



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James L. Seward

## Time For Government Reform Overdue

JAMES L. SEWARD July 29, 2010

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Reform is a word that is tossed around a lot by elected officials. By definition the word reform means to change and improve something by correcting faults – hard to argue with that concept. Looking at our state government, certainly a few faults need to be corrected. But simply saying you support reform, and making real improvements, are two different things

I have fought for a number of key reforms during my time in the state senate. With my support, legislation has been approved to open up the state budget process, create a more transparent senate and clean up Albany. Unfortunately, over the last two years, one party rule has dominated state government and many of the landmark reforms have been ignored.

Now, there is renewed optimism that past reforms will be followed and new ones will be implemented. A non-partisan, independent coalition known as “[New York Uprising](#)” is calling on elected officials and candidates for state office to sign a pledge committing their support to specific reform measures in three categories. I signed the pledge and have been named a Hero of Reform.

Let me be clear, I am not a Johnny-come-lately when it comes to government reform. Many of the initiatives included as part of the “New York Uprising” platform are measures I have already supported.

**Budget Reform** – With my support, the senate has passed legislation to adopt Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP); to institute a five-year financial plan; use performance budgeting and create an independent budget office. The bills were not passed by the assembly.

I also voted to enact the state Budget Reform Law of 2007 which requires the use of joint, public budget conference committees to ensure total budget transparency, and sets a schedule in law to achieve a responsible, on-time, balanced budget.

Unfortunately, legislative leaders have thumbed their noses at the Budget Reform Law over the past two years and have conducted the most secretive budget negotiations in state history, resulting in a disastrous budget that raised spending and taxes by billions of dollars,

and an incomplete budget that is on its way to being the latest in state history.

I have also consistently opposed tax increases and supported the enactment of a constitutional state spending cap to stop out-of-control spending and the tax increases that pay for that spending, make our state less economically competitive and drive jobs out of state.

**Ethics Reform** - Earlier this year, Democrats in the legislature put forward an ethics reform bill that was criticized by virtually every newspaper in the state, as well as some good government groups, because it was too weak. While I voted for this bill as a small first step, I also joined my Republican colleagues in proposing and supporting three amendments to strengthen the bill. Senate Democrats defeated every amendment. The bill was vetoed by Governor Paterson because it did not go far enough.

Rather than use the governor's veto of an ethics reform bill as an opportunity to publicly negotiate a better, stronger measure, legislative Democrats tried to ram through an override so the weaker bill they settled for would be enacted into law. I refused to vote for this override because I believe we need to negotiate a stronger bill that ensures more disclosure and more transparency. The people deserve better.

**Independent Redistricting** – I support legislation (senate bill 6240) that would create an independent commission to draw new district lines for the legislature and Congress. The bill provides for one appointment each by the majority and minority conference leaders, ensuring a truly bi-partisan redistricting process.

We need to restore public confidence in state government. Following the already established reform laws and creating additional transparencies will foster public trust and create a more

responsive legislature. The “New York Uprising” pledge embraces the principles I have already been fighting for and will continue to support moving forward.

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