

The Prohibition Party of New York's Response to Governor Andrew Cuomo's 2019 State of the State and Budget Address

January 17, 2019

On January 15, 2019, Governor Andrew Cuomo delivered his annual State of the State and Budget address to the people of New York. In the interest of advancing a productive discourse as to the condition and future of the state of New York, we of the Prohibition Party of New York will put forward a response to Governor Cuomo's address; in which, we will evaluate his statements and proposals, and counter by articulating our own vision and proposals for the state.

Governor Cuomo has called his set of proposals his 2019 Justice Agenda. A name which is not befitting of the whole of his proposals. While there indeed some proposals, such as passing the Child Victims Act and ending the statute of limitations for rape are good proposals, which are benefitting of the title of a justice agenda, other proposals, such as his proposal to legalize the commercial sale of recreational marijuana are socially regressive and detrimental to the endeavor of creating actually just society. Some proposals reflect the long and dedicated efforts of activists to seek positive changes in this state. While other proposals reflect Governor Cuomo's continuing willingness to support special interests at the expense of the public wellbeing and his reluctance to engage in serious reform on a variety of issues.

Governor Cuomo makes the claim that New York is the most progressive state in the nation. While there are variety of things which attest to the progress of our state, there are variety of facts which complicate this and which show how much there is to be done. Governor Cuomo's administration, and its Democratic and Republican coconspirators in the state legislature, have worked to significantly weaken state restrictions on the alcohol industry, and have used state agencies and taxpayer money to support the growth of the alcohol industry. These actions have worked to make the problem of alcohol New York worse and has undermined the health, safety, and wellbeing of the people of New York. The state's support of the alcohol industry and other greedy special interests at the expense of the public is fundamentally regressive. Some politicians, including the governor, want to drag public health efforts further backward by legalizing yet another drug for greedy corporations to profit off of. Our state government has seen widespread corruption at levels that (based on the frequency of corruption convictions) are likely greater than most other states.

In various ways New York state has lagged behind as other states have made advances. For instance, states such as Tennessee have taken larger steps to advance the availability of tuition free college. Utah has passed a 0.05 BAC limit for drunk driving. 7 states, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming have abolished the statute of limitations for felony sex crimes.

There is much which needs to be done in order for New York State to truly and fully be a leader in progress. For New York to be truly progressive, it must abandon the regressive forces that have falsely hidden under the term. The state must embrace good government based in moral principle and advancing the wellbeing of its people.

Governor Cuomo claims that our state as seen economic progress. While there are indeed some positive statistics, our state's economy still faces significant challenges. Post-recession economic growth in the

state has often lagged behind national averages. Post-recession economic growth in the state has mostly been focused in New York City, while the rest of the state has seen far less economic growth. The state has seen large numbers of people move out the state in past years, which has exacerbated the struggles of many communities in the state. The state has seen losses in retail business, struggling agricultural industries, and high levels of food insecurity in many counties. The state's economic development programs have often produced mediocre results, and have often been affected by corruption.

Our state needs to change its economic approach. We need to adopt a smart, holistic approach to economic development. We need to work to revitalize our communities and reorganize our systems, in a manner that fosters sustainable economic growth, that better allows for people to make a decent living in the state, and which advances quality of life for people in our state.

Governor Cuomo made several proposals for reforming our state's voting and election laws. These include requiring that all polls are open by 6:00 am, making election day a state holiday, having federal and state primaries on the same day, enacting early voting, enacting vote by mail, same-day voter registration, and automatic voter registration.

We support a strong electoral system, with strong voter participation, and welcome positive reforms to that effect. Things such as ensuring all are open by 6:00am, making election day a state holiday, early voting, allowing vote by mail, and cutting back the deadline on voter registration, and automatic voter registration could potentially help to increase voter participation. In endeavoring to enact voting reforms, care should be taken to ensure that they are properly funded, and implanted in a way that ensures their effectiveness and the integrity of our election system.

