

## **The Roads Not Taken – State by Dan Jacoby**

The state legislature was called into session this week for one extra day. Governor Pataki was dangling a pay raise in front of their noses in a desperate attempt to get two rotten pieces of legislation passed. Fortunately, nobody was buying, and the Governor was left out in the cold.

Unfortunately, many good bills never got passed either. Some passed one house but not the other; other bills never went anywhere. Here are a few examples:

### **S6363**

I'll start with a bill introduced by my own state Senator, George Onorato. This bill would prevent credit card companies from sending those "checks" that almost nobody uses – except for thieves who go through the garbage looking for things to steal. Naturally, since this bill would protect consumers (and banks) from an increasingly popular form of identity theft, it went nowhere.

### **A2915**

Right now, there is no way to take a bus across the county line between Queens and Nassau County. Many people, especially elderly, who live (for example) in Queens and need to get to a hospital or medical center in Nassau County would benefit greatly from cross-county bus or "Access-a-Ride" service. This bill would set that up.

The bill passed the Assembly in 2005 and died in the Senate. This year, the bill passed the Assembly and the Senate, but was vetoed by Governor Pataki for reasons passing understanding. The elderly will just have to wait until next year.

### **A2056/S7976**

Under current law, after each decennial census the state legislature redraws the districts. Each house redraws its own districts, and the lines are always drawn to favor keeping the status quo. Partly as a result, the Assembly has been solidly Democratic for over three decades and the Senate has been Republican for four decades.

These bills would establish an independent commission to draw the district lines. This system was used in Arizona after the 2000 census with tremendous results. Since it's a government reform bill, however, it went nowhere here.

### **A9296/S7232**

This bill would provide an exemption from sales taxes in Orange County for the cost of wind- and hydro-power electricity systems. Under state tax law, a county can apply for this exemption, and Orange County did.

The bill passed the Senate, but went nowhere in the Assembly. The next legislature should pass a statewide tax exemption for purchase and use of clean, renewable energy sources as part of a comprehensive plan to reduce New Yorkers' reliance on fossil fuels.

**A5626**

This bill would begin the process of reform of our “Public Authorities” mess. There are currently over 700 of these entities (nobody is quite certain exactly how many there are). They have little accountability, and can (and often do) engage in fiscal practices that are, to say the least, shaky.

Under the terms of this bill, public authorities’ actions would be restricted. Their ability to issue bonds would be brought into line with acceptable fiscal practices. A commission would be created to investigate which authorities can be merged or eliminated. (A fine example of one that should be eliminated is the Overcoat Development Corporation. This Class A Public Authority was established in the 1980s for the purpose of convincing an Indiana-based overcoat manufacturer to move his operation to New York. Nobody seems to know what happened to him, but the public authority still exists.) An Inspector General would be appointed to oversee the operations of these institutions.

And several other reforms would be enacted.

This bill passed the Assembly, but died in the Senate. Public authorities, which are anything but “public”, are allowed to continue on their merry way, without any real oversight or accountability.

**A5506/S2401**

Officially these two bills are not the same, but in fact they are. They would create a “Clean Money, Clean Elections” (CMCE) system of public campaign finance.

Right now, there is no system for public financing of campaigns for state offices. Candidates must raise all the money on their own, and with the highest contribution limits in the country and plenty of loopholes, rich candidates and those with access to rich people have an overwhelming advantage when running for office. Under CMCE, candidates who qualify by demonstrating sufficient constituent support would get full public financing for their campaigns.

This bill would not only open the election process up to many middle-class and working-class New Yorkers, but by taking campaign contributions out of the picture, elected officials would no longer be subject to pressures from large contributors and fundraisers. These bills are also de-facto lobbying reform.

Naturally, neither bill went anywhere.

There are thousands of other bills, many of which are introduced simply so that elected officials can say they tried (even though they didn’t really). But many of these bills, on issues including child abuse protection, education reform, healthcare coverage options, property tax realignment, energy efficiency, and many, many others. You can search for individual bills, or browse bills on a subject, at <http://assembly.state.ny.us/leg>.