



New York
COMMON CAUSE
Holding Power Accountable



NEWS RELEASE

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Citizens Union, Dick Dadey
Common Cause, Susan Lerner
League of Women Voters of NYS, Barbara Bartoletti
NYPIRG, Blair Horner
Reinvent Albany, Liz Marcello

REFORMERS DECRY ALBANY'S FAILURE TO RESPOND TO ITS "WATERGATE MOMENT"

URGE GOVERNOR AND LAWMAKERS TO ENACT PROMISED ETHICS REFORMS

CALL TO END SECRET STATE SPENDING and PASS A TRANSPARENT BUDGET FREE FROM CORRUPTION RISK

SECRECY AROUND BUDGET NEGOTIATIONS AND LUMP SUM SPENDING UNACCEPTABLE GIVEN RECENT HISTORIC SCANDALS

(Albany, NY) A coalition of government reform organizations demanded that our state's political leaders act to respond to its "Watergate moment" by approving comprehensive ethics reforms. The groups responded to the public statements of Governor Andrew Cuomo, Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie that there would be no ethics reforms included in the final budget agreement, expected later tonight. Despite an overwhelming public demand that actions be taken, Citizens Union, Common Cause, the League of Women Voters, NYPIRG, and Reinvent Albany charge that the governor and legislative leaders have "kicked the can" by failing to act and not passing even one ethics reform measure

in the 3 ½ months since former legislative leaders Silver and Skelos were convicted of corruption.

Even calls to itemize and create back-end public disclosure and transparency of billions of dollars in secret state spending within the budget that begins in four days have gone unanswered. Of all the needed reforms, the one most connected to the state budget – reform of the lump-sum appropriations – would lessen the risk of corruption were they enacted.

Governor Cuomo had included ethics reforms in his budget plan and both houses had advanced their own different – and inadequate – plans in their one house budget resolutions. However, all have stated publicly that there will be no ethics reforms in the final budget agreement.

With a recent poll showing that nearly 90% of New Yorkers believe that unethical behavior is a serious problem in state government a month before former legislative leaders Sheldon Silver and Dean Skelos are sentenced for public corruption, the groups argued that the governor and legislative leaders have an obligation to New Yorkers to reach a significant agreement on ethics reform.

Yet, there have been no public hearings, no public leaders' meetings, and the only public statements from the governor and the majority conference leaders have come from persistent media inquiries.

Moreover, the groups charged that the overall budget discussions have been shrouded in “unprecedented secrecy” that has effectively shut the public out over the debate over how the governor and legislative leaders plan to spend over \$150 billion in taxpayer money.

The groups demanded that, at a minimum, “lump-sum” appropriations totaling several billion dollars be completely transparent: the governor and legislature must identify the sponsor, the methods by which all state funds are awarded and the recipient of the funds. Lawmakers and the governor must not pass another budget without the necessary reforms to disclose all funding decisions to the public, especially those lump sum appropriations that have been decided months and in some cases years after a state budget is passed.

“No longer can spending decisions be made in the shadows, out of public view. New Yorkers deserve to know more details on how their tax dollars are being spent and to see their elected leaders taking action to put forth meaningful ethics reforms that will restore public trust,” said Dick Dadey, Executive Director of Citizens Union.

"Lawmakers' seeming indifference to corruption is an affront to the public trust, and anyone who tolerates a crime is complicit in it. If ethics reform does not succeed it will be for lack of interest, which speaks louder than any platitudes about legislative gridlock. Common Cause/NY

urges the Governor to use every tool at his disposal to restore trust in government as he promised to do when he first ran for office," said Susan Lerner, Executive Director of Common Cause/NY.

"The lack of transparency this budget season has been even worse than usual, further eroding public confidence in our state government. The Legislature needs to pass comprehensive ethics reforms now, and put in place open budgeting. We can no longer allow Legislative leaders to work in secrecy," said Barbara Bartoletti of the League of Woman Voters NYS.

"The collapse of ethics reform during the budget is failure by the governor to mobilize overwhelming public support for change," said Blair Horner, NYPIRG Executive Director. "New York State's political leaders have chosen to 'kick the can' instead of tackling the needed reforms to respond to Albany's 'Watergate moment.'"

Liz Marcello, Campaign Manager for Reinvent Albany said, "Governor Cuomo may know who is getting billions from state lump sum accounts and how they were selected, but the public doesn't. Secret spending is an invitation for corruption."