

The Preamble

Fed up with years of political corruption, special interest control of government, onerous taxes, an escalating cost of living, an education system, which does too little to educate children, a business climate in which it often seems next to impossible for the little guy to get ahead and a flawed criminal justice system, which is far too costly and not nearly effective enough at rehabilitation, we the members of the REFORM PARTY of the state of New York do adopt this platform.

While our leaders and our candidates may let us down, our goal is to adhere to the values of citizen empowerment that our party was founded on.

Central Mission

The Reform Party of New York is organized around a core set of beliefs and principles, embodied in this platform. Our key reasons for existing and the guiding post in the construction of this platform have been:

- 1- That the Reform Party is controlled exclusively by its membership, its agenda set by them and its direction guided by them. This includes having the Reform Party being a model for intra-party democracy. Our members know what's best.
- 2- That government at all levels (Washington D.C., Albany and City Hall) has become too dominated by special interests, lobbyists, big money and professional politicians and that citizens would be better served by more of an emphasis on citizen legislators. We're anti lobbyist and pro people.
- 3- A more civically engaged and better informed citizenry is necessary for government and for NY's political parties to function more effectively. We must make Civics education a priority!
- 4- The rights and interests of voters should trump the interests of political parties and party bosses.
- 5- New York's ballot access laws are woefully inadequate and undemocratic. Let's streamline the process to make it easier for regular people to run for office.
- 6- Elections and government in general should be administered in a non-partisan rather than bi-partisan manner. Let's reform the Board of Elections, so that it's no longer a patronage mill.
- 7- New York's education system should be a student first agenda, with a curriculum primarily determined by parents, local educators and administrators, with an emphasis

- on higher standards and life skills, as opposed to a one size fits all approach like Common Core, focused exclusively on standardized testing.
- 8- New Yorkers should have the opportunity to vote on whether or not their elected officials should be subject to Term Limits.
 - 9- To support voter choice and voter empowerment, we strongly support allowing people to make laws for themselves through “Initiative and Referendum”.
 - 10- Public Authorities like the MTA, the Port Authority, the New York Racing Association, etc. need better oversight, less bureaucracy and greater public awareness into how they make decisions

I. POLITICAL AND ELECTORAL REFORM

The problems:

New York State is poisoned by the toxicity of political corruption. It often seems that even when our leaders aren't corrupt they're either inept or not able to deliver effectively for New Yorkers because of the constraints of their office. Too frequently, it seems as if the only ones who find New York State works for them are deep pocketed political donors, moneyed special interests or those who have the means to hire lobbyists. There seems to be a permanent government that's so encrusted with bureaucracy, a pay for play culture, arcane electoral procedures and abusive administrative practices that real progress seems next to impossible. New Yorkers are literally leaving the state in droves. Those that remain find our political process frustrating and ineffective.

The solutions of the Reform Party include:

- A. *Support for a Constitutional Convention.* Many of the reforms we're calling for are unlikely to ever be enacted by the state legislature. So for reform's sake, we're calling on the voters to vote YES on having a constitutional convention. It's the hope that a true PEOPLE'S CONVENTION will implement key reforms to empower voters and clean up Albany. If the proposed constitutional amendment(s) are inadequate, than New Yorkers will have the opportunity to vote them down. The state has little to lose and a great deal to potentially gain.
- B. *Term Limits for All Levels of Government.* Too many elections in New York State are completely uncompetitive. This is a tremendous disservice to the voters. Term Limits create open seats and invite more challengers. Voters are the big winners when they have more choices and more voices. It often seems like the advantages of incumbency are so great that you're more likely to die than to lose re-election. We call for TERM LIMITS to continually give government a fresh set of eyes. Let's continually have the halls of government refreshed by citizens who have no idea of what's impossible or impractical.

