



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jose M. Serrano

Senator Serrano Encourages New Yorkers to Help Bring Reform to the New York State Senate

JOSÉ M. SERRANO January 10, 2011

(Albany, NY) – On the first day of State Senate session, Senators designated “Heroes of Reform” by Mayor Ed Koch called on Majority Leader Dean Skelos and Senate leadership today to keep their promise and pass Mayor Koch’s “New York Uprising Heroes of Reform” pledge as the Senate’s first order of business in the New Year.

Senate Democrats encouraged all New Yorkers to sign an online petition at www.PassThePledge.com, to ensure that the Senate Majority keeps its promise and delivers on reform. The petition calls for action on the New York Uprising reform bills before the Senate moves on to consider other legislation. In his first State of the State address, Governor Cuomo wholeheartedly embraced Mayor Koch’s reform pledge as being among his top priorities for the new session.

“Throughout my years in office I have pushed for reform in the way that our state and local governments work,” said Senator José M. Serrano. “With the daunting fiscal challenges ahead, we cannot waste any time to reform and tackle the state’s many pressing issues and these pieces of legislation are basic ways to strengthen our ethics and improve our government. I applaud Mayor Koch and my fellow colleagues for their commitment to leading a campaign that will clean up Albany and begin to restore the confidence in

government.”

Before the election, 53 of 62 members of the incoming Senate signed Mayor Koch’s pledge to clean up Albany. With a clear mandate to pass comprehensive reform legislation, the time has come for pledges made to become promises kept.

The reforms in the New York Uprising pledge will:

- Create an independent redistricting commission so legislators can no longer draw their own districts.
- Strengthen ethics and disclosure laws and create an independent oversight commission to improve the standards of conduct and accountability for all elected officials.
- Take the politics out of budgeting to stop the practice of fiscal manipulation that encourages the state to spend more than it has.

Senator Daniel Squadron (D-Brooklyn/Manhattan) said, "It's simple: 53 Senators made a promise; the time has come to keep it. Too often, pledges on the campaign trail become broken promises in the halls of the capitol. These reforms would be a fundamental change, both in how Albany does business and in how New Yorkers view state government. The new Senate majority must make good on the New York Uprising pledge as the first order of business--immediate reform will make us more able to tackle the dire challenges facing the state of New York."

Senate Democratic Leader John L. Sampson said, “New Yorkers want Albany to solve their

problems and for once the answer is simple: keep your promise – pass the pledge. We must immediately pass independent redistricting, ethics and budget reform to build a government more accountable and responsive to the needs of the people. With our state at a crossroads, our next step must finally bring us to the reform the public expects and Albany needs.”

Senator Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan) said, "Government budgets must be rooted in quantitative facts. Our current process allows shady accounting practices and encourages a model of non-accountability for spending, revenues and borrowing. These habits of fudging our numbers for short-term gains are crippling our state. If we don't do something now our ability to fully recover will grow impossible. A majority of Senate members have signed this pledge and signed-on to these reforms, so there's no reason for delay or inaction. We must pass budget reform now."

Senator Tony Avella (D-Queens) said, “This election cycle we witnessed New Yorkers turned out in great numbers across the state to cast their ballots for reform. During that time we saw candidate after candidate line up to sign Mayor Koch’s pledge for reform. Now that we have been afforded the opportunity to serve the people we need to follow through on the promises we made. We’ve all talked the talked, now is the time to walk the walk and pass Mayor Koch’s “New York Uprising Heroes of Reform” pledge.”

Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D/I/WF—35th District) said, “We must conduct redistricting in a fair and bipartisan manner. Building a better government begins with keeping our promise to pass independent redistricting as well as ethics and budgetary reforms. With a clear bipartisan mandate to pass comprehensive reform legislation, the time has come for pledges made to be promises kept.”

Senator Gustavo Rivera (D-Bronx) said, "Since elected officials do not spend all of their time

in Albany doing the people's business, then the people have a right to know who their legislators are working for and what they are getting paid to work on. This legislation brings us one step closer to the kind of transparency that is crucial in order to renew people's trust in their elected officials."