We would propose additional voting reforms. We should reform our state's ballot access requirements to make them fairer and more equal. Our current ballot access requirements often require candidates seeking to get on ballot by independent nomination petition to collect 3 times as many signatures than they do for Democratic and Republican candidates. Furthermore, the high signature requirement to get on ballot present a costly barrier to democratic participation, which favors big money and powerful organizations to the disadvantage of the average citizen trying to serve the public. The state should lower its signature requirements and end the disparities that require independent candidates to collect more signatures than major party candidates. Currently, the only way for parties to gain statewide ballot access to run a candidate for governor and get over 50,000 votes. We propose creating a second additional means for seeking state party recognition. Perhaps, adopting something similar to the system in Vermont, where here is a process for local party organizations, and reaching a certain number of local organizations being able to apply for statewide recognition. The state should also consider the possibility of adopting ranked-choice voting.

Governor Cuomo has proposed passing the Child Victims Act. As an organization which has supported the Child Victims Act, and as people with a sense of morality, we applaud this. Yes, we have waited too long to get the Child Victims Act passed. Let's get it passed this year, and let's work towards abolishing the statute of limitations for rape, sexual assault, and the sexual abuse of children.

Governor Cuomo proceeded to make further proposals for combating sexual abuse. He proposed banning revenge pornography, establishing a specialized police unit to combat child sexual predators

online, and abolishing the statute of limitations for rape. Again, we commend him for these proposals, and hope that we can get them passed this year.

Unfortunately, Governor Cuomo then proceeded towards making the misguided and regressive proposal of legalizing recreational marijuana. Legalizing recreation marijuana is a terrible idea. It would only serve to give greedy corporations another drug to profit off of, at the expense of the health, safety, and wellbeing of the public. Contrary to the marijuana industry's and the permissivists' propaganda, recreational marijuana does have negative effects on the mental and physical conditions of its users, and is conducive to various social ills. Which is why organizations such as the state's association of county health officials has taken a stand against legalizing recreational marijuana.

Governor Cuomo falsely claims that legalizing recreational marijuana would reduce racial disparities in our criminal justice system. As can be seen in Colorado, where marijuana is legal, yet African American residents are three times as likely to be arrested than their White counterparts. Rather scapegoating the state's laws against marijuana as a cover trying to line the pockets of his marijuana industry donors, Cuomo should try actually addressing the systemic issues in our legal system that are conducive towards producing racial disparities.

Governor Cuomo claims that he would do it in a way that wouldn't be about enriching the big companies, and in a way that would benefit poor communities and communities of color. It's a flat out lie. While he spouts this hogwash, politicians like Chuck Schumer and Byron Brown are rolling out the welcome mats to the big marijuana companies, ready to make into the next Big Tobacco. But ultimately whether it's sold by big or small companies, it still involves companies exploiting people by selling harmful products and profiting off people with substance use problems. As it does with the alcohol industry, the tobacco industry, et cetera. While these companies will target any community they can profit off of, they end to especially target lower income and minority communities. This is seen with the alcohol and tobacco companies in New York, and with the marijuana companies in other states. Legalizing marijuana will not empower poor and minority communities, it will exploit them.

Cuomo states that his proposal for legalizing marijuana would allow cities and counties to opt out and establish their own local bans on recreational marijuana. If that comes to pass, then we will campaign on the grassroots level to drive it, along with the alcohol and tobacco industries, out our state, and keep pressing until the state realizes its mistake and makes the progressive move of prohibiting their manufacture and sale.

Governor Cuomo made several proposals for changing campaign finance laws, including closing the LLC loophole in campaign finance rules and banning corporate contributions. We generally support reforms to try to reduce corruption and the undue power of wealthy special interests in state's our politics. And while we are hopeful for making progress, there is reason to skeptical as to whether Cuomo will actually make any substantive steps to advance these. Governor Cuomo is one of the biggest beneficiaries of big money in politics and of the LLC loophole. In his political he has amassed tens of millions of dollars from corporations and special interest donors. Governor Cuomo has promised to seek similar kinds of changes in the past, but nothing came of them, and he continued to take money from corporate donations and through the LLC loophole.

Governor Cuomo has proposed expanding support for efforts to ensure the safety of our drinking water. Which is a sensible thing.

The governor has proposed measures to increase environmental cleanup efforts, increase environmental restrictions, and undertake what he terms a Green New Deal (which would be a program to develop renewable energy, with a stated goal of trying to reach 100% renewable energy electricity by 2040).

