



A message from
 Assemblywoman
**SANDY
 GALEF**
**School Sharing and
 Consolidation Forum**
Thursday, September 16th

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE 2010

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Dear Constituent,

We have certainly spent a lot of time in Albany this legislative session. The \$9.2 billion state budget deficit has forced us to make some very difficult decisions. Coming to consensus on these tough issues has, in my opinion, been a key driver of our long, extended process.

I do wish we could have adopted an on-time budget, and I personally worked with some of my colleagues to speed up the process. I was a leader in the "storming of the Governor's office" which jump-started the stalled negotiations. However, even with the unprecedented difficulties that naturally accompany a struggling economy, the Assembly was able to pass a budget by the end of June, and the full legislature by August 3rd. I hope that as our financial times improve, budget decisions will be easier and more timely. This pattern of late budgets, which I have worked so hard to eradicate, should not happen again.

As you know, I continue to focus my efforts on lowering the cost of government and reforming how it operates. I encourage you to attend my forum on September 16th when we will discuss ways we can all be involved in reducing school costs. We acknowledge the critically important role schools play in our society and are so proud of the achievements of our students and our schools collectively. But the price tag is too high, and disproportionately so when compared to other states with similar demographics and achievements. I look forward to a lively discussion with experts and attendees on the often controversial subject of school sharing and consolidation.

Also in this newsletter I have tabulated your responses to my most recent survey on reform. From the information in the last newsletter, you know how critical this issue is for me and for the state to ensure a truly representative government that works for the people. I have included some updates on legislative activity about reform issues. Other bills that have passed both houses which address issues you and others have communicated about with me are also highlighted on the pages that follow.

There are many changes needed in our state and at the local level to keep New York more competitive and working better for all of us as taxpayers. I always welcome your input on these important issues. Please continue to stay in touch with me as I will with you.

Sincerely,

Sandy Galef
 Member of the Assembly

**Assemblywoman Sandy Galef
 Hosts a Forum on Property Tax Relief
 Shrinking School Budgets
 through Sharing and
 Consolidation**

**Thursday, September 16th
 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.**

**Cortlandt Town Hall
 1 Heady Street, Cortlandt Manor**

with:

Jonathan Drapkin

Executive Director, *Pattern for Progress*

Charles Zettek Jr.

V.P. and Director of Government Management Services
Center for Governmental Research

John Clarkson

Former Executive Director
*State Commission on Local Government
 Efficiency and Competitiveness*

Dr. Joseph L. Natale

Director, Advisory Solutions
New York State School Boards Association

Some school districts in the area are seeing declining enrollment, lower state aid, and increased difficulty getting budgets passed with ever-growing property taxes. My forum is an opportunity to discuss this sometimes controversial topic. We will discuss ways other states have approached education financing, and what we can do to continue to offer the excellent educational programs and high standards we are known for in Westchester and Putnam Counties, and New York as a whole. These panelists have all been involved with studies within New York State and beyond that analyzed areas schools can look to for savings. **There will be an opportunity for Q & A following the panel discussion.**

In the picture on the address portion of this newsletter, Duane Jackson, a Buchanan resident, joined me in my district office to receive a proclamation from the Assembly recognizing him as a hero. Mr. Jackson, honorably discharged from the US Navy, was one of the two New York City street vendors who alerted police to the Times Square car bomber earlier this year.

Assemblywoman Sandy Galef's 2010 Legislative Highlights

I sponsored and co-sponsored many pieces of legislation this year. There are three, however, that deserve special mention since they have a direct positive impact on you. These three pieces of legislation streamline state and local government, helping government operate more efficiently and/or saving taxpayers money.

Real property tax receipts will now be available online *(A10869/S7677 Passed both houses)*

Municipalities have, in increasing numbers, allowed their residents to pay taxes electronically. Unfortunately, due to a technicality in the law, municipal personnel had been unable to provide taxpayers with on-line receipts as proof of payment. With the passage of this new law, taxpayers will feel more confident paying their taxes on-line because they will have an official receipt. This will save time and money for both taxpayers and municipal governments.

