

PLEDGE FOR CHANGE NEW YORK

It's Time to Make Albany Work for the People



State government in Albany is hobbled by gridlock, unable to conduct the people's business. Study after study, news reports and editorials decrying the situation form an ever-growing stack. Members of the public are cynical about the ability of state government to take action on important issues. Yet, the situation remains unchanged. One-house bills, introduced to impress constituents and the public – but not to actually become law – have been the norm for years. And, there is an alarming lack of public comment, debate or transparency when things do pass the Legislature or are acted on by the governor.

The public's faith in state government is further eroded by controversies and corruption scandals involving both parties. Yet, there is no effective ethics oversight of the Legislature, which excluded itself from the jurisdiction of the Commission on Public Integrity. Instead the Legislative Ethics Commission is merely an extension of the legislators' own team of lawyers and operates completely in secret. Moreover, the legitimacy of the Commission on Public Integrity itself has been challenged since the majority of its membership is appointed by the governor.

Additionally, under pressure to fundraise to win and keep their offices, politicians focus on donors rather than the people they are supposed to represent. Too many politicians appear to care more about what lobbyists and powerful interests think than they do about the critical problems faced by most New Yorkers.

Voters are tired of "politics as usual" and a state government so mired in those politics that it is unable to address the very real problems faced by New Yorkers. In 2008, New York voters are demanding real change that goes beyond empty slogans. To ensure that New York State government is accountable to voters, we urge all candidates to sign this Pledge for Change, and agree to work for these changes in their party caucuses and legislative committees, as well as on the floor of their houses.

By signing below, if elected I pledge to be a force for change in Albany, working in my house and my party caucus for legislation and rules changes which would:

- **Restore Faith In New York's Ethics**

Establish a Legislative Ethics Commission – one independent of legislators – with investigative and enforcement authority, that would conduct its meetings in public. In addition, ensure that no one elected official dominates appointments to the Commission on Public Integrity and that its proceedings will be conducted openly.

- **Make Elections Fair**

Adopt public funding of election campaigns which would make grants available to candidates who agree to abide by spending limits and to not raise additional money from special interests, along with significantly lower limits on all campaign contributions and strong, non-partisan oversight with significant penalties for violation of the spending limitations.

- **End the Practice of Legislators Choosing Their Voters**

Legislators have a vested interest in the political boundaries of their own legislative districts. Given this obvious conflict, new laws must be enacted that take the redistricting process out of the hands of legislators and give it to those who have no vested interest in the outcome and are independent of the partisan, political process. Clear rules for forming districts must be prescribed and software used to create the districts must be made public.

- **Open the Legislative Process and Let the People See and Participate**

(a) Require public release of all staff reports on bills; (b) Require committees to conduct open meetings on the bills assigned to them with an opportunity for the public to testify and be heard; (c) Require that committee attendance and all votes be recorded and promptly made public; (d) Require Conference Committees to meet and resolve differences between adopted Assembly and Senate Bills when requested by any of the bill's sponsors; (e) Give committee chairs and ranking minority members authority over committee budgets and staff hires; and (f) Create a New York "C-SPAN" for all of state government.

Name _____ District _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Please return by fax to 212-807-1809
or by mail to Common Cause/NY, 155 Avenue
of the Americas, 4th Flr, New York, NY 10013

The Pledge for Change is Endorsed by Citizens for Better Government in New York, Common Cause/New York, The Interfaith Alliance of Rochester, League of Women Voters of New York State, and New York Public Interest Research Project. For more information, visit www.PledgeforChangeNY.com.