- C. *Initiative and Referendum*. Voters should have the opportunity to enact public policy directly. We strongly support giving voters at the state level the opportunity to put a question on the ballot, providing they're able to collect a reasonable amount of valid signatures. If a majority of New Yorkers vote yes, that proposition shall be enacted into law. Additionally, we support allowing the state legislature to put questions before the voters. If the voters vote in the affirmative, the proposition will be enacted into law. Lastly, we support the practice of Legislative I&R: Initiative and Redress: to force the state legislature to vote on a question if a reasonable number of New Yorkers sign a petition asking lawmakers to do so.
- D. *Easing Ballot Access Requirements*. The Reform Party strongly supports reducing the minimum number of signatures required to qualify for most elective offices from 5% of those registered in a party to 2.5%. Additionally, the practice of allowing opposing candidates to "challenge" a candidate's petitions needs to end. The only arbiter of signature validity should be the election administrators and officials. Finally, as an alternative to circulating petitions, candidates will have the option of paying a filing fee to qualify for the ballot equivalent to 1% of the salary of the office they're seeking.
- E. *Streamlining and reform of the Board of Elections including administration of the BOE along non-partisan rather than bi-partisan lines*. The Board of Elections is a total mess. It's mired by incompetence on a good day and corruption on a bad day. This is primarily due to the fact that everyone who has a job there is a political patronage appointee. This creates a polarized, toxic atmosphere in which candidates not favored by the political establishment can't get a fair shake. We need a truly non-partisan BOE, with people getting their jobs through civil service not political patronage.
- F. *Support for Same Day voter registration (including the ability to switch parties) with a valid photo ID*, proving citizenship and voter eligibility. States that have same day voter registration lead the nation in voter turnout. This is a positive thing, which should be replicated here. Understandably, there are some concerns about voter fraud. To mitigate those concerns, we're proposing that in order to register to vote on the day of the election, a government issued photo ID, which offers proof of citizenship and voter eligibility requirements be required. The Reform Party is also open to consideration of automatic voter registration.
- G. *Campaign Finance Reform Modeled on Seattle's Democracy Voucher Program*. Rather than full public financing or a system of public matching funds, similar to the one New York City has, which is far too costly and far too prone to abuse (and often seems to make the system less accessible to regular people as opposed to professional politicians), we support a system for supporting municipal and statewide candidates (potentially even federal candidates) which would send EVERY registered voter a \$100 democracy voucher (for each level of government that implements this reform), which can only be used to make a contribution to a candidate running for office. This would truly bring campaign financing to the interested masses rather than a handful of special interests, lobbyists and bundlers.
- H. *Reforming elections for State Supreme Court*. The Reform Party is in favor once and for all of ending the practice of having candidates for State Supreme Court nominated by

judicial conventions. Instead, candidates should be free to run in party primaries just as they do for other judicial offices like New York City Civil Court. This would end the absurd practice of having party bosses handpick Judges, a process which has been rife with abuse and in some cases looks very much like purchasing Judgeships. Additionally, we support allowing candidates for judicial office to be permitted to state their positions on issues, so voters have an idea of who they're actually voting for and what those candidates stand for. Ultimately, some system of non-partisan elections should also be considered.

- I. *Support for Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) aka Single Transferrable Vote.* Currently candidates for nearly every office in New York State are elected with a plurality of votes. This can lead to candidates being elected, even though a majority of voters oppose them. It also leads to the so-called "spoiler effect", in which voters are penalized for voting their conscience. Under IRV, voters would rank their choices in order of preference. If any candidate gets a majority of "first choice" votes, that candidate is elected. If no candidate gets a majority of first choice votes then the candidate with the least number of first choice votes is eliminated and all of the votes for that candidate gets transferred to that voter's second choice. This continues until a candidate gets a majority of the vote. This allows a candidate to get elected that truly represents a broad consensus of the community. It also allows voters to vote their conscience without seeing the candidate they like the least get elected.
- J. *Support for non-partisan municipal elections.* The Reform Party strongly favors all municipal elections within New York City being non-partisan in nature, with all voters being given an opportunity to vote and every candidate being given an opportunity to run, even if they're not the nominee of any party. This allows the voters to have more choice and reduces the influence of the party bosses. Currently special elections for New York City Council are non-partisan. This is a far preferable system. Ideally, this reform would be coupled with Instant Runoff Voting and would not emulate the "top two" system used in California.
- K. *Support for some version of Proportional Representation (PR) to elect the state legislature.* Many democracies around the world utilize some form of PR and when it was implemented for twelve years in New York City, it not only reduced the influence of party bosses and Tammany Hall, but allowed for elected officials that were truly representative of how people voted. While there are many different forms of PR including the Hare-Clark system which was utilized in New York City (and is used in Australia) or the Districts Plus system advocated by Fair Vote, which allows the benefits of individual districts to be combined with PR, the Reform Party strongly supports serious study of reforming our elections for the state legislature to be done through some form of PR. The sad reality is that right now, our legislature isn't truly representative of how the voters vote.
- L. *Support for Campaign Finance Reform.* Our current system of political contributions basically amounts to legalized bribery. Big donors and large campaign bundlers get access to elected officials and influence over policymaking while regular citizens are largely ignored. Unfortunately, attempts at correcting this problem have often made it

