



Metro Justice News

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Citizen Action in Rochester, New York

April 2007

Pushing Back on the powers that be

*By Jon Greenbaum,
Metro Justice Organizer*

New Yorkers are once again experiencing a taste of what is possible in our nation. Non-stop Congressional hearings (Walter Reedgate, U.S. Attorneygate, Plamegate, etc.) are beginning to hold the Bush White House accountable. Here in New York, a new governor has changed the political dynamic, allowing grassroots groups like Metro Justice to dare to hope for the passage of radically transformative policies (campaign finance reform, equal marriage, equitable school funding and corporate accountability in economic development subsidies).

Yet too many of our neighbors are still stuck in the cycle of alienation and civic withdrawal. They aren't sure how decisions in city hall, Albany and DC impact their lives. And they don't see how their collective power can transform our communities. Their response is to retreat from the pool of social action. But if the pool empties out, corporate interests and the wealthy will have the water to themselves.

The media tells us that the electoral world is divided between reds and blues, but the reality is much more purple. And many campaigns are decided with slim margins. The challenge for grassroots organizations is to push our issues into the electoral arena and mobilize our swing constituencies. If we succeed we will be able to transform the power equations toward social justice.

In order to create this reality, grassroots groups like Metro Justice need to build powerful community-based movements that are coordinated state-wide and nationally.

Last year, while working with Jobs with Justice on the

COMIDA issue, Jobs with Justice Director, Adrienne Shropshire invited Metro Justice to participate in the Push Back initiative. Push Back brought together organizations from six states to collectively engage in voter education and mobilization work.

The results were exciting. Here in New York a new state-wide network was built during the 2006 electoral season combining organizations from upstate urban regions, downstate suburbs, and New York City groups from almost every borough. These eight organizations focused primarily on educating and turning out their base constituencies to the polls – low income communities, communities of color, immigrants,

union members, and working class voters. Through door-to-door education on a range of social and economic justice issues important to the local communities, New York Pushback groups collectively contacted over 19,000 voters and identified nearly 13,000 of those as potential long-term, progressive, supportive voters. Thirteen hundred new activists were recruited across the state as more than 226 grassroots precinct captains and volunteers canvassed their neighborhoods.

For the past two years Push Back has been developing bottom up social justice infrastructure. In New York City, community-based organizations worked to develop a common *(Continued on page 10)*



**Metro Justice Annual Dinner Featuring Adrienne Shropshire
Executive Director of New York Jobs with Justice**
**Sunday, May 6, 6pm, Temple B'rith Kodesh, 2131 Elmwood Ave.
Tickets: \$15-35 in advance, \$30 at the door**

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Metro Justice is greater Rochester's leading progressive, multi-issue, citizen-action organization. We enable ordinary people to break through their isolation, join together, educate, agitate, and take non-violent action. Metro Justice has been working for social and economic change since 1965. We seek a more peaceful, just, and sustainable future.

Task Forces

Ciudad Hermana (Sister City) Task Force
 Rochester Committee on Latin America, (ROCLA)
 TV Dinner
 Poor People United (PPU)
 Peace Action, and Education (PA&E)

Metro Justice Council Executive Committee

President.....Katie Castern
 Vice President.....Jesse Lenney
 Secretary.....Aaron Micheau
 Treasurer.....John Keevert
 Finance Chair.....Katey Burke
 Fundraising Chair.....Jim Bearden
 Personnel Chair.....Aaron Micheau
 Social Action Chair.....Mike Patterson

Council members-at-large

Michael Argaman, Mel Braverman, Ververly Caldwell,
 Michael Lopez, Doug Noble, Danielle Ponder, Gary Pudpup, Vincent Shelton

Task Force Representatives

Bonnie Yannle.....*Ciudad Hermana*
 Ted Wilcox.....PA&E
 Clare Olson.....PPU
 Peter Mott.....ROCLA
 Dorothy Paige.....TV Dinner

Organizer: Jon Greenbaum
 Operations and Development: Tanya Smolinsky
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Secretary's Report

Poor People United Spins off from Metro Justice

By Aaron Micheau,
Metro Justice Secretary

Poor People United (PPU) joined Metro Justice as a task force in 2003. PPU's mission of advocating for the human right to shelter for the poor and homeless fit well with Metro Justice's dedication to economic justice for all. PPU also showed an ability to organize poor people, who were – and remain – underrepresented in Metro Justice's membership.

Though both organizations remain committed to social justice, both PPU and Metro Justice have expanded and developed their vision in the past four years. Metro Justice's membership has grown significantly and its infrastructure has struggled to keep pace. Council meetings, once small and personal enough to be held in members' homes are now held in the office. Council members and staff have worked to develop policies and procedures to manage our increased activity. And the nature of that activity has changed. Staff currently spends most of its time administering to and organizing member-driven campaigns, such as Clean Money Clean Elections and Bus Fareness, leaving less time to support Task Force activities. Finally, recognizing that we were involved in an increasing amount of lobbying, Metro Justice created a 501(c)(4) corporation to lobby, and shifted most of our member-driven activities into that organization and away from the 501(c)(3) organization.

PPU has innovated in its pursuit of economic human rights. It has adopted the Kensington Welfare Rights model of training poor people to advocate for themselves. The Task Force has aggressively sought out grants, and one such grant donated to PPU a bus that it converted into a winter shelter, to broadcast that need to the public. PPU's members later purchased and rehabilitated a Human Rights House, to provide a more permanent shelter.

These activities require a very active cash flow, which created a challenge because Task Force accounts are held and



administered by Metro Justice. Service activities also require different types of insurance than Metro Justice has traditionally carried. Metro Justice and PPU worked together to streamline cash flow and study the operations and infrastructure of organizations that provide shelter to the homeless. However, this dynamic continued to exist.

