

**CITIZENS UNION  
COMMON CAUSE/NY  
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS/NYS  
NEW YORK PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP (NYPIRG)**

**NEWS RELEASE**

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**CIVIC GROUPS LAY OUT POST BUDGET PASSAGE REFORM AGENDA  
GROUPS URGE GOVERNOR & LEGISLATIVE LEADERS TO “FIX ALBANY”  
“REFORM NY” CAMPAIGN TO KICK OFF**

Civic groups Citizens Union, Common Cause New York, the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), and the League of Women Voters of New York State laid out their post budget passage reform agenda and urged Governor Spitzer, Senate Majority Leader Bruno and Assembly Speaker Silver to enact fundamental reforms, including campaign finance and legislative redistricting reforms, in the 32 session days scheduled before the Legislature adjourns on June 21<sup>st</sup>. The groups also announced the kick off of the “Reform NY” campaign to promote their reform proposals and press lawmakers on the reforms.

At the legislative half way point, with the state budget largely concluded and 32 scheduled legislative session days remaining on the calendar, the groups urged that major reforms must be achieved before the end of session to fundamentally change Albany. Topping the list are changing the way New York State’s electoral campaigns are funded and overhauling the way legislative district lines are adjusted after the census.

**Reform New York’s campaign finance law**

- 1. Ban soft money.** Unlike federal law, New York State allows donations of an unlimited amount to “housekeeping” accounts. The soft-money loophole allows individuals, PACs and corporations to exceed New York’s already high “hard money” limits by giving to the parties’ housekeeping accounts.
- 2. Lower sky-high campaign contribution limits.** Individuals are allowed to contribute \$94,200 annually to political parties; \$37,900 to statewide candidates for a general election (plus \$18,100 for a primary); \$9,500 to state senate candidates for a general election (plus \$6,000 for a primary); and \$3,800 to assembly candidates for a general election (plus \$3,800 for a primary). Candidates for President of the United States of America can only receive contributions of \$2,300 (and an additional \$2,300 for the primary). New York should limit contributions to bring them in line with the national limits.
- 3. Ban transfers from one political committee to another.** On top of the sky-high contribution “limits,” political parties are able to undermine existing contribution limits by transferring donations of unlimited size from their accounts to the candidates of their choice. This loophole should be closed.
- 4. Ban campaign fundraising during the legislative session.** Unlike 28 states, New York imposes no additional restrictions on campaign fundraising during the legislative session, nor does it impose any unique limitations on lobbyists’ involvement in campaign activities<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> National Conference of State Legislature, *Limits on Contributions during the Legislative Session*, April 25, 2006. <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/legismgt/about/duringsessionchart.htm>

5. **Strengthen and expand disclosure and reporting..** Unlike federal law, contributors do not have to disclose the names of their employers or even the names of those who actually delivered the contributions (a.k.a. “bundlers”). Contributors should disclose their employers and identify those who deliver campaign contributions. Contributions should be reported twice during the legislative session.
6. **Strengthen enforcement.** The recently-adopted budget added money for compliance staff for New York State’s Board of Elections. The BOE now must aggressively monitor and enforce the Election Law.
7. **Ban “personal use” of campaign funds.** New York’s vague prohibition on the use of campaign funds for personal use has resulted in the use of such funds for non-campaign related expenditures like junkets, country club memberships, flowers, and leased cars. The law must be tightened to clearly prohibit such uses.
8. **Enact public campaign financing.** New York’s combination of huge contribution limits and the commonplace practice of incumbents holding fundraisers near the Capitol during session promote a heavy reliance on those with the financial resources to fund elections – typically special interests with business before government.
9. **Ban “pay to play” for government contractors.** Government contractors should be banned from making political donations to remove any suspicion that contributions play a role in the award of public contracts.

## **Create an independent redistricting commission to draw legislative and congressional district boundaries for the 2012 elections and beyond.**

New York must create an independent redistricting commission that is required to draw state district lines that adhere to stringent criteria to eliminate using redistricting for partisan advantage and that includes a substantial public participation component.

1. **Partisan Redistricting Has Distorted Legislative Representation.** If district lines were consistently drawn to benefit constituents or communities of interest, one would expect that Senate and Assembly districts would share many common boundaries.
2. **Redistricting Decisions Undermine the Concept of "One Person, One Vote."** Only 29 of 212 legislative districts (14 percent) are within one percent of the “ideal size.” Indeed, New York’s legislative districts can be dramatically different in size, pushing the threshold of the legally permissible. Those districts with greater population are effectively denied the same level of representation as those with far fewer residents.
3. **Redistricting Decisions Contribute to New York State’s Lack of Competitive Elections.** New York’s incumbent return rate is one of the highest in the nation, hovering close to 95%. When districts are manipulated to avoid electoral challenges, the voters are ultimately denied a real choice on election day.
4. **Redistricting Decisions Play a Critical Role in Having Maintained Albany’s Legislative Status Quo for Decades.** In the last 30 years, New York has undergone significant changes. Yet, when it comes to our legislature, not much has changed. Since the Democrats took control of the Assembly in the 1970s – and redrew the maps in 1980 – the majority parties in each house have maintained their dominance, and critical issues have consistently failed to be addressed.