worse. In New York City for example, the 6-1 matching funds program has proven costly and created a cottage industry of political professionals who know how to game the system, while normal people seeking to run for office are often subjected to onerous fines and a mountains of time consuming red tape. Rather than a matching funds system or full public financing, which could exacerbate some of the problems we've seen in New York City, we prefer a system modelled on Seattle's "DEMOCRACY VOUCHER" system. Under this proposal, which could be implemented at both the municipal level and the state level, every registered voter would be automatically sent a certain number of \$25 vouchers, which could then be used to make a campaign contribution to an eligible candidate. The voucher would be paid for by the city or state taxpayer. In order for candidates to be eligible for the voucher, they'd need to adhere to spending and contribution limits. The idea is to empower more everyday citizens and force candidates to reach out to the masses and not to large donors.

M. *Reform the rules of the state legislature to allow minority members to have more input.*

Currently the members of the minority party are reduced to second class citizens in Albany. This puts their constituents at a tremendous disadvantage. Some of the reforms we're calling for include:

- Allowing the leadership of the minority conferences to be represented at budget and leadership meetings.
- Having each member of the legislature get comparable amounts of funding for staff and other resources.
- Term Limits for Committee Chairmen
- Allow ranking minority members of standing committees to call public hearings
- Committee ratios shall reflect the ratio of majority to minority members that are currently elected to the house;

II. FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Problems:

New York State is drowning in debt. The tax burden is among the highest in the nation. The cost of living is crippling New Yorkers and driving young people out of the state. Real economic growth has been lacking and policymakers have relied on gimmicks like corporate welfare and legalized gambling, which in the long run often do more harm than good. The state budget process has been a total mess, lacking in transparency and accountability, but loaded with waste, gimmicks and accounting trickery. It often seems as if those responsible for crafting the state budget are better suited to run a Ponzi scheme.

The solutions of the Reform Party include:

A. *Requiring all proposed legislation to spell out the source of its revenue.* If a legislator is proposing new spending. They need to detail exactly how it will be paid for, either in terms of cuts to other programs, tax increases or borrowing. It's the only fair thing to do

both for the public and the other legislators. There is no magic pot of money that state legislators draw from, so let's deal with reality.

- B. *Make paying state debt a priority.* New York's debt stands at over \$300 BILLION!! That's more than every state in the union except California. The interest paid on this debt is simply flushed down the toilet. It's not used to repair one road or pay one state trooper. Reducing NY's massive debt burden never seems to be a priority. The Reform Party supports an emphasis on reducing state debt. In the event of state budget surpluses, policymakers should use a good portion of it to reduce state debt rather than immediately earmark all of it for new spending or new tax cuts.
- C. *An end to backdoor borrowing by public authorities.* For half a century, Governors and legislators in both party have been guilty of using public authorities to borrow money in an attempt to circumvent the state constitution's requirements that voters approve new types of debt. This is incredibly dangerous. Not only is it costly (\$60 Billion and rising in debt acquired this way according to the state Comptroller) but by empowering these agencies who are elected by no one (and largely unaccountable to the public) to rack up all of this debt, which the taxpayers are forced to shoulder, without allowing proper voter approval, this practice flies in the face of the principles of good government and legislative transparency that New Yorkers deserve. The Reform Party strongly advocates for legislation that would prohibit borrowing without voter approval and outlining specifically to the public on the principle, interest and payback period that taxpayers can expect. This has been described by some legislators as **TRUTH IN BORROWING**.
- D. *Gradually move away from Defined Benefit pensions to Defined Contribution (401k style plans).* While New York greatly values all its state workers, the generous retirement plans they currently enjoy coupled with increasing life expectancies and increasingly strained state and municipal finances all add up to a need to rethink the way we fund pensions in this state. While we strongly advocate keeping our commitment to all current retirees and all current state workers, the Reform Party advocates a system that would see new state workers enrolled in defined contribution retirement plans rather than defined benefit plans. Not only would this be less costly to the state, but it would allow for portability for workers and greater individual control over one's own retirement planning decisions. This **TIER 7** proposal, more closely models what most private sector businesses are doing.
- E. *A prohibition on pension double dipping.* Currently, it's not unusual for many state workers to collect a government salary, along with a government pension. It simply defies logic to think that government workers could retire, begin collecting a pension, only to go back on the public payroll and collect a salary (and perhaps an additional pension). The Reform Party believes that people shouldn't be permitted to retire, while they're still capable of working, only to see them collect another government salary. While, everyone currently in the pension system, or collecting a government salary, we propose a ban on future workers collecting both a pension and a state government salary. If you wish to continue working for the state, then you shouldn't be able to collect a pension from the state until you're truly retired.