As a solution, the PPU and the Metro Justice Council agreed that Metro Justice would assist PPU in creating its own 501(c)(3), allowing it to obtain grants on its own, and maintain its own tax-exempt accounts. The PPU leadership and members of Council have worked for several months with the target of PPU finalizing its incorporation and applying for tax exempt, non profit status this month. The independent corporate structure will also be legally able to own the PPU Human Rights House and bus, an advantage that Metro Justice could not provide. Metro Justice will offer assistance in providing administrative services or training to PPU as needed.

PPU and Metro Justice continue to share the same vision, and have committed to working together in the future, with PPU retaining the benefits of a Task Force at least into 2008. Our hope is that the new corporation will provide PPU with the autonomy it needs to further develop and achieve its goals, and that PPU and Metro Justice will continue to partner in seeking social and economic justice for many years to come. ■



Legislature Should Join Spitzer in Support of Full Public Financing

By Richard Kirsch, Citizen Action

It hasn't taken long to learn that our new governor isn't afraid to throw down the gauntlet in Albany.

Soon he'll be challenging the Legislature on one of the issues closest to their hearts – campaign finance reform. Legislators would be well advised to join the governor's call for creating a new system of full public financing of elections in New York, one that puts voters and taxpayers before the wealthy special interests that fund campaigns. They might even be surprised to find they like a system that frees them from perpetual fundraising from interests who expect something for their campaign dollars. That's been the experience of legislators in the two states that regularly elect legislators – and statewide officials including a governor – who have never collected a contribution of more than \$100 for their election campaigns.

Full public funding of campaigns is already law in Maine and Arizona, where it has worked well through four election cycles. Connecticut will implement the

reform in its 2008 election. Arizona's Gov. Janet Napolitano was elected twice under the system as were four out of five state legislators in Maine, Democrats and Republicans both. It is a proven, sensible way for voters to take back control of politics and make elected officials accountable.

To participate in the voluntary, publicly-funded system, candidates must demonstrate broad community support by collecting several hundred small contributions in the district they wish to represent. If successful, they receive enough public funding to wage competitive campaigns and agree to accept no more private donations.

This reform enables people with community support but ordinary financial means to run for office. It frees candidates from too much fundraising, giving them

more time to listen to regular voters. Most importantly, publicly-funded candidates who win owe nothing to deep-pocket contributors.

There's a big difference between the full public financing system backed by Eliot Spitzer and the partial public financing system that the State Assembly passes each year, which is a watered-down version of New York's City's matching system.

Under the New York City system, according to a recent report from the city's Campaign Finance Board, candidates who are backed by wealthy campaign contributors still have a big advantage, as do incumbents.

The Campaign Finance Board found that, "It is clear that candidates with access to the wealthiest donors have a substantial advantage over

It's no mystery why the city's partial public financing system falls short of its stated goals: partial public financing means mostly private financing.

opponents who do not." In fact, the Board reports that less than 6 percent of high-end contributors gave 40 percent of the money in the 2005 citywide races. The Board also found that City Council incumbents maintain a sizeable financial advantage against challengers under the city's system.

It's no mystery why the city's partial public financing system falls short of its stated goals: partial public financing means mostly private financing. In 2005, two-thirds of the money (64 percent) for City Council races was private. Candidates for City Council or citywide office still need to raise money throughout the campaign, looking for the biggest checks possible, often from interests with a financial interest in city government. Under full public financing, candidates get their money up-front, once they qualify, and can stop fundraising.

Full public financing has one more big advantage over partial systems: the ability to effectively deal with "the Bloomberg factor," the specter of a candidate who either from personal wealth or private fundraising, spends more than the spending limits allowed for publicly financed candidates. Under a matching system, the publicly financed candidate must keep fundraising in the hope the he or she will stay competitive. But under full public financing, candidates receive grants of public funds to keep them competitive, without having to (Continued on page 10)



There's a big difference between the full public financing system backed by Eliot Spitzer (Clean Money Clean Elections) and the partial public financing system that the State Assembly passes each year.

Highlights of the January and February 2007 Council meetings

In January, Council prepared for the February 3 Annual Meeting. The Annual Meeting agenda was approved and finalized the wording of the organization's six goals for the next five years so they were ready to be presented to the membership. We also approved the draft of the 2007 budget so it would be ready for the membership's vote.

The Finance Committee announced that MJ staff had just received their first raise in two years, and Council agreed that we must go further in improving staff compensation.

As the February meeting was the first for the 2007 Council elected at the Annual Meeting, we held an orientation for new Council members before the regular meeting.

Highlights of the February meeting:

- Approval of policies and procedures related to the use of the MJ e-mail and newsletter lists, the practice of lawful tactics by all MJ campaigns and Task Forces, and hiring policy and procedures for Task Forces.

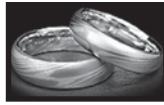
- Council members signed a statement that they understand and will abide by MJ's conflict of interest policy.

- Discussion of nominations for awards to be presented at the Annual Dinner.

- The Fundraising Committee requested that Council members contribute at the Leadership Level, which represents one-half of one percent of an individual's annual income.

- Council approved a proposal to create a local chapter of Jobs with Justice in order to streamline local labor solidarity efforts.

- Council discussed whether an ad hoc committee is needed to develop objectives and action steps for our 5-year goal of improving MJ's ability to influence the actions and decisions of elected officials. It was decided that this work would remain under the charge of the Social Action Committee. ■



Freedom to Marry

Marital Congratulations!

Heterosexual couples receive a basket of legal privileges when they get married. The following rights are available to straight men and women who get married in New York State. Each and every right, however, is denied to same-sex couples.