The absentee ballot process has been simplified *(A5276B/S2868B Signed by Governor Chapter 63)*

Up until now, potential voters were forced to answer a lengthy questionnaire to obtain an absentee ballot. This new law removes the irrelevant questions, thereby decreasing the amount of paperwork for board of elections staff while eliminating a bureaucratic hurdle in the absentee ballot application process.

Voters will be able to apply for absentee ballots by fax and other ways in writing *(A7347B/S4960B Signed by Governor Chapter 97)*

Currently, potential voters must apply for an absentee ballot application form by mail or in person. Both ways incur time and costs for voters and board of elections employees. This new law will allow voters, as of next January, to request an absentee ballot by fax or another written instrument, making it easier to vote by absentee ballot.

PROPERTY TAX RELIEF LEGISLATION:

Sweeping education reforms better position New York to receive federal Race-to-the-Top funds

(A.11310/S.7990 Chapter 101, A.11309/S.7989 Chapter 100, A.11171/S.7991 - Chapter 103 All Signed by Governor)

These measures make necessary reforms to our education system as well as increase our chances of receiving \$700 million in aid, through the federal Race-to-the-Top program. Transparency and accountability have been strengthened by giving the State Comptroller auditing power over charter schools, and make sure that these schools enroll and serve students with special needs. The new laws also increase the charter school cap significantly, but ensure that no for-profit organizations operate or manage any new charter schools. An annual professional performance review of classroom teachers and building principals based on student achievement will also be created to improve the

statewide evaluation system as well as teaching and leadership standards.

Early retirement incentive for the public workforce *(A.11144/S.7909 Signed by Governor Chapter 105) + New Tier 5 Pension Plan*

In an effort to reduce the number of public employees and cut state spending, the legislature and Governor approved an early retirement plan, offering a couple of options to state employees. Another cost cutting measure the legislature passed this fiscal year was a new Tier 5 pension plan in effect January 1, 2010 for all newly hired state employees. Under Tier 5, public employees including educators are required to have 10 years of service before being eligible for a state pension, and contribute three percent of their salaries annually to their pensions for their entire career.

State education department may now receive important information electronically, reducing the use of paper

(A.11566/S.8376 Passed both houses)

This creates a much more efficient and cost effective way of submitting school reports. This bill will also give the education commissioner authority to examine the impact of regional transportation systems through transportation pilots. The results could allow for more cost-effective transportation systems for school districts throughout the state.

Cooperative competitive bidding helps libraries save money

(A.6154B/S.3903A Passed both houses)

Currently, public libraries in New York State are not allowed to join together and bid for services or supplies as a group, and therefore need to pay a premium when bidding individually. This new bill would allow libraries to bid collectively so they can receive bulk prices when purchasing books, office supplies, equipment, and services. This will save money for the library systems, and bring in higher quality supplies.



NYS Education Commissioner Dr. David Steiner came to speak with my constituents in April of this year. Prior to my town meeting, school superintendents and board of education presidents met with the Commissioner to address specific issues of concern and interest in this area.

Donate Life registry

Currently, New York ranks 47th out of the 50 states for its rate of organ and tissue donations. Legislation has now been signed into law by the governor (Chapter 161 of 2010) which will simplify the process in which one can register for organ donation. With this new legislation, a person can consent to donate with the NYS Donate Life registry over the internet. This makes it easier for people to register and will hopefully



ly increase the amount of New Yorkers registering to be an organ donor. One person's consent can save multiple lives in the future. Thousands of New Yorkers who are in great need of new organs will potentially benefit from this simplified process. For more information, please visit the NYS Donate Life Registry's website at www.nyhealth.gov/donatelife or call 1-866-693-6667.

2010 Legislative Highlights

Continued from page 2

BILLS THAT IMPROVE OUR ENVIRONMENT:

Recycling electronic waste

(A.11308/S.7988 Signed by Governor Chapter 99)

This law requires electronic equipment sold in the state of New York to be reused, recycled and/or handled safely.

Protecting our drinking water

(A.8914B/S.3780B Signed by Governor Chapter 205)

This new law limits the amount of phosphorous allowed in dish-washing detergent as well as limiting the use of lawn fertilizers containing phosphorus, with the intention of reducing the amount of this mineral that can get into our water supply.