- F. *Don't allow the state budget to be used as policy making tool. Make it primarily focused on issues related to funding government operations.* Unfortunately, in recent years, the state budget process has become about everything except the budget. It's become an omnibus, kitchen sink series of policy proposals in which legislators in both parties try to slip in a myriad of issue having nothing to do with funding government operations. Issues like "raise the age", legalizing ride hailing services, raising the minimum wage and ethics reform should have nothing to do with the budget process. We're calling upon Albany to keep the budget process about simply taxes and spending. Don't force legislators into voting for something because there's something they might like in there and vice-versa.
- G. *An end to unfunded mandates.* As it stands now, Albany forces the counties and municipalities to shoulder enormous expense (these range from New York's odd Medicaid funding formula to pensions and salaries for local officials). While many of these programs have merit, they all amount to the same thing...increased costs for the counties, which then forces them to raise property taxes (the only tax the counties themselves can control). This is simply untenable. We need to put an end to unfunded mandates once and for all. If Albany wants to pass on additional spending that the counties are responsible for, they'll need to earmark the funding to do so.
- H. *Medicaid Reform.* Medicaid funding is aspect of life where we wish we weren't saying "only in New York". In nearly every other state in the country, the Federal government pays half of the bill for Medicaid and the state pays the other half. In New York though, while Washington pays its share, the counties and municipalities are also required to kick in a significant percentage of the costs of Medicaid. New York is number one in requiring local governments to shoulder a significant portion of Medicaid costs. This is a significant burden on the counties, which leads to increased property taxes. This unfunded mandate is driving many New York counties to the brink of insolvency. In Erie County for example, more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of their property tax money goes to paying for Medicaid, leaving very little for anything else. This is simply unacceptable. The Reform Party is calling for Albany to relieve the local governments of its share of the Medicaid burden.
- I. *Support for Zero Based Budgeting.* The state, county governments and cities should utilize **ZERO BASED BUDGETING**, a method of budgeting in which all expenses must be justified for each new period. Zero-based budgeting starts from a "zero base," and every function within an organization is analyzed for its needs and costs. This will not only serve to reduce costs but create real innovation with government agencies.
- J. *A lower sales tax for items completely manufactured in New York State.* It's expensive to do business in New York and to stay in business in New York. Why should retailers and manufactures who employ New Yorkers and comply with New York's regulations be forced to compete at a disadvantage with products from other states? Let's offer a 25% reduction in sales tax for any item sold in NY that originates in NY.
- K. *Opposition to Corporate Welfare.* New York's repeated recent failed attempts at corporate welfare (giving taxpayer money to private businesses) including The Buffalo Billion, Start-Up NY, etc. have been costly to the taxpayer, produced little in the way of

real economic growth and have fostered an environment of corruption, which have resulted in self-dealing and criminal indictments. Rather than gimmicks and giveaways to campaign donors, the Reform Party is calling for an end to corporate welfare. Instead, the state should foster a business and regulatory environment, where all businesses can flourish, as long as they play by the rules.