- ♥ Access to health insurance through spouse's workplace
- ♥ The right to custody of children after a divorce
- ♥ Visitation rights to any non-biological children
- ♥ Joint parenting rights, such as access to children's school records
- ♥ Bereavement leave after death of a spouse
- ♥ Burial determination after the death of a spouse
- ♥ Domestic violence intervention
- ♥ Ability to live in neighborhoods deemed "families only"
- ♥ Access to life insurance in spouse's workplace
- ♥ Rights to shared property, child support, and alimony after divorce
- ♥ Ability to file joint home and auto insurance policies
- ♥ Joint rental leases with automatic renewal rights if spouse dies or leaves
- ♥ Automatic inheritance of shared assets after spouse's death
- ♥ Automatic inheritance of retirement saving tax-free after spouse's death
- ♥ Ability to file joint tax returns
- ♥ Access to tax breaks for married couples
- ♥ Assumption of spouse' pension after death
- ♥ Ability to transfer property from one spouse to another without transfer tax consequences
- ♥ Immigration and residency priority for spouses from other countries
- ♥ And many, many others...

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Marriage Equality for ALL Taxpayers

Tax Day Demonstration

**Tuesday, April 17
5-6pm**

**Henrietta Main Post Office
1335 Jefferson Road**

**Sponsored by
Social Action for
Marriage Equality**

WHAT YOU CAN DO



**Get on the
Equal Marriage Bus
to Albany**

**Tuesday, May 1
Lobby Day**

Call 278-4190 to register

Hugo Who?

Hugo Chavez's promise of social and economic equality, democratic socialism, and Latin American integration helped him gain the support of Venezuela's lower class and win the 1998 presidential election. He was reelected in 2000 and 2006, and as president, has continued to combat disease, malnutrition, poverty, illiteracy, and other social ills through his self-proclaimed "Bolivarian Revolution." Chavez supports alternative models of economic development and advocates cooperation among the world's poverty stricken nations, especially those within Latin America.

There is much controversy within Venezuela and in the United States over President Chavez's policies and actions. Venezuelans are divided between those who believe he has stimulated economic growth and empowered the poor and those who think he has mismanaged the economy and squandered wealth of the nation's elite. Some foreign governments see Chavez as a threat to global oil prices and regional stability, while others encourage his bilateral trade and reciprocal aid agreement. Though Chavez has

brought significant change to a poverty stricken Venezuela, there is still concern over his political actions and decrees.

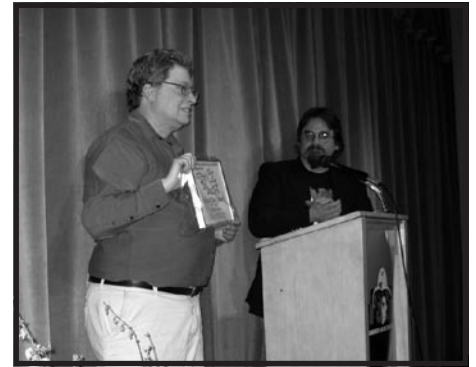
Like Jacob Arbenz of Guatemala, Salvador Aliende of Chili, Omar Torrijos of Panama, and Jaimi Roldos Ecuador, Chavez's populist and nationalist policies run contrary to what the U.S. State Department, the World Bank and IMF, and the Global Corporatocracy consider to be appropriate for a Latin American neighbor. But unlike the aforementioned, Chavez has a little more leverage – at least for now. As the fourth largest exporter of oil to the United States, Venezuela has proved to be a less malleable candidate for intimidation.

ROCLA will present *Hugo Who?* a forum on May 2 at 7pm at the School of the Arts on the corner of Prince and University. Three panelists will discuss alternative views surrounding Hugo Chavez's presidency, the current politics of Venezuela, and the role of the United States.

The Panelists:

Charles Hardy is an ordained Catholic priest who spent eight years living in a cardboard and tin shack in the barrios of Caracas. He has been writing and speaking about the political and social reality of Latin America for over forty years.

Daniel Hellinger is a professor of



Michael Argaman of Ciudad Hermana Task Force accepts ROCLA's White Dove Award at the annual Beans and Rice dinner on March 16th. Michael was honored for his extraordinary efforts on behalf of Nicaraguan solidarity and the people of El Saucé, Nicaragua.

political science at Webster University in St. Louis, Missouri and has distinguished himself as one of the world's leading scholars on Venezuela and Latin America. Hellinger was invited to Venezuela to provide expert commentary on the recall vote of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

Olivia Burlingame Goubri is the Executive Director of the Venezuelan Information Office in Washington, DC, and is considered an expert on politics in Venezuela and a seasoned professional in the activist community. ■

Iraq: not if, but when

Because of the persistence and hard work of the antiwar movement, the Iraq debate in Congress has shifted from "if" to "when" we pull out of Iraq.

Both the House and Senate have now passed versions of the \$124 billion supplemental defense appropriations bill, to which they affixed troop withdrawal dates and other demands (but no call for Congressional approval on Iran). Some antiwar groups applaud Pelosi's ability to pull together a bill with enough votes to pass and declare this a partial victory, an important "first step" in changing course in Iraq. Others insist that Congress's call for troop withdrawal is either weak (House) or non-binding (Senate). Senate and House members must now somehow compromise on a timetable acceptable to both houses, and ultimately, of course, Bush has threatened to veto any bill with a timetable.

So what's next? And what should we do? The anti-war movement needs to keep the pressure on Congress. As United for Peace and Justice is saying, "We must insist that what comes out of the conference committee sets a firm end date for our military presence in Iraq. As weak as these bills are, the compromise version must not be weakened behind closed doors."

