
THE BROADWAY DEMOCRATS

♦ District Leaders: Curtis Arluck, Paula Diamond Román ♦ President: Joe Nunley ♦

A Critical Review of Governor Cuomo's Proposed Budget Cuts:

-What the proposed cuts in **education** will mean to our young and the future of our democracy.

-Why the rich **should** pay more taxes in this recession.

SPEAKERS

- * **Mr. Michael Rebell** (*Executive Director, Campaign for Educational Equity, Teachers College, Columbia University*)
- * **Mr. James Parrott** (*Fiscal Policy Institute*).

COME AND ASK QUESTIONS!

Thursday, March 10th

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

Joe Nunley

THE SMOKING BAN

You know for years I've gone out into the park every decent day playing basketball, biking, running and I never knew that my life was in jeopardy because someone in the park might be smoking, but thank God for our enlightened City Council and our visionary mayor who have come up with one more action to take away the right of one more group of people for no conceivable reason at all. There have been no significant scientific studies of the effects of second hand smoke outside.

It's hard to comprehend the illogic of the City Council. I'm disappointed in people I have formerly admired, like Gale Brewer who introduced the bill, and Melissa Mark Viverito and Inez Dickens who supported it. My hats off to Robert Jackson for voting against this bill and seeing what a government infringement on people's rights this is.

If people's minds are so undeveloped that they cannot make a distinction between an advocated concern for health and health fascism then I don't know what to tell them. It's hard to even fathom the preposterous thesis that anyone's health has EVER been affected by second hand smoke at a park or beach!

Except for African-Americans, low income drug users, and illegal immigrants I've never seen any group so exploited and ill-treated as smokers in America today. Smokers are wholly persecuted by the anti-smoking lobby. They have been painted with a scarlet letter by others who want to force their choices and moralities on the smoker. Most non-smokers jump on the bandwagon because it doesn't affect them and it is the PC thing to do. Well, I don't.

Today it is smokers who are being gored. Who will it be tomorrow? Will you only speak out when it is your own ox being gored? I have to say that I cannot sit back and be silent when one part of our citizenry is so outrageously being subjugated to second class citizenship. I don't like it when my fellow democrats have no problem interfering in the personal rights and liberties of people's lives. For me there is very little difference between taking away a person's right to collective bargaining or taking away their right to smoke in a huge park or along 14 miles of coastline. Each is about robbing Americans of freedom for dubious reasons and I question the qualifications of one who supports either for leadership.

If smoking is so evil, why not make it illegal and ban it? Maybe it should be. Answer: It won't. The government is too addicted to the revenues.

The government will never kill the goose that lays the golden egg. The federal government took in \$88 billion dollars last year from its share of the excise tax on cigarettes! New York has the highest cigarette tax in the country—\$1.60 for the state, higher for the city. In the state, according to the NY Times, these taxes provide \$440 million for health care programs and \$71.6 million for the state cancer research center in Buffalo. Do you see the irony here?

In 2003 Bloomberg raised the excise tax on cigarettes from 8 cents to \$1.50 a pack. Charles Rangel, perceptive as always, opposed this. He said "It's not fair to impose a \$1.50 tax on people and then say that you're doing it in order to stop them from smoking. All you're really doing is making life hard for them."

According to the New York Times, NYC collected over \$600 million dollars each year in cigarette taxes (including state portion). This money is spent on local traffic programs, traffic enforcement, city employee payroll and yes, park maintenance.

Maybe we should have a day honoring smokers as they do so much more than anyone else to keep the wobbly ship called our city afloat. Maybe we can have a day where we let them smoke in the park.

This is a bad bill. Citizens are expected to enforce it. What problems will this bring? Citizens will disobey it because they know it's unfair. It's another excuse for the police to harass black youth (I know of three who have already been ticketed and it's not even in effect). And it's another excuse to rid the park of undesirables, harass the poor, Stop and Frisk. It's one more authoritarian step in creating Bloomberg's vision of a namby-pamby city and we're better than that.

DN

Please submit letters to the editor!

Email: gborges370@gmail.com.

Manhattan Borough President Report

Scott M. Stringer

2011 State of the Borough Speech—Calling for a "New Partnership" to Spur Economic Growth and Create Jobs in NYC

On February 8th I had the privilege of delivering my fifth State of the Borough Speech, during which I called for a "New Partnership" between City Hall and the people it represents. I discussed the need for local government officials to do a better job of listening to and working with New Yorkers, and outlined my agenda in the coming year to help working families thrive.

New Yorkers have rightly come to expect professionalism and efficiency in City Hall. But for all that New York City has gained; there is also something we have lost. There is a troubling view taking hold that to set high standards and achieve good outcomes, we must rely on a closed, top-down model of government. I believe that once you subscribe to this view, you have opened the door to the idea that inviting new voices to the table is a distraction—and that listening to them is worse.