- L. *Crackdown on sales tax evasion.* Unfortunately, many retailers (particularly cash businesses) are utilizing special “Revenue Suppression Software called Point of Sale (POS) computer systems “also known as “zappers” that allow businesses to hide sales and avoid paying sales tax. This is beyond outrageous and leads to a higher tax bill for honest businesses and for consumers. Rather than immediately looking to raise taxes when the state is facing a budget shortfall, we’re calling upon the state department of taxation and finance to aggressively crack down on both businesses and individuals who are cheating the system. As technology continues to advance, this will require a coordinated effort by prosecutors, regulatory agencies, law enforcement and creative partnerships with federal authorities. There’s no way to know how much revenue New York is losing because no one can know how many businesses are utilizing this software, but it needs to end. Seattle has taken some laudable steps in cracking down on sales tax evasion. New York should follow suit.
- M. *End the practice of the State Comptroller serving as sole trustee of the pension fund.* Currently, as the sole trustee of the pension fund, the state Comptroller has sole control of more money than almost any other person on the planet. This amount of power is not only an invitation to corruption and/or influence peddling as we’ve seen with Alan Hevesi and others, but it also subjects this massive retirement fund to the whims of one man and his staff, when retirees and/or the taxpayers might enjoy greater benefits if there were multiple decision makers. Rather than have the Comptroller continue to serve as sole trustee, we’re calling upon him to instead be Chairman of a Board of Trustees, the other members being named by the Governor, Assembly Speaker, State Senate President, Senate Minority Leader and Assembly Minority Leaders. Two members would also be elected by the current retirees themselves. Lobbyists should also be banned from lobbyists would also be barred from interacting with the fund.
- N. *Reducing the power of lobbyists and special interests.* While lobbyists play an important function in our democracy and are occasionally unfairly villainized, the bottom line is that those doing the bidding of moneyed special interests wield far too much power, while everyday New Yorkers wield far too little. The Reform Party seeks to end the revolving door of policymakers and lobbyists. Gifts from lobbyists should be prohibited and there should be greater oversight over those who lobby policymakers under a different title e.g. consultant, etc.

III. CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The Problems:

There are over 80,000 people currently incarcerated in New York State. New York also has the unique distinction of paying the most to incarcerate them, at an approximate cost of \$60,000 per inmate- nearly TWICE THE NATIONAL AVERAGE. In spite of that, conditions in state prisons and city jails are often abysmal, doing little to rehabilitate prisoners and often doing little more than helping them become better criminals and leaving them with few post incarceration skills. Additionally, there have been an alarming number of incidents of inmate on inmate violence, inmate on correction officer violence and other incidents, which should be unacceptable in any society that values the rule of law. There have also been an alarming number of wrongful convictions in New York State. While “overcriminalization”, in which otherwise law abiding citizens, run afoul of the overwhelming number of federal, state and local criminal laws, remains a largely unaddressed problem, there have also been far too many incidents of prosecutorial misconduct, which seem to go largely unnoticed. While certain draconian sentencing laws have been modified, there are also still far too many nonviolent drug offenders taking up space in New York’s prisons and jails.

The solutions of the Reform Party include:

- A. *Opposition to Mandatory minimum sentencing.* Despite decades of evidence showing that mandatory minimum sentences do little to either reduce crime or rehabilitate prisoners, Congress (and to some extent the state legislature) has continued to allow mandatory minimum sentencing laws to persist. We’re calling on all levels of government to allow for Judges to have some discretion in terms of sentencing and consider a variety of circumstances when determining appropriate punishment. Hopefully, this will result in not only more just punishments and less crowded jails, but also cause the voters (and public officials) to take more care when evaluating judicial candidates. It’s also hoped that enhanced judicial discretion will cause more qualified attorneys to seek judicial office.
- B. *Drug addiction and the opioid epidemic should primarily be dealt with as a public health crisis, rather than a criminal justice issue.* Simple possession of drugs should be misdemeanor crime rather than a felony. The Reform Party supports alternatives to incarceration for those suffering from opioid addiction. Drug treatment programs should be mandated for both youthful and adult offenders and Naloxone (Narcan), a prescription medicine that reverses the effects of an overdose should be available to every law enforcement officer in the state, likely to encounter an overdose. In general, the Reform Party supports a comprehensive approach to deal with the opioid crisis in our communities and hopes policymakers make this the priority it deserves to be.
- C. *Hold a referendum on the decriminalization of cannabis.* Many New Yorkers have called for decriminalization and/or legalization of marijuana. The Reform Party strongly supports allowing New Yorkers to vote on this issue and letting the people of the state decide for themselves what the best course of action is.