Bush will probably get a bill by mid-April. He could sign it, ignore the conditions, and have his funded war. We lose this round. Or he could veto it, as promised (thereby delaying "needed" funds), and send it back to Congress. They in turn could weaken or remove the conditions in order to satisfy Bush (and to be seen as "supporting the troops"). Or else they could refuse to put forth another bill (or fund only a troop withdrawal) – that is, they could use their power of the purse to stop the war. This

last option is where the antiwar movement should keep its focus and its pressure. ■



Hundreds of area residents turned out on the 4th Anniversary of Bush's invasion of Iraq. Gail Mott (pictured talking with Ted Forsyth) organized the rally through area church congregations and peace groups. Photos by Annette Drag-on and Jon Greenbaum



Initiative for Development Accountability

Main Street: Talking Back to Wall Street

Jobs with Justice

Current economic development models prioritize the needs of big business and real estate. Groups representing these interests organize themselves into effective coalitions that project a unified vision to New Yorkers and our elected representatives. We know that Wall Street is clear about its agenda. But what about Main Street? Those of us fighting on the front lines across the state must also come together to define our own priorities and vision for a just and healthy New York, with affordable housing, good jobs, a sustainable environment, access to education, and community-driven development.

The objective of our educational, policy, campaign, and communications efforts statewide is to articulate a vision for economic development that addresses the needs and concerns of all interests – residents, workers, businesses, developers, the environment, and policy makers. Through a series of regional dialogues, we have begun to identify both the problems and the opportunities that economic development presents for New York residents. Now we'd like to invite you to participate in an exciting community-

based survey project that will gauge the attitudes, values, and opinions of New York State residents on a range of economic development issues in our communities. The survey will take us one step further by helping us assess the needs, values, and perspectives of NY residents so they can be reflected in our vision for equitable growth.

A Vision For Tomorrow

This type of community-based survey has rarely been done in any region in the country, making this work truly groundbreaking. By "taking the temperature" of NY residents, the survey will go deeper to reveal how the economic and political reality has impacted the day-to-day lives of residents, to identify which issues and challenges are most pressing, what New



Rather than being told what kind of economy we should have, New Yorkers will spread out across the state to begin a dialogue about our priorities and vision for a healthy NY.

Yorkers value in their local communities and regions as assets, and what they believe local governments' priorities should be in fostering a healthy economy.

Our collective commitment to this survey will strengthen the statewide network of organizations and activists working toward accountable economic development, and will provide

us with a tool to further expand this network. This survey will provide a space for meaningful involvement by community leaders and stakeholders in the dialogue around economic development, and it will be a chance to assert the voices and opinions that have been marginalized in the research and polling around these issues. Access to statewide and regional data will help bolster the work already happening within our organizations, will help us forge connections in our work across the state, and will help us frame more nuanced policy solutions toward equitable development.

Issue Areas

The issues areas that the survey will cover include:

- **The economy:** New York State has become the most income-polarized state in the country. Poverty rates in cities continue to rise as top income earners continue to see increases.
- **Jobs:** Job availability, job quality, and job stability continue to decline, particularly with the continued erosion of our manufacturing base. Additionally, workers in Upstate NY earn less than their national counterparts.
- **Housing:** Affordability continues to be a challenge for many New York residents. Barriers to homeownership discourage invest-

(Continued on page 11)



Metro Justice Board Member Vince Shelton addressing the crowd at the Empire State Economic Security Legislative Action Day in Albany.



Initiative for Development Accountability

NY: Best Economic Climate or the Worst?

By Paul D. Van Ness

New York has the 45th worst business climate out of 50 states, according to the Small Business Survival Index. Should businesses panic? Should businesses flee to South Dakota, which this index rates as having the best Climate?

Not so fast! New York has the 4th best business climate, according to Cato's Fiscal Policy Report Card. Businesses can do well here.

How can two different groups, supposedly rating the same thing, come to diametrically opposite rankings? Here's how.

Some business groups use rankings of the "business climate" to argue for tax cuts and regulatory relaxation. Unshackle Upstate is a coalition consisting mostly of Chambers of Commerce and businesses located west and north of Albany, which aims "to bring sensible government reforms to an area that desperately needs economic relief to spur business

growth." It says "New York is at the bottom of most state rankings on business climate and economic competitiveness. . . New York was 40th in the Beacon Hill Institute's State Competitiveness Report in 2005, brought down by . . . unionization," among other things.

A "business climate" rank is not a reliable figure and is not an argument for Unshackle's program. Many of the think tanks which calculate such rankings have in common a free market ideology which is anti-tax, anti regulation, and anti-union, and their ranking systems reflect that ideology. So it is with Beacon Hill, which uses 42 variables to construct its index. It considers unionization to be detrimental to business, as are unemployment compensation, a minimum wage, and government employees, for example. To be fair, Beacon Hill considers high tech payrolls to be advantageous and toxic emissions to be detrimental; still,

the ideological bias is unmistakable. Beacon Hill also seems to ignore the research on the economic and social factors which are favorable to business.