The Prohibition Party of New York supports protecting the environment, as a necessary part of ensuring the health and prosperity of our society. We believe in pursuing a balanced program of environmental protection and green energy development, which would provide a better relation with the environment while meeting our economic and energy needs. The development of green energy presents an opportunity for our state to improve its economy and create jobs. Though, further information will be needed in order to evaluate the governor's proposals, see whether his plan would be the best course of action, or whether a different strategy of green energy development would work better.

Governor Cuomo proposes legalizing sports betting in the state of New York. That is a misguided idea. Gambling is a socially and economically destructive practice. The gambling industry creates no wealth in our economy. It creates no useful product or service. It instead siphons money from people, often those with lower incomes, for the profit of a few. The negative impacts of gambling cost our society and as a result produces a net reduction in wealth for our society. Our state should instead go in the opposite direction, and work towards removing the existing gambling structures in our state.

Governor Cuomo proposes further investments in infrastructure programs in our state. Indeed, our state should work to revitalize its infrastructure. And we should work to do so in a manner that is cost effective and that broadly benefits the people of this state. At this point we would need more details in order to evaluate the governor proposed plan for infrastructure.

Governor Cuomo points out that there's an inequity in our state's system of funding schools. This is correct. Our state government systemically underfunds many of its schools; especially in lower income and upstate school districts. In the past, Governor Cuomo and the state legislature have done little to address this. Hopefully they will take more substantive steps to address it this year.

Our state should also work to undertake curriculum and teaching reform, to improve the quality of education. To advance quality education, which develops knowledge, reason, character, good citizenship, and skills. The Prohibition Party of New York calls on the governor, state legislature, and the public at-large to join in working to establish a system where all students are able to receive a decent quality education.

Governor Cuomo continues to tout his Excelsior program for college financial aid. A program which Governor Cuomo has tended to misrepresent and exaggerate the impact of. He claims that it is the first free tuition college program, when it is not the first. And while this program has helped provide some additional financial aid, to some students, at some colleges, it has not benefited the average student. The Excelsior Program has been reported to provide aid to less than 2%. Meanwhile, the state has neglected to take significant actions to expand TAP (the New York State Tuition Assistance Program), New York's main financial aid program and has helped the greatest number of students with affording college.

We offer a bolder vision for making college more affordable. Let's expand the state's TAP program in both the range of eligibility and the amount of aid provided. Let's expand aid to part time students. Let's

expand job training programs. And let us work towards establishing a system where all students have a reasonable opportunity to a debt free education at any of our state's public an independent non-profit, colleges, universities, and vocational schools.

Governor Cuomo complains about high property taxes in New York State. Though he ignores the leading driver of high property taxes in the state. The state requires local government to pay for a significant portion of the state's budget, an as a result makes local government have to raise property taxes. The state needs to restructure its financing so that the state government takes more responsibility for paying for its own expenses and reduce the burden it places on local governments. That would allow local government to be able to significantly reduce property taxes.

The Governor has proposed passing laws requiring the labeling of products that contain known carcinogens and other toxic substances. This should be done, and we should make sure that it includes the labeling of alcohol, which is a known group one carcinogen.

The Governor proposes increasing restrictions on tobacco by raising the age to purchase tobacco to 21, banning flavored E-Cigarettes, banning the sale of tobacco in pharmacies. These would be welcome steps to help address the problem of tobacco.

The governor has proposed additional funding to combat the opioid crises. Indeed, more should be done to combat the opioid crises. Though more should combat alcohol, tobacco, and other drug problems as well. We should increase support for prevention efforts, education, and rehabilitory services.

Governor Cuomo claims concern over the lives of the young in our state, but his actual proposals are inconsistent on this. Some proposals have supported protecting the lives and wellbeing of our youth, while others openly endorsed things that are destructive towards their lives and wellbeing. If only the governor were willing to stand on a platform that was consistently in favor of life and wellbeing.

The governor proposes increasing support for our state's parks and historic heritage sites. That is a sensible move for helping to develop tourism in a healthy manner. But unfortunately, not all of his tourism proposals are like that.

