
THE BROADWAY DEMOCRATS

♦ District Leaders: Curtis Arluck, Paula Diamond Román ♦ President: Luis Román ♦



The State Budget:

How It Works
How to Advocate Changes



FEATURING:

Moderator

David Weiman

Alena Wels Hirschorn Professor of Economics, Barnard College

Speakers

James Parrott

Deputy Director and Chief Economist, Fiscal Policy Institute

Tammy Pels

Senior Research Associate, Citizens Budget Commission

Thursday, March 11th

7:30 pm sign in/refreshments * 8:00 club business * 8:30 forum

Congregation Ramath Orah

550 West 110th Street (off Broadway)

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President's Corner

Luis Román

Rubbernecking. It's the name given to the traffic phenomenon caused by the slow parade of cars passing by a traffic accident, pausing ever so slightly to behold the unfortunate damage to some other unlucky motorist.

It seems that we all have been doing the political equivalent of rubbernecking, watching the slow untangling of the accident that has been the administration of Governor David Paterson.

Paterson's announcement that he would not seek election to a full term as governor is obviously tinged with sadness for us as a club, as we have been so closely acquainted with the Governor Paterson for so long. He served us ably for many years as State Senator, and the whole district practically burst with pride when Elliott Spitzer tapped him to serve as Lieutenant Governor.

No one could have predicted the spectacular self-immolation of the Spitzer administration. Even in the best of times, Governor Paterson would have found himself in an unenviable position. Taking office in the midst of an economic catastrophe, in the most politically polarized environment since the Vietnam era, meant that Paterson would not only need to perform ably as governor but that he would need every possible roll of the dice to land his way.

As we have seen, that hasn't been the case. Perhaps the incredibly awkward roll-out of the Paterson administration should have been an omen. The press event, with Governor Paterson talking about his marital infidelities, could not have inspired less confidence in the direction of our state. All that controversy was promptly swallowed up by the meltdown in the State Senate, which rendered our state legislature a nonfunctioning joke for months, until Paterson installed Richard Ravitch as Lieutenant Governor, quite possibly the high water mark of his administration.

From there, it seems like it has been a long march bringing us to this point. Governor Paterson, dogged by speculation about his political future, gamely battled the State Legislature over the continued solvency of New York State. Whatever else may be said about his performance as governor, I believe David Paterson has generally acted with the best interests of the state and its citizens in mind. Perhaps that only makes the tragedy of his ultimate failure that much sadder.

Now, we must look to the future. The stage has been set for Andrew Cuomo to become the Democrats' next nominee for Governor which will set off a primary battle to succeed Cuomo as Attorney General. Speculation abounds that our own State Senator Eric Schneiderman may become a candidate for Attorney General which would create a vacancy for Schneiderman's seat. There will be a great deal of work for us as Democrats in the coming months. It's time for us to stop rubbernecking, unite as a party, and prepare for the battles that lie ahead of us.

DR

Assembly Member's Report

Daniel O'Donnell

During recent community discussions, many area residents and local school community members have expressed deep concern about the decision-making process when New York City Department of Education authorizes charter schools to use public school space. I strongly believe that the community deserves an opportunity for meaningful input in these decisions that most impact schools and local families.

To address this issue, my colleague Assembly Member Keith Wright and I have introduced A9845 which would require full compliance with the city's Universal Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) before a charter school can be located

in New York City owned property, including a public school.

ULURP is currently required when city-owned properties are to be sold, transferred, or leased. The ULURP process includes a specific timeline, review by the local community board, and approval by the City Council. Whereas current law excludes New York City public school buildings from the ULURP process, my bill would require the ULURP process to be applied before changes are made that affect charter school placement in public school buildings or other city-owned properties.

A9845 would in no way preclude charter schools from using, leasing, or purchasing a Department of Education or other city-owned property, but it would allow parents, the community board, and the City Council their proper role in reviewing and approving these changes.

As a member of the Assembly's Education Committee, I will continue to follow this important community issue.



Steering Committee

Richard Siegel

At this point in time (February 2010) the status of healthcare reform is uncertain. After the healthcare summit yesterday, nothing has changed. The President has outlined a bill that closely follows the Senate Bill. Without any Republican support, these are the options to the passage of reform this year:

- 1) **The House passes the Senate Bill.** If the House passed the Senate bill—as is—then no further action is needed by the Senate. The bill could go to the President for his signature. That is not likely. The Senate bill is considered “too conservative” for many in the House. One concern is the “**public option**”. The House bill includes the public option and the Senate Bill does not.

Another big difference concerns the way in which the expansion of coverage to most Americans is paid for. Both plans expect to save over **\$800 billion over ten years**. Both see savings coming in part from Medicare and Medicaid. However:

- The Senate bill will impose a tax on what are called “Cadillac” healthcare plans—health care plans that are worth more than a certain amount. Those opposed to this tax fear that many **lower and middle class families**, those in union plans and those living in ‘expensive states’ (e.g., New York and California), will be adversely affected by this method.
- The House bill would place a surcharge imposed on families with incomes above one million dollars and individuals with incomes over \$500,000. This tax is projected to raise over \$460 billion in revenue over 10 years. Almost every Republican is opposed to this increase in taxes on this small percentage of Americans.