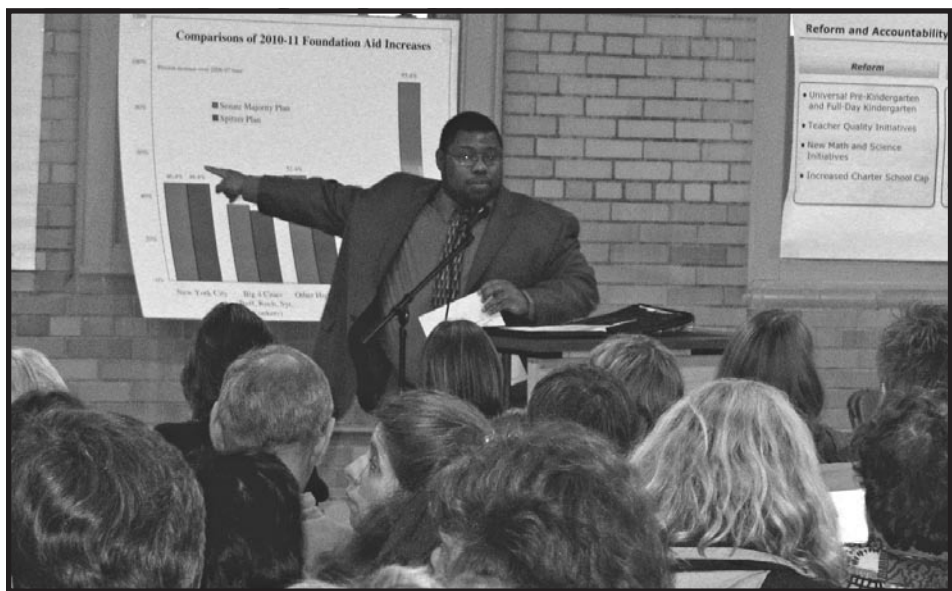
The term "business climate" lacks a generally accepted definition in the economics profession; it means whatever the ranking organization wants it to mean. Different groups use different combinations of a state's tax rates, its tax policies concerning what is subject to tax or exempt, its labor policies concerning a minimum wage, unionization, its environmental protection laws, etc. to derive their rankings. A good business climate is one in which these factors are adjusted to make it easy and profitable for businesses to operate in the state. Any ranking agency or group is free to select whatever factors it deems important to businesses. The factors that it picks are likely to be dictated by ideology and not by statistical evidence. Hence the wide divergences among the rankings.

The Small Business Survival Index is a good example of methodological faults in calculating business climate rankings. It is published by the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Council and is based on 23 variables including such things as the top personal income tax rate, the top corporate income tax rate, the right-to-work status, electricity cost per kilowatt-hour, the crime rate, etc. Taxes enter the index as rates; electricity cost as dollars; right-to-work as an either-or status, crime as a rate per 100 residents. Low values are considered to be favorable for business. Constructing an index requires that these variables be combined into a single figure for a particular state, and yet there is no valid arithmetic or statistical technique for doing it. One cannot add apples and oranges and one cannot add rates and dollars.

Nevertheless, in defiance of arithmetic and common sense, SBEC "simply uses the raw numbers and adds them together." Thus, the income tax rate, which is a percent, is added to the cost of electricity, which is a dollar amount, and these are added to the right-to-work status, which is 0 or (Continued on page 11)

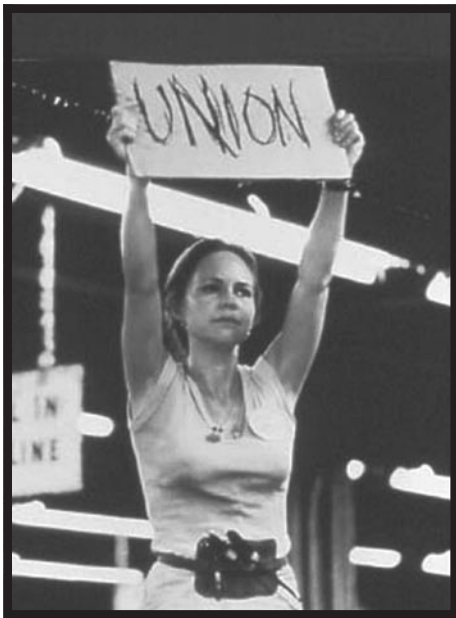


Alliance for Quality Education



Mike Patterson pointing out that the proposed NYS Senate education funding formula would lock in funding inequities in favor of wealthy school districts. Hundreds of area residents showed up to hold Senator Joe Robach accountable for equitable school funding. Town Hall Meetings around the state caused the upstate Republicans to break ranks, leading to a compromise on an historic education budget that significantly increases funding for high needs districts in an equitable manner and holds districts accountable to community members. This year's battle was the culmination of 13 years of effort by AQE/CFE.

Employee Free Choice Act Passes House



Compiled from reports by Ross Eisenbrey, Kyle Clark, Jobs with Justice and Center for American Progress

When the corporations and the wealthy go on the offensive with campaigns like the attempt to privatize Social Security and Medicare, Metro Justice has looked to organize labor to lead the way. The organizational sophistication and deep resources of the union movement has proven to be the critical component in our efforts to raise the minimum wage and reign in COMIDA by reforming the statewide industrial development agency system. The progressive movement depends a great deal on the health of American unions.

The post-war rise of the middle class occurred during the height of union membership. And it was no coincidence that after Reagan went after the air traffic controllers union (PATCO) American workers started to see their wages erode against inflation as conservative deregulation of the economy unleashed a squeeze of the middle class.

More than half of U.S. workers—58 million—say they would join a union right now if they could. According to new survey research by Richard Freeman of Harvard University, “if workers were provided the union representation they desired in 2005, then the unionization rate would be about 58%”—almost eight times higher than the actual rate of 7.4%.

The problem is that American labor law creates a gauntlet that workers must overcome as they try to organize their workplace and the National Labor Review Board has been weakened.

Often, workers must wait months if not years for a decision from the court that handles worker cases—companies spend millions of dollars each year to appealing unfavorable rulings.

- 25% of employers illegally fire at least one activist during a union campaign;

- 78% require supervisors to deliver anti-union messages to the workers whose jobs and pay they control;

- Even after workers successfully form a union, in one-third of the instances, employers never negotiate a contract.

The Employee Free Choice Act would provide some necessary changes to existing labor law. The bill, which just passed the House of Representatives, would level the playing field for employees and employers. It would restore workers’ freedom to form unions and bargain by strengthening penalties for companies that coerce or intimidate employees, establishing mediation and binding arbitration when the employer and workers cannot agree on a first contract, and

would enable employees to form unions when a majority express their decision to join the union by signing authorization cards.