- D. *Opposition to civil asset forfeiture.* Civil asset forfeiture is used by law enforcement agencies and allows these entities to meet a very low burden of proof before seizing property from citizens and businesses. The assets can then be repurposed, often providing funding for the very agencies that seized it. Forfeiture began as a way to put criminal gains to a useful purpose, it has been expanded much too far, and now endangers individual rights and the integrity of law enforcement. The Reform Party supports severely curtailing its use.
- E. *Support for conviction integrity units.* There have been way too many wrongfully convicted people in New York serving lengthy sentences. Brooklyn has led the way in the use of a conviction integrity unit, which many other counties have emulated. The Reform Party supports making this a practice in District Attorney's office around the country.
- F. *Reducing mass incarceration.* The current criminal justice system in this state and the country is woefully inadequate. Not only does it fail to rehabilitate prisoners, but with America keeping more people incarcerated than any nation in the world, this system is incredibly costly. The Reform Party encourages policymakers to find solutions to reduce the prison population.
- G. *Reform of the grand jury process with an emphasis on transparency and accountability.* As Judge Wachtler put it, a grand jury "could indict a ham sandwich". They often serve as little more than a formality in doing a prosecutor's bidding. We support allowing a Judge to oversee Grand Jury deliberations and allowing a Judge to serve as the legal adviser to members of a grand jury. Additionally, we propose lifting the veil of secrecy on grand jury proceedings. If a Grand Jury decides not to issue indictments, we support releasing the transcripts of certain aspects of testimony as well as encouraging the grand jury to release a report explaining their rationale. Above all- the defining aspects of the grand jury process should be transparency, accountability and fairness.
- H. *Allow inmates in state prisons to be eligible for college courses.* It does no one in society any good if prisoners leave prison only better equipped to commit crimes. We strongly support allowing inmates in state prison to be eligible for a variety of vocational training and college courses. These programs should be funded privately or through non-profits whenever possible.
- I. *Improve conditions in state prisons.* State prisons should be required to minimum standard of health, nutritional and safety requirements, for the benefit not only of the inmates but for prison staff. Additionally, at least one prison in every portion of the state should be equipped with a hospice facility to care for terminally ill inmates.
- J. *Opposition to warrantless wiretapping and preservation of other civil liberties.* Civil liberties and due process of law have eroded due to a variety of factors, including new technology that that allows for easy invasion of privacy. The Reform Party supports the restoration of civil liberties and opposes warrantless wiretapping. We also support an end to secret detentions, arrests without charges, restricting access to attorneys, the use of secret "evidence" and the shredding of "probable cause" determinations.

IV. MASS TRANSIT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The Problems:

Our roads are crumbling. While cities around the world are launching state of the art, high speed mass transit system, New York's mass transit system has come to be defined by delays that are either comical or tragic. Many of the public authorities tasked with maintenance of mass transit have come to be known for bureaucracy, corruption and mismanagement as opposed to efficient and effective travel. Through it all, it's taking longer for New Yorkers to get to work in conditions that are

- A. *Establishment of a privately funded state infrastructure bank.* While New York has toyed with the idea of a State Infrastructure Bank (SIB), it has largely existed in name only. A SIB is a financing mechanism designed to provide low-interest loans and credit guarantees to local governments, funding all or part of an infrastructure project. Examples of successful SIBs include those in Ohio and Florida. We suggest that New York State create a SIB, which is flexible and largely focused on local needs. It should receive funding from not only from the State, but emphasize private funding sources to the greatest extent possible. It would make loans to smaller local projects. Municipalities should have their debt payments on SIB loans exempted from the property tax cap.
- B. *Reform of the MTA and other transportation related authorities, including reforms allowing for local control.* It often seems as if transportation projects affecting local communities get little input from local residents and local officials. We support allowing for greater local input on transportation funding requests and priorities including questions of speedbump placement and mass transit improvements. Common sense reforms for these agencies have been ignored, while unelected bureaucrats have been empowered. The common theme through all these transportation authorities is that they're all characterized by unsustainable debt, a lack of transparency, a lack of oversight and confusing leadership structures. New York's transit agencies lag far behind similar agencies in places like Vancouver, Hong Kong, London and Tokyo, not only in terms of projects completed but in terms of effective management. We need a complete restructuring of these agencies, where rooting out political patronage should be a priority.
- C. *Make improved mass transit a priority around the state.* The Reform Party will be the lobbyist and the advocate for the straphanger and the commuter. As such, we strongly urge lawmakers at all levels of government to make modernizing mass transit the priority that it needs to be.
- D. *A modernization program of the state's roads and bridges to bring them into the 21st century.* In order to assure safe and effective travel, promote economic development, and create jobs, New York must make rebuilding and modernizing its roads, bridges, public buildings, and other critical infrastructure a top priority. There is a critical need for modernization. This is one of the few investments, where we think increased borrowing might be warranted.