Governor Cuomo boasts about the increase in breweries and wineries in the state. He ignores the damaging effect that alcohol has on people and society, and how support or growing the alcohol has damaged the health, safety, and wellbeing of New Yorkers. He falsely claims that this has helped the economy, when in reality the state loses over four times as much money from the damages caused by alcohol than it gets from its business. He boasts about the role that the Taste New York program has done to promote the alcohol industry. He outright lies by claiming that their products are healthy. Alcohol is a toxic substance, that kills thousands of New Yorker's each year, contributes to over 200 types of injury and illness (including rain damage, organ failure, and several forms of cancer), and produces high rates of addiction. The alcohol problem in our state is larger than the opioid crisis. His statement is outright dishonest, immoral, and shows an utter indifference for the lives and wellbeing of the people of this state. If Governor Cuomo has even the slightest ethical integrity, he will admit to lying to people of New York, admit to supporting the alcohol industry at the expense of the people of this state, and stop using the state to support the alcohol industry.

The Governor proposes additional support for anti-gang operations, violence prevention efforts, and school-based supports. Indeed, we should take stronger efforts to combat organized crime and work to reduce violent crime.

The Governor has proposed several changes to state ethics laws, including enacting a code of conduct for lobbyists to discourage self-dealing and revolving door practices, expanding lobbying report requirements, banning political consultant from acting as lobbyists to people they helped elect and banning lobbyists from becoming consultants to people that they lobby, expanding the minimal amount of time from former elected officials and policy makers from becoming lobbyists to 5 years, and requiring lobbyists to disclose conflicts of interest, requiring lobbyists to report campaign donations, increasing penalties for lobbyists who violate disclosure requirements, passing a FOIL law covering the state's executive and legislative branches. These would be welcome changes.

Having responded to the governor's statements, let us turn to our own vision and proposals.

The Prohibition Party of New York puts forward a vision of good government, based in moral principle, ethical public service, and advancing the public wellbeing. To this end we put forward the following proposals.

End state support for the alcohol industry in all forms. That includes prohibiting state agencies from being used to support the alcohol industry or its products, eliminating all special tax cuts that were given to the alcohol industry, prohibiting state money from being used to support any alcohol manufacturing or selling business, and restrengthen state restrictions on the alcohol industry.

Have the state seriously address alcohol as a social and public health problem. That includes expanding prevention and education efforts (including the promotion of teetotalism), expanding support for reformatory efforts and rehabilitation treatment, holding the alcohol industry legally liable for the damage caused by its products, increasing restrictions on the alcohol industry, and working towards the eventual abolition of the alcohol industry.

Likewise, expand efforts to combat tobacco, other intoxicating drugs, and gambling. With such efforts including stronger education, prevention, reformatory, and rehabilitation efforts, and stronger restrictions.

Enact stronger state ethics laws and increase anti-corruption efforts.

Pass the Child Victims Act and work to abolish the statute of limitations for rape, sexual assault, and the sexual abuse of children.

Pass Britany's Law

Reform the state's economic development efforts, to embrace an effective holistic approach to economic development.

Reform the state's fiscal system, to have the state take greater responsibility for its expenses and reduce the burden of property taxes.

Take further actions to protect the environment and advance renewable energy.

Reform our education system to improve the quality of education and ensure adequate funding for all schools.

Expand TAP and other financial aid efforts, and work towards a system where all New Yorkers have a reasonable opportunity to a debt free education at any of the state's public and non-profit independent colleges, universities, and vocational schools.

Work to promote equal rights and opportunity in the state.

Work to expand opportunity and improve services for those in the state living with disabilities.

Work to improve voter participation and improve the state's ballot access laws.

And in general work to improve the condition of our state.

We welcome those who wish to help build a better future for New York to join us in our effort to seek positive reforms for our state, and to stand for moral principle, public wellbeing, and progress, against the regressive forces of greed and permissivism, who seek to drag down our state for their own selfish gain. As William Jennings Bryan had said, "The humblest citizen of all the land, when clad in the armor of a righteous cause, is stronger than all the hosts of error." Let us work to truly advance justice and progress in our state.