Local Republicans Tom Reynolds, Randy Kuhl and Jim Walsh voted against the bill. Democrat Louise Slaughter was a bill co-sponsor and voted for it. At one point Kuhl was also a sponsor but he withdrew late last year.

Often, workers must wait months if not years for a decision from the court that handles worker cases. . .

The Employee Free Choice Act passed despite a campaign waged by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber warned House members it will not forget a vote in favor of a union-backed card-check bill, punctuating its opposition to the bill by launching a flight of radio ads in 51 House districts.

However, this fight isn’t over. President Bush has pledged to veto the Employee Free Choice Act if it reaches his desk—and it’s going to be very tough to convince a veto-proof majority of senators to support it. Especially with the kind of pressure corporate groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce are planning. Here’s what Bill Miller, the Chamber’s national political director, promises about the fight in the Senate: “It’s going to be even bigger and nastier with the whole kitchen sink.” ■



Over 150 union members turned out to confront Congressman Randy Kuhl in Corn- ing last month. Kuhl had initially co-sponsored the Employee Free Choice Act but then flip flopped and voted against it.

Health Care, Spitzer, 1199 and the Hospitals:

Why Universal Health Care Remains the Missing Piece of the Puzzle

By Mark Dunlea, Hunger Action Network of New York State

As usual, funding for health care and education were the big focal points of debate in this year's state budget. Health care by far the bigger of the two, has drawn the lion share of controversy, including a multimillion dollar TV ad campaign funded by the hospitals and the 1199 SEIU health care union.

Defenders of the hospitals point to them as the crown jewel of the state's health care system. They are also major centers of employment and economic stimulation in their host communities.

But the details of the actual proposals on the table got lost in the advertising blitz. Governor Spitzer had proposed what many are calling the best health care budget in decades. He called for universal health care for children, and a reduction in the number of the uninsured. But while he outlined key issues related to accountability for health care financing, he failed to propose a comprehensive solution to the problems he identified.

Spitzer also failed to outline any process for committing the state to health care for all despite strong public support for such measures. The Governor argued that he first had to put the state's health care finances in order before he moves on the broader

issue of universal health care. But since much of the health care financial problems grow out

of providing health care to the 2.6 to 5.5 million uninsured (the latter the annual number), it is difficult to see how you can solve one without solving the other at the same time.

Unlike years past when Governor Pataki proposed cutting healthcare programs serving low income New Yorkers, this year, advocates for the poor praised the budget proposals. Governor Spitzer not only spared the poor from cuts in his budget, he is proposed a series of reforms to expand access to Medicaid and other public health care programs. He called

But while Spitzer outlined key issues related to accountability for health care financing, he failed to propose a comprehensive solution to the problems he identified.



Missing from the headlines about the healthcare budget was a historic provision of funding to study the most cost-effective means of achieving universal healthcare in New York State. The study will push NY to take the first step toward making sure every New Yorker has quality healthcare.

for universal health care for children by increasing the income eligibility for Child Health Plus from 250% to 400% of the poverty level (in reality, a minimal investment that will fall short of the goal). His also made several proposals to reduce the number of uninsured by 50% over four years, starting with making it easier to

access public benefit programs like Medicaid and Family Health Plus and proposed administrative changes that would avoid throwing people in and out of the system as their wages fluctuate from month to month.

The Governor also called for more accountability for public health dollars, focusing on the state payments made to hospitals "for" graduate medical education and Medicaid. Spitzer pointed out that these payments are often not directly tied to the actual services provided to the poor. He had called for a freeze on the trend factor (e.g., inflation adjustment) on the Medicaid reimbursement rate for hos-

pitals (with some offsets for those hospitals most serving the poor). He called for ending the practice whereby hospitals use the state's Medicaid payments to subsidize deep discounts they provide to private insurance companies.

Spitzer said he wanted to put "patients first", that public dollars should be directed towards those intended to be helped by the various public health programs – the poor, elderly and disabled – rather than being viewed as a free-floating funding source that helps the hospitals deal with their overall financial needs.

Most reform groups, especially the advocates for the poor, strongly praised the Governor. They agreed that the hospitals have used their political power to win a disproportionate share of the state's nearly \$50 billion health care budget. Few would deny that politics more than sound public policy determines how the state's health care budget is spent. While everyone publicly decries the wasteful costs of providing primary care to the insured through hospital emergency rooms, New York actually pushes people in that direction rather than relying more on the less expensive community health care services.

But many who (Continued on page 11)

BUSH's Budget Priorities Wrong for New York

Citizen Action of New York and Fiscal Policy Institute

"The President's budget puts tax cuts for millionaires ahead of funding for health care, education and struggling New York families. Those are the wrong priorities — for New York and the nation," said Richard Kirsch, Executive Director of Citizen Action of New York at a joint press conference with the Fiscal Policy Institute last month (at the Metro Justice Annual Meeting Metro Justice voted to affiliate with Citizen Action). Kirsch added, "Bush's one billion dollars in federal cuts for New York will undermine New York's effort to improve education and restructure health care."

The report presented there, *First Things First for New York: The President's Budget Makes the Wrong Choices for New York*, finds that the President's budget would shift billions of dollars in costs to New York and other states, forcing them to either raise taxes to compensate for the lost federal funds or scale back key public services. Many families could end up losing child care assistance, help paying winter heating bills, and other assistance. In contrast, millionaires will receive \$73 billion in tax benefits from the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts which the President wants to extend indefinitely.

