fortuna, President, Citizens Budget Commission; Doug Israel, Public Policy and Advocacy Director, Citizens Union; Blair Horner, Legislative Director, NYPIRG; Robert Ward, Research Director, The Public Policy Institute, Business Council; and Edmund J. McMahon, Senior Fellow, Center for Civic Innovation, The Manhattan Institute.

“As we work toward what I hope is another on-time budget this year, there are without a doubt many reforms we need to ensure a more open, responsive and responsible state government. Last fall, Senator Liz Krueger came to Syracuse to host a task force hearing on budgetary reform, an important part of this overall discussion. I look forward to hearing testimony from other leaders of the reform movement as we work toward a better government,” Senator David Valesky (D-Syracuse) said.

Other lawmakers noted the importance of a report critical of Legislative practices that called the public’s attention to the way state government operates.

"While the Assembly took some genuinely positive steps toward democracy and transparency last year, the Senate appears to be moving backward," remarked Senator Eric Schneiderman (D-Manhattan & the Bronx). "I am proud to join with my colleagues in calling on the Senate to enact significant -- and long overdue --legislative reforms this year."

"In 2004, when the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University labeled our state's government the most dysfunctional in the entire nation, a lot of people both inside and outside the Legislature sat up and took notice," said Senator George Onorato (D-Queens). "This led to a number of positive changes, but no one should get the idea that we've finished the job when it comes to making New York's government more open and accountable to the public it is elected to serve."

Senator Onorato's thoughts were echoed by Senator Neil D. Breslin (D-Albany), who said the Task Force must continue its work. "Last year the State Legislature took a few small steps toward reform, but there is still a great deal of work to be done if we are to make New York's state government truly democratic," Senator Breslin added.

Senator John D. Sabini (D-Queens) noted that while reform was a hot topic in the 2004 elections, public servants should not rest on their laurels, because New Yorkers are still paying close attention. "Every two years we ask the public for their confidence as we seek to represent them in the State capital," Senator Sabini said. "It's critical that we keep up our end of the bargain by passing a fair and responsible budget on time, without the ethical questions that have plagued Albany in the past. Getting the public involved with open hearings like today's is a good step in that direction."

Senator Kevin S. Parker (D-Brooklyn) added that today's hearing is helping to shed even more light on practices that have been swept under the rug. "For far too long the culture in Albany has remained stagnant and irresponsible. Public hearings like this allow us to discuss the obvious examples of government dysfunction and allow the people of New York to voice their concerns and share their ideas. Clearly, there is a real need to rethink and reform the way Albany goes about its business. It is time for us, as a legislative body, to step up the plate and enact effective changes to make our government more responsive and accountable," said Senator Parker.

Other members of the Task Force include: Thomas K. Duane (D-Manhattan), Ruth Hassell-Thompson (D-Mt. Vernon), Suzi Oppenheimer (D-Westchester), and Malcolm A. Smith (D-Queens).

"Today's hearing will not end the efforts of my colleagues and I to reform State Government. Throughout the rest of the session and into the summer and fall, we will continue examining ways to ensure a better life for everyone in this State. Our children deserve to have a healthy, vibrant state handed to them one day. We will all work to make sure that happens," Senator Krueger concluded.