- E. *Use technology to speed up traffic, wherever possible and practical.* This might include increased use of smart traffic lights, which adjust with traffic volume, cashless tolling at all bridges and tunnels, etc. This could potentially include the use of school bus cameras to mitigate causes of traffic congestion, protect pedestrians and ease enforcement of existing traffic regulations.
- F. *Allow local communities to vote on expansion of, elimination of or implementation of red light cameras.* Decisions about controversial red light cameras, which ticket motorists, should be made by local municipalities, ideally with the input of local residents.
- G. *Support for the establishment of a privately funded watchdog group to be an advocate on behalf of commuters (similar to the Citizen Utility Board model).* The Citizens' Utility Board, or CUB, is a model approach for bringing together large numbers of consumers (or in this case commuters) into a voluntary organization, which can then pursue a common agenda in a variety of arenas, including mass transit. In New York, the state legislature could include in certain state mailings, an invitation to commuters (and other mass transit advocates) to pay a \$10 annual fee and become a voluntary member of this commuter advocacy group. All members of the CUB have the right to vote in the election of the CUB Board of Directors. This process ensures that the leadership of CUB reflects the interests of commuters. The Directors serve without pay and hire full-time staff of accountants, attorneys, economists, organizers, and lobbyists. This model has worked extraordinarily well for energy consumers in states like Oregon and Illinois.

V. CHAMPION SMALL BUSINESS AND CONSUMERS

The problems:

All over the state, small businesses are closing. Not only has this been a problem in terms of slowing job growth and reducing the quality of jobs in this state, but it has been devastating for local communities. Businesses that have been an integral part of local communities and helped define them are closing because they can no longer afford rising rents coupled with cumbersome government regulations. Businesses that aren't national tenants struggle to keep the lights on, all the while contributing generously to local charities and to a neighborhood's distinctive character. We need to reverse this alarming trend. Small businesses have often struggled to find an advocate in the halls of government...until now.

The solutions of the Reform Party include:

- A. *Ease burdensome regulations on all businesses particularly small and midsize businesses.* Whether it's onerous health department fines or traffic tickets driven by a quota system, businesses are hurting, not because of honest free market competition or their own failures to meet consumer needs but because they are being squeezed by the government. No area is this more pronounced than tickets. Local governments have increasingly relied upon summonses of all types, not as punishment but as a revenue source. In spite of the fact that local officials often

deny the existence of quotas, there appears to be ample evidence of their existence. The Reform Party strongly opposes such quotas and urges government at all levels to make life easier rather than more difficult for small businesses- their consumers and their employees.

- B. *Establishment of citizen utility boards so that consumers finally have a watchdog against the utility companies.* Just as we've suggested with respect to straphangers, this is an attempt to create a watchdog group to stand up to the utility companies, on behalf of the ratepayers, at no expense to the taxpayer.
- C. *legislation to create fair negotiations of commercial lease renewals, so landlords can't use insane rent hikes to evict dependable and beloved business people.* The problem of local businesses being priced out by landlords hoping for a national chain tenant is particularly noticeable in New York City. The commercial rent market has been driven up precipitously by speculators at a time where cities like New York are more dependent than ever on small businesses of all types. The Reform Party strongly supports legislation like the "SMALL BUSINESS JOBS SURVIVAL ACT" which would give commercial tenants
 1. A minimum 10-year lease with the right to renewal, so they can better plan for the future of their business.
 2. Equal negotiation terms when it comes time to renew their lease with recourse to binding arbitration by a 3rd party if fair terms can't be found.
 3. Restrictions to prevent landlords from passing their property taxes on to small business owners.
- D. *Control the spread of chain businesses.* We strongly support legislation in which municipalities would not permit a "formula" retail store or restaurant to open in any commercial district unless it undergoes a public hearing and obtains special permission from a zoning board, community board, or other type of public entity designated for that purpose. While chain stores play an important role in our economy, they've enjoyed an inordinate amount of advantages over independent and family owned stores. This model has worked incredibly well in San Francisco, which still enjoys a vibrant independent retail sector. This is the lifeblood of America's neighborhoods.
- E. *Generous tax breaks for small business as opposed to large multinational chains.* While we oppose corporate welfare, the Reform Party does support legislation at all levels of government, which would offer tax breaks to small businesses (those with fewer than fifty employees).
- F. *Give fines or increased taxes to landlords who keep their commercial spaces vacant.* Currently, commercial landlords think nothing of keeping a property vacant for months at a time in the hopes of scoring a national tenant. This leads to the combined problems of vacant storefronts and continually escalating rents. We propose that cities like New York, where there an abundance of retailers, who would like to open up shop, fine landlords who keep a storefront vacant for more than six months, barring any special mitigating circumstances.

