



## Staten Island Advance

### Reform in state Legislature to begin with 'Project Sunlight' *Internet site will allow public to track campaigns and lobbying activities*

By TOM WROBLESKI

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. — Few disagree that the Albany Legislature is dysfunctional and needs to be reformed.

The question is: Where to begin?

Attorney General Andrew Cuomo believes it should start with a little “sunlight.”

Cuomo adviser Blair Horner last night announced plans to create a one-stop, clearinghouse-style Internet database — dubbed “Project Sunlight” — that New Yorkers could use to track campaign contributions, member-item spending, lobbying activity and other policy-influencing events in state government.

Horner, the former executive director of the New York Public Interest Research Group, discussed the plans during the inaugural session of the Hugh L. Carey Center for Government Reform at Wagner College.

“Albany needs work,” Horner told students, faculty members and others in the college’s Spiro Hall. “It needs a culture of openness, not a culture of secrecy.”

Horner said that a number of factors have conspired to land Albany the distinction of recently being dubbed “the most dysfunctional legislature in America”: The possibility for nearly unlimited campaign contributions to lawmakers; the fact that less than 1 percent of New Yorkers donate, and legislative district lines drawn to protect incumbents and inhibit competitive elections.

“It is sobering to see how the system works,” said Horner, noting that most donations to lawmakers come from political action committees, public-employee unions, trade organizations and wealthy individuals, all of whom have vested interests that sometimes conflict with the public good.

The path to reform, he said, lies in more openness in government, better disclosure and enforcement, campaign finance reform and changes in how districts are drawn.

Project Sunlight, Horner said, is a good place to start.

A prototype of the Web site should be up and running in a couple of weeks, he said, and will provide a search engine and direct links so New Yorkers can peruse Board of Elections and Lobbying Commission records, as well as see who gets money for state contracts and which bills are introduced and passed in Albany.

Horner hopes the site will “fire up the electorate” and provide the information voters need to make informed decisions.

“People have to understand how the system works,” he said.

Former state Sen. Seymour Lachman, director of the Carey Center, said change is possible.

“It takes time,” said Lachman, who used to represent part of Staten Island in the Senate and is the author of “Three Men in a Room,” an examination of Albany

dysfunction. “You can’t do it in a hundred days. You have to develop a foundation. That’s what I hope the Center will be involved in.”

The Center plans to hold a number of lectures and other events at the college and is preparing a book about Carey’s role in helping New York recover from the fiscal crisis of the 1970s.

Dr. Richard Guarasci, the Wagner president, said he hopes the Center will be a “beacon of light on public practices” that can help ensure transparency in government.

Carey, Gov. Eliot Spitzer and other dignitaries are expected to attend a gala in Manhattan to mark the formal opening of the Center on Nov. 16.

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