According to the report, which is available at fiscalpolicy.org, the President's budget would:

- Cut New York's K-12 education funding by \$130.7 million after 5 years (by 2012). The President's proposals would eliminate much of the additional funding Congress provided to help states implement the federal No Child Left Behind law. The years in the report refer to federal fiscal years so that 2012 means the period beginning October 1, 2011 and ending September 30, 2012.

- Cut New York's child care funding by \$2 million next year, and \$6.7 million after 5 years. Under the proposed cuts, children receiving child care assistance nationally would fall by 300,000 by 2010.

- Cut New York's Head Start fund-

ing by \$41.6 million after 5 years. The report projects that under the President's budget, programs would serve 5,300 fewer children than the programs served in 2002.

- Cut New York's funding for low-income energy assistance by \$49.4 million next year and by \$63.3 million after 5 years. The 40% cuts in the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) would vastly curtail the ability of states to provide assistance to vulnerable households, often the elderly or persons with disabilities, despite increases in energy prices in recent years.

- Cut New York's funding for clean and safe drinking water by \$48.6 million next year and by \$62.4 million after 5 years. Among the programs impacted are EPA grants to states for sewage treatment plants and clean drinking water and wastewater infrastructure projects.

- Completely eliminate the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, which helps 28,300 low income elderly New Yorkers. This program provides nutritional food packages to more than 400,000 low-income elderly people nationally, more than a third of whom are over age 75.

- Eliminate funding for New York's Community Services Block Grant, a cut of \$55.4 million next year. The Community Services Block Grant provides core operating support to New York's fifty-two community action agencies that work to alleviate poverty in their communities.

- Eliminate a set of grants programs that assist state and local law enforcement, costing New York \$85.6 million in guaranteed funding next year.

In contrast, the Bush administration is requesting nearly \$100 billion in additional war-related spending for this fiscal year, 2007. If Congress passes this request, the cost to New York taxpayers for the Iraq War will rise to \$40.9 billion. The cost of the Iraq War to Monroe County is estimated at over \$1.3 billion. Hopefully the House and Senate budgets now being negotiated will follow much different priorities. ■

(Greenbaum from page 1)

progressive platform for social change through NY VOTE, a Pushback Partner. They then used that platform to talk to voters from different neighborhoods about the issues that tie us together and the power of collective action. Local residents were trained as Election District Captains and lead the effort to mobilize voters in their neighborhoods. Neighbors trained each other in the issues and tactics of social change and then led each other to the polls on election day.

You are invited to come hear Adrienne Shropshire tell the exciting Push Back story at the Metro Justice Annual Dinner. Adrienne is the Executive Director of New York Jobs with Justice, a community, labor and faith-based coalition. She worked as an organizer for ten years building AGENDA, a multi-issue, grassroots community organization based in South Los Angeles. As one of the founding staff members of AGENDA, Adrienne's work focused on building sustainable multi-ethnic grassroots organizations; developing community leadership; building long-term strategic alliances between labor unions and community organizations; and directing issue-based public policy campaigns. Adrienne also helped to develop and evolve neighborhood-based electoral networks in communities of color that are the foundation of the Pushback model. ■

(Clean Money from page 3)

do more fundraising.

Now, with the governor's endorsement, that support is rapidly growing.

The Democratically controlled Connecticut State Legislature and Republican Gov. Jodi Rell established that state's full public financing system in 2005, shortly after Rell's predecessor, Gov. John Rowland, went to jail in a campaign finance scandal. We shouldn't need a scandal in New York for the Legislature to join Gov. Spitzer in giving New York a campaign finance system that is among the strongest in the nation, one which removes all the conflicts for legislators having to choose between voters and campaign contributors.

Under full public financing, voters are campaign contributors and the public's interest comes first. ■

Richard Kirsch is the executive director of Citizen Action of New York.

(Main Street from page 6)

ment in neighborhoods and exclude many NY household from wealth and asset building opportunities.

- **Population:** Shifting population and migration trends exert growth pressures in some NY regions, while others experience a population “brain drain.” Furthermore, changing demographics – especially a growing elderly population – pose new challenges for local governments.

- **Land use:** Current tax policies, as well as incentives and regulations on development, have contributed to the growing problem of suburban sprawl – particularly in Upstate cities – therefore adding to existing environmental problems that result from the decentralization of housing, jobs, and businesses.

- **Policy:** Current policies and regulations set the economic conditions that create and magnify the challenges described above. Government subsidies and investments often favor development that is profitable to businesses and developers, but contrary to the needs of communities and workers.

We are very excited about this survey, as it presents a unique opportunity to build our network statewide and to understand the challenges and opportunities within our regions. With the aid of the survey results, we look forward to developing our vision toward more equitable growth that benefits all New Yorkers. ■

(Van Ness from page 7)

1, but not the way you would expect. “0” means a right-to-work state. In 2004, the values of these totals ranged from 24.6, which was assigned a rank of 1 (best climate) to 59.9, which was assigned a rank of 50.

Statistical analysis, however, reveals which of SBSI’s factors vary the most and cause the most variation in the different totals. Most of the variability in the totals is caused by progressive income tax rates. That is, states with no or low taxes have low rankings (favorable for business) and states with higher tax rates have high rankings.

This narrow focus on taxes ignores the many important factors which may attract a business to a site when it is searching for a place where it can operate profitably. A business must consider such things as the availability of employees, the quality and availability of trans-

portation, communication networks, police and fire departments, and much more. The SBSI’s emphasis on taxes and its favorable view of right-to-work states reveal that the index is constructed on the basis of the pro free market ideology of the SBEC. It is anti-tax, anti-regulation, and anti-union. Its rankings are not a guide to public policy.

New York State’s poor ranking on the SBEC scale comes from its relatively high personal and corporate marginal tax rates, compared to other states.