VI. Education

The problems:

Education in New York is the worst of both worlds. It's incredibly costly and it's producing questionable results. Children emerge from New York's public schools far too often completely unprepared for either the workplace or to meet the basic math and reading requirements that should be expected of those with a High School education. Aside from the basics, students also emerge from school completely unprepared to be an engaged citizen, with a functioning knowledge of government or community. It's certainly the case that not all of the blame can be laid at the hands of the public education system. Parents, community leaders and students themselves all play an essential role in the collaborative education process. There's no denying though that an emphasis on one size fits all testing, top-down education requirements passed on from Washington D.C. and Albany and a myriad of other illogical moves in the education policy area have all served to stifle creativity in the classroom, increase stress among students and parents and ignore so many of the basic fundamentals of learning.

The solutions of the Reform Party include:

- A. *Opposition to top down education mandates like "No Child Left Behind" and "Common Core"*. While there should certainly be minimum standards of what's required to get a Regents diploma, the level of micromanagement forced on professional educators, parents and students by people who have often never even seen the inside of a classroom. The Reform Party strongly opposes Common Core and advocates that a greater emphasis be placed on local decision making when it comes to curriculum and school policy. The principles of transparency and accountability should be paramount.
- B. *Support on a well-rounded education rather than simply standardized tests*. Our increased reliance on standardized testing has failed our students. The Reform Party encourages school districts to embrace a well-rounded education philosophy, which isn't dependent on teaching to the test. One alternative to standardized testing, which has shown a great deal of promise is "portfolio based assessment", which allows for a great deal of teacher flexibility and creativity but always relies upon records kept by the teacher and on collections of the student's work, called the "student portfolio."
- C. *Make Civics instruction a priority*. Students should not only know how to read and add by the time they complete school, but they should have a thorough knowledge of how government at every level works. Age appropriate civics education should be included for all grades and various government and civic participation programs should be encouraged as well.
- D. *voter referendums on key educational policy related issues like charter schools, school vouchers and teacher tenure*. These decisions are too important to be made by a legislature too often dominated by special interests. Let's give parents and taxpayers the right to choose the state's directions on hot button issues like these.
- E. *Allow for a state tax credit for donations to public schools and nonprofit scholarship funds*. The Reform Party supports legislation similar to the Education Investment Tax Credit, which would generate increased funding for education by enhancing tax benefits for

charitable donations to public schools and scholarships programs. Increased funding sources for private schools don't just benefit private schools and their students, it helps the community as a whole in innumerable ways. This legislation also allows for scholarships that support programs in the arts, sports or music, which are often on the chopping block when school districts are faced with budget cuts. It's a win for taxpayers and a win for students.

- F. *End the practice of "last in, first out", in which teachers with the least seniority are removed first.* This policy has resulted in the removal of incredibly qualified, dedicated and hard-working teachers. Rather than institute a blanket policy in which new teachers are automatically penalized for lack of seniority, we support allowing local school administrators to retain some discretion in determining which teachers are removed. Seniority should certainly be a consideration.
- G. *Mandate that water in state schools is safe to drink and meets minimum levels of safe to drink.* It's simply unacceptable for students in public schools to be exposed to hazardous levels of lead, toxins or pollutants. No student should ever get sick from drinking water.
- H. *Truly eliminate social promotion.* While social promotion supposedly no longer exists, in to many schools, it exists in practice. Many municipalities still carry on this practice and in New York City, where it was supposedly eliminated, there appears to be far too many instances, where this counterproductive practice continues. It needs to end once and for all. Students shouldn't be passed on to the next grade, without demonstrating a basic competency in the grade appropriate materials.

VII. Environmental and Energy Policy

The Problem:

Too often it seems as if the battle to preserve our state's majestic natural resources runs directly at odds with some of the interests of the business community. New Yorkers often pay far too much for energy and there are aspects of the state, where the air and water supply are far too dirty. There **MUST** be room for both.

The solutions of the Reform Party include:

- A. *The Reform party supports safeguarding natural resources, while balancing the need for economic development.* We can and we **MUST** do both. We encourage New York's public officials to pursue policies that keep both of these laudable goals at the forefront of principles that guide their action on environmental policy.
- B. *Support for energy independence and pursuing domestic energy production initiatives in the state, the nation and the continent.* New York shouldn't be a net importer of energy and New York should continue to use modern technology to produce energy within its borders cheaply, safely and efficiently.

This platform shall be reviewed and amended as the State Committee deems appropriate.