IMPROVING PUBLIC SAFETY:

Texting while driving would become a primary offense

(A.10063/S.6992 Passed the Assembly)

In response to my earlier constituent questionnaire in which 97% of respondents favored stronger penalties for texting while driving, this legislation will make New York's roadways safer by strengthening the ban on texting while driving. By making the ban on using personal electronic devices while driving a primary offense instead of a secondary one, this bill will improve and increase highway safety, and look after the best interests of New York residents.

Emergency personnel and certified nurses can draw blood at the scene of a DWI accident

(A.8601B/S.46B Signed by Governor Chapter 169)

This new law makes it easier to prosecute drunk drivers after a collision by removing the requirement that a physician must supervise the withdrawal of blood from a suspected intoxicated driver. Now, at the request of a police officer, not only can physicians draw blood under vehicle and traffic law, but so can advanced EMTs and certified nurse practitioners, ensuring a more accurate Blood Alcohol Content to be documented. This means fewer people will be able to get away with drunk-driving crimes.

No fault divorce approved for New York

(A.9753A/S.3890A, A.10984B/S.8390, A.7569A/S.4532A Passed both houses)

The legislature approved a multi-bill package of divorce reforms which will make New York State's laws similar to the rest of the nation. New York was the only state that did not have a no-fault divorce provision. Under this legislation divorce will be granted to either party without an alleged fault. Guidelines will be created to maintain consistency and equitability in determining spousal maintenance payments. This will help alleviate the costly burdens of divorce.



Here I joined my friends from around the Assembly District and the area to go on Croton Arboretum's annual garden tour in July. Pictured from left to right are: Suzanne Willis, Lana Hiller, Sylvia Wallin, Melanie Matero, myself, Jo-Ann Shapiro and Debbi Milner.

Great efficiency and cost savings through state agency mergers and consolidations

Agency mergers and consolidations at the state level will not only enhance productivity and efficiency but will also save the state an estimated **\$9 million annually**. Following are some specific consolidations and mergers we passed this session, and their estimated savings.

- Consolidating the Office of Homeland Security, the State Emergency Management Office, the State 911 Board, the Office of Cyber Security and Critical Infrastructure Coordination and the Office of Fire Prevention and Control into the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services **will save \$1.5 million annually**.
- Eliminating the Crime Victims Board and merging services with the newly created Office of Victims Services **will increase productivity and save \$300,000**.
- Merging the Office of Real Property Services into the Department of Taxation and Finance **will save \$2 million annually**.
- Consolidating state and federal agencies such as the State Employment Relations Board into the Public Employment Relations Board **will result in annual savings of \$1.3 million**.
- Merging the Division of Probation and Correctional Alternatives into the Division of Criminal Justice Services **will save \$100,000**.
- Consolidating NYHomes and the Division of Housing and Community renewal under the same management system **will save \$3.5 million annually**.
- Consolidating services provided by the Office of Welfare Inspector General and the Office of Medicaid Inspector General **will increase efficiency and productivity**.

Update on local municipal sharing and consolidation

Much activity has taken place with regard to sharing and consolidation in my Assembly District. Recently, reports were released that looked at ways the Villages of Ossining and Briarcliff and the Town of Ossining could share services and consolidate efforts in the areas of police and also public works. In addition to considering results from the study, the Town of Ossining has also been in discussions with Westchester County, as well as the Village, to consider having one of these entities take over policing for the Town outside. These three municipalities also have a soon-to-be released study on sharing local justice court services. Also, a local resident organized a group to petition for the dissolution of the Village of Ossining. In addition, Philipstown is looking at options for sharing space in which to consolidate court and other municipal functions. To see the Ossining/Briarcliff reports, go to these links:

Study on the Consolidation of Law Enforcement Services - FINAL REPORT

June 8, 2010 (PDF)

http://www.townofossining.com/docs/police/Ossining_Consolidation_Police_FinalReport-20100608.pdf