Senator Mike Gianaris (D-Queens) said, "Candidates of both parties tripped over each other throughout 2010 to declare themselves reformers. As we enter 2011, now is the time to discover who is a genuine Hero of Reform and who was just spouting empty campaign rhetoric. It's time to Keep the Promise and Pass the Pledge."

Senator Timothy M. Kennedy (D-Western New York) said, "There's no question that the time for change is now. In Western New York, I've heard from thousands of hardworking families that they are sick and tired of politicians spouting empty promises and trying to cover themselves with vague excuses. They want their leaders to take action on the issues vital to our state's rebirth. With such surging momentum for change, we can't let partisan politics get in the way of this statewide, bipartisan push for progress. We must keep our word and pass the pledge. Reforming government should be the first step toward restoring greatness to the Empire State, so we can turn our full attention to job creation initiatives like the University at Buffalo's UB 2020 plan."

Senator Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr. (D-Queens) said, "Elected officials have a lot of work to do in making people know that their state legislature can operate in a professional and responsible manner. I believe there must be a change in the way Albany conducts its business on behalf of the people of the state, but the change will not come easy. There has to be a different way of thinking and ideology in Albany. I am hopeful other state representatives from both sides of the aisle see it that way, too. We must have a government people can finally believe will work for them and for their interests."

Senator Adriano Espaillat (D-Manhattan/Bronx) said, “The word unity is not often used to describe the State Senate, but Democrat or Republican, more than 85 percent of senators signed former Mayor Ed Koch’s pledge. We now have a Senate that is unified in its support of historic reforms and its time to follow through. New Yorkers have dealt long enough with a government full of back room deals and conniving politicians, so today, as the new session truly begins, I encourage all my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to keep their word and pass the pledge.”

Summary of the Government Reform Package

Redistricting:

Independent Apportionment Commission (Gianaris):

- Establishes an independent commission to propose and draw district boundaries for congressional and state legislative districts every 10 years following the U.S. Census.
- The district lines would be drawn to be compact, equal in population and contiguous; not abridge or deny minority voting rights; and align with local boundaries and community character to ensure the even-handed and non-partisan drawing of lines.
- Commission members could not currently hold or, in the past two years, have held elective or public office, been a lobbyist, been in a position within a political party, or be a relative or spouse of an elected or public official.

Ethics:

Unitary Ethics Commission (Squadron)

- Creates an independent and unitary Commission on Governmental Ethics, which would oversee both the legislative and executive branches.
- The Commission would consist of nine members, three of whom are chosen by the governor and one each chosen upon the recommendation of the comptroller, attorney general, senate majority leader, senate minority leader, assembly speaker and assembly minority leader.
- Members of the Commission are not allowed to be state or federal lobbyists or employed by political consulting firms, or the recipient of a state contract. The executive director would be chosen jointly by the Chair and Vice-Chair to serve a five-year term and not more than two consecutive terms.

Comprehensive Financial Disclosure (Rivera):

- Increases disclosure requirements on public officials by requiring that attorneys disclose their clients (unless it would violate a privilege or materially harm the client), creating new categories of value for reporting income, and requiring legislators to report business dealings with lobbyists.

Prohibit Contributions from those Doing Business with the State (Addabbo):

- Prohibits corporations and other entities seeking or renewing government contracts from making direct and indirect political contributions, which could influence their ability to receive public funds for such a contract or renewal.

Budget:

Adoption of GAAP budgeting (Krueger):

- Removes the ability for fiscal manipulation by requiring both the Executive Budget proposal and Enacted Budget to be balanced according to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles, which will fundamentally realign recurring spending with recurring revenue.

Legislative Budget Office (Krueger):

- Creates a non-partisan Legislative Budget Office modeled after the Congressional Budget Office, to remove the politics from revenue forecasting while ensuring funds are not hidden in “off-budget” public authorities.

Commission to study performance based budgeting (Krueger):

- Creates a 15-member Empire State Performance Commission tasked with designing a performance based management and budgeting blueprint to streamline government spending and end waste and fraud within programs and services.