As I called for in my speech, it is time for a new partnership between city government and its people. This new partnership would create a paid sick leave policy that works for both business and working families; would seek to improve public schools while talking to the parents of our school children; and would work with Albany legislators to finally pass a marriage equality act that honors everyone's rights.

An example of this New Partnership is the West Harlem rezoning—a 35-acre blueprint spearheaded by my office that protects one of the city's most historic neighborhoods, while also paving the way for a 17-acre expansion of Columbia University.

Both the community and the University have genuine needs. So, when Columbia sought to expand, we listened and learned, and forged new relationships across old divides. The result is an expansion that will create 6,000 new permanent jobs, plus thousands of construction jobs, and will create a \$20 million affordable housing fund. The official public review of this historic rezoning will begin this fall and, with engagement from all sides, will hopefully be completed by early next year.

My office has several exciting projects we will be working on in the coming year.

On March 14, I will join with Representative Jerry Nadler and Representative Steve Israel at a conference I am

hosting aimed at creating a national, regional or state infrastructure bank to help fund major infrastructure projects. New York has no strategy for funding its infrastructure needs, and its roads, bridges and tunnels are in desperate need of repair. An infrastructure bank can help—the idea is to create an independent bank that, on top of critical federal transportation funding, can leverage private sector funds to make certain major infrastructure projects a reality.

My office has also been hard at work finding ways to deliver healthy food throughout the city to prevent obesity. I outlined several new "Go Green" initiatives at my state of the borough address, including "the Veggie Van," a refrigerated vehicle that will bring fresh produce directly to senior homes, Housing Authority properties and other areas.

We will also be launching "Speak Up, New York," a digital tool that could transform the way people get involved and take political action. It is a first-of-its-kind government website. My hope is that it becomes a civic game-changer—a tool that empowers people and helps to inform government leaders about challenges down the road.

Government is about finding solutions to problems from the people it governs. We may speak in many different languages, but in every single one of them we speak of a brighter future. I look forward to taking with you, listening to you and learning from you, as I have for years. Working together, we will build the best New York yet.

☺

State Committeeman Report

Daniel Marks Cohen

Still no word on the new State Committee chairman. For the moment, Jay Jacobs remains chair of the State Party, as Governor Cuomo has been slow to staff up since assuming power in January. Rumors abound that Jacobs may be replaced by Charlie King, although this was denied by a Cuomo spokesman, and at least once by King himself publicly late last year, perhaps things have changed. The lack of certainty on the chairmanship has kept the State Committee in a bit of limbo; locally the Reform Caucus has met, and also formed a subcommittee to work on issues for the 2011 year, but the absence of leadership at the top of the party means it is unclear who we would press on issues of importance without clarification of who is in charge.

Was pleased to attend Broadway Democrats presentation about gun proliferation last month. I thought the discussion with Richard Born highlighted some of the challenges and the few successes in the gun control

arena. Particularly frustrating was the conflict between first amendment issues regarding the current city administration's policy of "stop and frisk" and the fact that this policy appears to be the one thing that has reduced the number of people carrying guns. One problem is that it has not materially reduced gun violence, so people are either having their wives or girlfriends carry their guns (gun violators are virtually exclusively men) or stashing guns where they can be retrieved, but also where they can be found by others, and potentially accidentally discharged. There are no good answers; guns flow over borders, so the issue will remain with us for some time.

One issue I want to highlight is that redistricting is coming up, and I hope that west-siders will get active early and often on the new district lines—not just for the Congressional seats, but also State Senate, Assembly and City Council districts too. Now that Senator Espallat has succeeded Eric Schneiderman in the seat, the lines might, and in my opinion, should, be redrawn to reflect a more compact and geographically logical district. Some of you may recall it was redrawn previously to punish Eric for his outspokenness on political reform. It didn't work, but the lines remained, and with the Census completed it is time to consider the district boundaries anew.

My newsletter item last month on the charter school issue neglected to mention that since the beginning of the year I have been on the volunteer planning committee of a potential charter school, Harlem Hebrew Language Academy ("HHLA"), which is exploring space in the northern part of the Upper West Side, probably north of 110th Street. The school will **not** be co-locating, it is going into private space (an absolute pre-requisite considering the hostility to another charter last month that is seeking to inappropriately muscle its way into co-locating in the Brandeis High School). The praise, or criticism, of charters is a separate matter. I have seen merits in both sides of the argument, but the important point is transparency, and I regret I did not include my support in HHLA in my prior newsletter submission. I will be more careful in the future.



Steering Committee Member

Joe Robins

Two weeks ago, I had the great privilege of attending Teach For America's 20th Anniversary Summit. This occasion was a gathering of 11,000 staff members, current corps members, alumni, and supporters, all gathered in support of a common cause: education reform. We were there to recognize the accomplishments that have been made so far, and to highlight the work that still remains. And there have been accomplishments worth celebrating. From

individual classrooms to schools to whole cities, we have seen gains in student performance and graduation rates.