ICMA Final Report of the Public Works Analysis (PDF)

http://www.townofossining.com/docs/ICMA_PublicWorks_report.pdf

Results from constituent questionnaire

90th Assembly District • Late Spring 2010 • 592 Respondents

QUESTION	YES	NO
1. In my last poll, 97% of those of you who responded agreed that member items (known as “pork” or legislator’s discretionary funding) should be removed from the budget this tight budget year. If member items remain, however, should assembly members and senators receive equal shares of the total apportionment rather than having the money distributed based on seniority or political favoritism, as it is currently done?	92%	8%
2. Should assembly and senate districts be determined by an independent redistricting board as opposed to being determined by the party currently in power, as is the current practice?	95%	5%
3. Are we at the point where we should consider total or partial public funding of campaigns as opposed to candidates receiving large donations from special interest groups?	Total Funding 48%	Partial Funding 24% No Funding 28%
4. Should we establish an independent legislative budget office, like the federal congressional budget office, which would oversee the fiscal impact or total costs of proposed legislation? Currently each house of the legislature has an office that estimates these costs so the Senate might estimate a different cost than the Assembly.	88%	12%
5. If you were a legislator would you sign onto the good government groups’ pledge for change?	96%	4%
6. On the NYS Senate’s website, there is a way to view legislation, comment on it, and read other collected comments as well, at www.nysenate.gov/open . Do you think that the Assembly should offer a similar option for feedback on our website?	97%	3%
7. If an elected official is convicted of a violent misdemeanor unrelated to his or her official duties, do you think that he or she should be removed from office?	92%	8%
8. Do you think that records to be discussed at a public open meeting should be made available to the public 24 hours prior to the meeting on its website and/or in photocopy form at the meeting when the records are to be discussed?	97%	3%

My response to the survey results

As you know from my last newsletter in which the questionnaire appeared that generated the above responses, I agree with the majority of respondents on these reform issues. These issues must be addressed in order to ensure a government that runs smoothly, efficiently, and fairly and truly represents the people that we serve. Since the publication of these questions, two of the bills which are relevant to open government issues passed one or both houses of the legislature. A9911 requiring records be made available 24 hours prior to any public meeting passed the Assembly. A10052A/S7369A requiring the Secretary of State to compile, make public, and keep current certain information about state boards passed both houses.

There are no new member items in this year’s state budget. In addition, the governor vetoed over 6,000 member items which carried over from last year’s budget. Clearly, I would like to see more progress in this area, but I am pleased that some steps have been taken and I remain optimistic that more of my colleagues are coming around on reforming member items.



At my Reform Roundtable in June, former Lieutenant Governor Al DelBello and good government group leaders, including Barbara Bartoletti from the New York State League of Women Voters, joined me to discuss the government reforms needed to make Albany function more smoothly, openly and ethically.

Air times for “Speak Out” TV shows

This year, I have held forums on a variety of topics that are relevant to my Assembly District. Many of these forums were recorded and aired in three parts as “Speak Out” episodes so that those who were unable to attend a meeting in person could have the opportunity to watch it on TV. Three recent forums will be aired in the coming months. Below is the schedule for the television air times.

Upcoming Episodes of “Speak Out” on Cablevision will air on the following dates*:

Fixing Albany Parts 1, 2 & 3	8/25, 9/1, 9/8 & 10/27, 11/3, 11/10
Education Forum Parts 1, 2 & 3	9/15, 9/22, 9/29 & 11/17, 11/24, 12/1
Local Court Consolidation Parts 1, 2 & 3	10/6, 10/13, 10/20 & 12/8, 12/15, 12/22
CABLEVISION	“Speak Out” airs Weds. at 8:00 p.m. on the following channels:
PEEKSKILL/OSSINING	Channel 15
YORKTOWN	Channel 74
WAPPINGERS FALLS	Channel 21

*Please check your local listings, as air dates and times may change pending re-approval by Cablevision in October. If you missed an episode and would like to obtain a copy to view, please contact my office at 914-941-1111.

Upcoming Episodes of “Speak Out” on COMCAST will air on the following dates:

Education Forum Parts 1, 2 & 3	8/25, 9/1, 9/8; 10/6, 10/13, 10/20 & 11/17, 11/24, 12/1
Fixing Albany Parts 1, 2 & 3	9/15, 9/22, 9/29; 10/27, 11/3, 11/10 & 12/8, 12/15 12/22
COMCAST	“Speak Out” airs Weds. at 7:30 p.m. in Carmel, Kent, Mahopac & Putnam Valley
Channel 8	

Verizon FiOS Customers Check your local listings for air times.