- 2) **The Senate uses the “reconciliation” process to pass the merged bill.** *‘Created in a budget resolution in 1974 as part of the congressional budget process, the reconciliation process is utilized when Congress issues directives to legislate policy changes in mandatory spending (entitlements) or revenue programs (tax laws) to achieve the goals in spending and revenue contemplated by the budget resolution.... In the Senate, total debate on a reconciliation bill is limited to 20 hours.’*

http://www.rules.house.gov/archives/bud_rec_proc.htm). This process would eliminate the need for 60 votes to cut off debate and would allow a simple majority to pass the bill. There are many restrictions on when this process can be used. Many believe that the use of this process for healthcare reform would violate at least the spirit of the requirements for it use. Others believe it could be done using several technical maneuvers. Senate Democrats seem increasingly less reluctant to go this route. In fact, approximately 25 have signed a letter urging Harry Reid to bring a bill to **with the public option to the floor via the reconciliation process**.

- 3) **Start over and pass several less extensive bills where there is consensus.** The argument for this approach cites significant public sentiment against the current bills. There is also the possibility that this approach would generate some bi-partisan support. The case against this is that if it fails, then the status quo remains.
- 4) **Abandon or postpone efforts to reform healthcare this year.** Some believe that the

public is more interested in efforts to increase jobs and to reduce the deficit. They suggest these pieces of legislations now need to be a priority.

Many progressive democrats (who really want to see a single payer system) believe healthcare reform must include:

- Universal (100%) affordable coverage of all Americans.
- Elimination of two major components of current policies—the “pre-existing conditions clause and the “life time caps on benefits”.
- Standardization of benefit packages, especially for primary and preventive care. (Many of us support a single payer system.)
- Portability of coverage throughout the country.
- Cost controls including the reduction of administrative costs. Many support legislation that mandates that a significant percentage of premiums be dedicated to benefits (this limits the amount of income an insurance company can use for profits and salaries).

Please contact your elected officials—in the House and the Senate and urge them to pass healthcare reform this year.



Steering Committee

Joe Nunley

A PROGRESSIVE OFFENSIVE

For the millions of progressives who supported Obama and the thousands who passionately worked for his election this is an unsettling moment. On the one hand we are frightened by the extremism of a reconstituted right. On the other, since entering the White House, Obama has basically ignored progressives in his own party. This is not only bad policy but bad politics. How will we win in 2010 without an energized base?

The crooks and lobbyists still run Washington; Bush/Cheney’s unconstitutional practices are still in effect; we are still bleeding treasure and lives in the Middle East; the insurance industry still controls healthcare. The anger has now boiled up even in the blue state of Massachusetts: our government is corrupt, fundamental change is needed.

Obama, the candidate, understood this anger. He spoke of lobbyists and campaign contributors rigging the system. He said that the reason he was running for President was to challenge the system. He said, “If we’re not willing to take up that fight, then real change—change that will make a lasting difference in the lives of ordinary Americans—will keep getting blocked by defenders of the status quo.”

He has not taken up this fight. Instead, he has accepted the “defenders of the status quo” and simply negotiated with them. There has been no “audacity”.

As an example, Glenn Greenwald says that the White House is disingenuously hiding behind the cover of the filibuster to justify their political inaction on the public option. Twenty-three Democratic senators have publicly signed on to supporting a public option. I commend Senator Chuck Schumer for leading the fight with the White House about not attempting to secure the fifty votes needed for simple-majority approval through budget reconciliation. The excuse originally given to progressives was that there were fifty-one Democratic Senators who supported it but because of the filibuster rule the public option just couldn’t get into the bill. Now when everybody is talking about healthcare reform through reconciliation, where only fifty votes are required, what does the President do? He unveils his first bill which excludes the public option.

Senator Schumer sees the public option as good politics and good policy. It will energize the base by giving us a health care bill that we can really defend as well as providing some curtailment of skyrocketing premium costs. Nationally, support for the public option in itself polls higher than the present bill as constituted. The Boston Globe did a survey of Democrats who voted for Obama in 2008 and didn’t vote for Coakley in 2010 and found that 82% favored the public option. 76% of Massachusetts independents who voted for Obama but voted for Brown this year favor the public option.

The signal from Massachusetts is that the murky politics of bipartisanship aren’t cutting it in Boston. Nor are they cutting it for the nation. We elected a Democratic president, not a bi-partisan one. Real change will consist of a flat-out progressive offensive that reverses every practice inflicted upon the nation since the Republican revolution; reinstate the Wagner Act, the Glass-Steagall Act, usury laws, and a full blown replica of the WPA and a health care bill that really makes sense! Let’s keep up the pressure.



Membership

In order to vote in club elections (endorsements, elections of officers, judicial convention, amendments), you must be an eligible, voting member of the Broadway Democrats. You must have attended at least one of the previous nine monthly public meetings and you must pay your dues. Dues partially defray the costs of presenting forums and putting out this newsletter. Dues are \$20; senior dues are \$5.

Name: _____

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E-mail: _____

Special Interests: _____

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FIRST
CLASS

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

The State Budget: Facts and Advocacy

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