These improvements are no longer one-off stories, but repeatable results coming from proven methods. Gone are the days when people could claim that poverty is an insurmountable obstacle to a child receiving a quality education. As one speaker said, "The question is no longer whether education reform is possible, the question is when it will happen." We know that every child can succeed, and we must make sure that we provide them that opportunity.

But many obstacles are still out there, including many political in nature. Opponents of reform are fighting tooth and nail. In Colorado last year, an opponent of a reform bill described his views on trying to educate children growing up in poverty, "If you were running a business baking bread and the flour came in to you full of maggots and worms, you would not be able to produce a good product, would you?" (The bill passed by a narrow margin.) In Washington D.C., Superintendent Michelle Rhee was demonized for her efforts, despite significant evidence that the reforms she instituted were already reaping positive results. And last week in Philadelphia, a teacher who has helped lead a complete turnaround of her school's performance on district and state English exams was placed in the district's "rubber room" in retaliation for supporting student protests against a planned charter takeover of their school.

Here in New York, we have had improvements over the last decade, but we still have a lot left to do. The Campaign for Fiscal Equity fought and won a battle to ensure that New York City schools would receive their fair share of funding, but the state has continued to short-change our schools and our students. And now, facing budget shortfalls, we are threatened with large-scale teacher layoffs, and those layoffs would follow the ridiculous practice of "last in, first out" to determine which teachers are laid off, rather than judging teachers by their merits. We cannot allow some of our best teachers to be laid off simply because they were more recently hired; the legislature must act immediately to repeal this policy.



Steering Committee Member

Richard A Siegel

Home Care Cuts: A Perfect Storm of Trouble

The city, the state and the federal government are looking to cut the Medicare and Medicaid costs of providing home care to the elderly and the injured. These reductions mean cutting benefits—by limiting the number of hours of care provided and by cutting the reimbursement rate for that care. The end result will be families having to provide additional support to loved

ones, or more people entering assisted living or nursing homes sooner.

Home care consists of SKILLED care—time limited 1-2 hour visits by professionals (nurses, physical therapists, etc.) to address a specific need. It also consists of CONTINUOUS PERSONAL CARE ASSISTANCE—someone to help with activities of daily living (bathing, dressing), meal preparation, and light shopping and cleaning. Medicare reimburses for a limited amount of continuous care (up to 4 hours of care over 5 days in a week)—called *home health aides* in NYC for a limited time (1-2 months) when someone has a skilled need that also requires a licensed professional to provide care. Medicaid pays for the majority of continuous care—called *home attendants* in NYC—based on need. Every city and state can and has set limits on the maximum amount of care it will provide.

New York City has consistently provided the most continuous-aide home care of any city or state in the country. While many cities and state limit care to 8 hours a day, NYC residents have received up to 24 hours of care 7 days a week. This much care often costs more per day than the cost of nursing home placement. Both the federal government and our state government are looking to dramatically limit that care.

- The federal government recently sued the Human Resources Administration (HRA) that administers Medicaid services. It claims that the HRA has approved 24 hour care (live in and split shift) without an appropriate methodology to assess and determine true need. In addition, new federal regulations have increased the physician documentation requirements for any Medicare authorized home care. And these are a few of the efforts effort to reduce the amount of care provided under Medicare.
- Governor Cuomo has set up a Medicaid Redesign Taskforce to reduce the state's Medicaid costs. A key targeted area is home care services in New York City. In advance of these cuts, it has become almost impossible to get 24 hour care approved. Some people remain in a hospital while trying to obtain approval for increased home care.
- Our governor has accepted the recommendations of this task force. A full listing and description can be found on the NY State DOH website: www.health.state.ny.us/ Two proposals target home care: Proposal number five seeks: "to control utilization and reduce costs" by creating "provider-specific aggregate annual per patient spending caps for certified home health agency (CHHA) services." (skilled care and aides—2009 cost of these services in

NYC was **\$1.2 billion**). Proposal 4652 seeks to "reform personal care services program in NYC" (aides for people without skilled needs).

These cutbacks will create a perfect storm of trouble for New York City residents. Many people who need and get home care services live alone and do not have family willing or able to provide additional care or support. With these policy changes, and when services are not approved, people are going to remain in hospitals longer struggling to create a 'safe' discharge plan. Families will be stressed to provide more support. Many more people will have to go to nursing homes or other types of assisted living. There may not be enough nursing home beds for all who will need support.

Let's hope our elected officials carefully review these changes. Let's hope they look at and develop a comprehensive approach to caring for the elderly in New York City. Let's hope that these cutbacks are done in a humane manner that balances economic reality with the need to treat those in need with respect and dignity. Let's hope that whatever is decided is presented honestly and openly to NYC residents. Currently, the proposals use formulas that most people can't understand. We need someone to use plain language and explain what is and is not going to be available.

Please let the governor and the legislators know what you think.

RF

Permit me this impersonal expedient to thank those of you who extended condolences on the recent death of my mother—96 years young! Your expressions of sympathy are greatly appreciated. —Alan Flacks

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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FIRST

CLASS

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Newsletter Editor: Gretchen Borges

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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