How did Cato’s Fiscal Policy Report Card come to rank New York as so highly favorable to business? The Report Card is published by the Cato Institute and is based upon 15 variables in three categories: state spending, state revenue, and tax rates. This is a different set of variables from that used by the SBEC, and they are combined in a different way. Both the SBEC and Cato say that they are ranking a state’s “business climate,” but they are really ranking two quite different things.

Cato’s Report Card focuses on state revenues and spending to the exclusion of all other factors impacting business operations. Cato says, “States that reduce taxes improve their prospects for economic growth.” Cato ignores the fact that businesses need employees, transportation networks, utilities, communication networks, police protection, fire departments, and much more. Cato believes that all taxes are bad and all spending cuts are good. It ignores the possibility that cutting taxes may adversely affect essential infrastructure and amenities.

The Cato Institute is an unabashedly libertarian, free market think tank. Its Report Card reflects its ideology, which is pro free market, anti-tax, anti-regulation, even anti-government. It ignores extensive scholarship about which economic and social factors are conducive to establishing businesses and promoting their growth.

New York State’s favorable ranking is based on the fact that the state has recently been cutting the top marginal tax rates. For example, the top New York State corporate franchise tax rate (the tax on corporate income) on small businesses has been reduced from 9.0% in fiscal year 1999 to 6.5% in fiscal year 2007.

If New York State is one think tank’s purgatory, it is another think tank’s paradise. “Business climate” rankings are best treated as light reading in the morning paper ■

(Healthcare from page 9)

agree with the broader health care reform principles advanced by the Governor feel that he has set up a fight (e.g., making hospitals demand that insurance companies bear a fairer share of the financial costs) without proposing comprehensive solution. They argue that the Governor should have directly taken on the power of insurance companies. The Governor did recently announce however he will be putting proposing to reinstate a requirement for prior state approval of insurance rate increases.

Many health care advocates want the Governor to eliminate the waste and bureaucracy of private health insurance by embracing a single payer system such as Medicare for All. As much as a third of health care dollars pay for the existence of private insurance – to pay for their paperwork, bureaucracy and profits. Many of these advocates feel that the state is already paying way much too money for an ineffective “sick care” system and want to both lower costs while providing quality health care to all state residents.

Spitzer is correct in pointing out how politics drives health care financing in New York. Convuluted, slight-of-hand political deals cut in the back rooms of the Capitol make money appear in ways that baffle any outside observer. The Governor, however, only targeted a couple of the irrational foundations of public health care expenditures – rather than proposing a comprehensive solution.

A broader approach is required. Missing from the media discussion of this years healthcare funding was the Assembly’s funding for a Commission on Universal Health Care. The commission would evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the various approaches to providing health care to all (e.g., single payer, employer mandates, the Massachusetts model, Health Savings Accounts, etc.).

Even if all of Spitzer’s proposals are enacted, there will be well more than one million New Yorkers lacking coverage after four years of implementing these reforms. Without an in depth exploration of proposals for universal health care, NYS legislators might respond to calls for universal healthcare by adopting flawed ideas such as the Massachusetts plan whose unrealistic adoption of individual mandates to purchase insurance is leading to failure. ■

Metro Justice of Rochester, Inc.
167 Flanders Street
Rochester, New York 14619

MJ Calendar

April, 7-11pm Equal Measure: Portraits of Love, Photo Exhibit. Equal=Grounds, 750 South Avenue, Rochester.

Fri. and Sat., April 13 & 14 Pathways to a Sustainable World. eight national speakers: David Abram, Lois Gibbs, Brian Halweil, David Orr, LaDonna Redmond, Michael Shuman, Christopher Uhl, and Judy Wicks, panels discussing regional issues. Sliding scale registration. See www.ecotransformation.org or call (585)330-4410.

Tue., April 17, 5-6pm Marriage Equality for ALL Taxpayers Tax Day Demonstration. Henrietta Main Post Office, 1335 Jefferson Road.

Sat. April 21, 10am 30 N Union St. (NYSUT bldg.) "Building Labor Community Coalitions"

Tue., April 24, 6:30pm COMIDA hearing on hotel subsidy. Brighton Town Hall, 2300 Elmwood Avenue.

Tue., May 1 Equality and Justice Day, lobbying for Equal Marriage legislation. Albany. Call 278-4190 to register.



Sun., May 6, 6pm
Metro Justice Annual Dinner, featuring Adrienne Shropshire, Executive Director, Jobs with Justice. Temple B'rith Kodesh, 2131 Elmwood Ave. Tickets: \$15-\$35 in advance, \$30 at the door.

Continuing

Peace Action & Education (PA&E) now holds a weekly antiwar vigil, every Sunday, noon-1pm, at East Avenue and Goodman. Please join us in standing against the occupation of Iraq and demanding U.S. troops home now.

First Wed., 7pm Rochester Committee on Latin America, Downtown United Presbyterian Church, 121 South Fitzhugh Street.

Third Mon., 7:15pm Metro Justice Council Meeting, 167 Flanders St. If you would like to address the Council, please contact Tanya at tanya_metroj@frontiernet.net or at 325-2560 to get on the agenda.

Second and Fourth Tuesdays, 7pm Indymedia/TV Dinner meeting, Hungerford Building, 1115 E. Main St. Rm. 368. Call 305-1594.

Every Wed., 7pm Poor People United meeting, St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, 402 South Ave.

Fourth Thurs., 7pm Ciudad Hermana Task Force, St. Anne Church, 1600 Mt Hope Ave.

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ANNUAL DINNER 2007



Metro Justice Annual Dinner

Featuring
**Adrienne
Shropshire**
Executive Director
**New York
Jobs with Justice**

Sunday, May 6th
6pm

Temple B'rith Kodesh
2131 Elmwood Ave.

Tickets:
\$15-35 in advance
\$30 at the door