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Our readers call for answers

Housing for mentally ill?

People with serious mental illnesses have a chance of recovery if they have appropriate housing and supportive services in the community, but the demand for such housing is seriously outpacing the supply in New York state. More and more people are shuffled in and out of shelters, adult homes, hospitals and other emergency services with detrimental effects on them and at a great expense to taxpayers.

As governor, what would you do to reform the state's mental health housing policies to assure an adequate supply of safe, affordable and adequately staffed housing with services for people with mental illnesses?

▼ ADVERTISEMENT ▼ Carol Booth

Co-President, National Alliance on Mental Illnesses of the Finger Lakes Ithaca

EDITOR'S NOTE: A similar question was received from Cornell University student Julia Hoffman.

Champion 'Clean Elections'?

As governor, will you actively champion and accomplish enactment of optional public funding for state office election campaigns (the so-called Clean Money, Clean Elections legislation)?

I am very disturbed by four problems in New York elections for local and state offices:

- * the large cost to taxpayers of privately-funded campaigns for office,
- * the number of uncontested seats,
- * the high (98 percent) rate of incumbents returned to office, and
- * voter disillusion and refusal to vote.

Since Maine (1996) and Arizona (1998) voted in Clean Money, Clean Elections by ballot initiative, those four problems began to disappear in those states. Presently, in both states, a majority of officeholders ran "Clean"; voter participation was much increased; there are no uncontested seats; contests do not automatically return incumbents to office; candidates filled the legislatures with officeholders of many viewpoints and backgrounds.

Your questions for Faso and Spitzer

We received more than responses to our printed call for questions to submit to gubernatorial candidates John Faso and Elliot Spitzer at tonight's Cornell University debate. Although The Ithaca Journal has withdrawn from the debate's press panel, we felt it was essential Faso and Spitzer know what was on your mind. Here are some of the questions you wanted your next governor to address.

More questions, covering issues from property tax relief to global warming, can be found on our Web site at www.theithacajournal.com/opinion.

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The officeholders who ran "Clean" do not owe favors to campaign contributors and have time to become knowledgeable about their state's problems; they have time to investigate a variety of solutions. They have time to repair the damage done in "paybacks" by previous officeholders.

However, those dependent on private campaign funds must work Friday through Monday to collect the hundreds of thousands or millions to campaign again next time. We pay them full salaries for three-day work-weeks.

The "private funders" receive hundred of millions of dollars in tax cuts or special consideration in contracts or exemption from state safety or consumer protection regulations, etc.

Services are lost because revenues were reduced. Taxes are raised to make up for shortfalls. Consumers or workers are unprotected because regulations were narrowed or weakened. Private funding/public money payback makes our state government weaker.

Clean Money, Clean Elections bills have been introduced five times in both houses of the New York legislature. Those bills will again be introduced in 2007. The bills are good and will provide New Yorkers with great benefits. When will we see them passed and signed into law?

Claudia Dweck
Johnstown

EDITOR'S NOTE: Similar letters calling on the next governor to endorse a Clean Money, Clean Elections bill were received from 15 other writers.

Require paper ballot voting?

Our state Legislature has passed the buck, and it is now up to every county election commissioner to decide what kind of voting equipment that we will have to use starting next year. Governor Bill Richardson in New Mexico recently announced that he will work with his Legislature to ensure a uniform statewide system using the paper ballot optical scan equipment. Different machines all over the state seems like a recipe for the kind of election disasters we've seen in Florida and Ohio. If you were elected governor would you follow Bill Richardson's example?

Allen Carstensen
Finger Lakes Chapter of New Yorkers for Verified Voting
Trumansburg

Back universal health care?

In the NY1 debate on July 24, Attorney General Spitzer expressed support for universal health care for the state of New York. Our Assembly has also passed a bill, A6576, which would create such a single-payer, universal healthcare system. As our newly elected governor how would you implement A6576, providing comprehensive health care for all New Yorkers?

Pete Meyers
Rebecca Elgie
The Workers Center Health Care Committee
Ithaca

Reform redistricting?

Districts throughout New York state are gerrymandered to protect incumbents. For example, I live in District 29 which stretches from the southern tier to Rochester. The peculiar district shape was largely set up over this area to protect Amo Houghton's Republican voting block, rather than a simple slice of the population in a given part of the state. These gerrymandered districts serve to protect incumbents of one party or the other, reduce the influence of moderates of either party, and generally hinder the democratic process. Are you willing to take on setting up voting districts based on population distribution rather than accepting the current corrupted situation? I do not see that gridlock in the state can be reduced without dealing with this issue.

Linda S. Rayor
Ithaca

Restrict the Oneida?

The next governor of New York will have to decide an issue that would challenge Solomon. Should the Oneida Indians who run the Turning Stone casino be permitted to put their lands into a federal trust as a way of avoiding taxes and compliance with local laws, particularly environmental laws? Do the past wrongs done to their ancestors entitle them to such exceptionalism in light of the Supreme Court decision in favor of New York's smallest city, Sherrill?

Sandra Miley
Sherill

Pay for services, tax cuts?

If they are taking a stand on lowering taxes, which we desperately need as the highest-taxed state in our nation, I wonder, where are they planning on finding the funds to do so? If they are planning to expand healthcare, education, and other services, as we so often hear, how are they going to pay for it?

Ellen Reynolds
Ithaca

Defend 9/11 responders?

For Mr. Spitzer:

As the "People's Lawyer" why have you never offered to assist the afflicted New York City workers in the matter of damage to their health related to environmental dangers at the Ground Zero site? Do you support the bill offered by the two U.S. congressmen? If it is determined that negligence or willful disregard was the cause of the erroneous EPA report, what steps would you take to ensure that adequate compensation and justice is served for the afflicted? What steps would you take as New York governor to ensure that future environmental reports in any area of New York state from any government agency remain non-political and completely objective?

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For Mr. Faso:

If it is determined that the Bush White House interceded or influenced the Whitman EPA report about the World Trade Center environmental conditions post 9/11, what steps would you take as New York governor to ensure that the New York taxpayer is protected from future improper activity by a U.S. or N.Y. environmental agency?

Paul Sheridan
Cornell MBA '80
Dearborn, Mich.

9/11 crimes and school funding?

Ask Elliot Spitzer: Given the inconsistencies, coincidences, incongruities and unanswered questions about the crimes having taken place on 9/11 in New York City, and given the enormity of that crime, and the legitimate questions which have been raised since then, why have you not convened a grand jury to delve into what was the murder of almost 3,000 people? Or, do you believe the official 9/11 commission report concerning the events on 9/11?

Ask John Faso: Your record shows you are for limiting the funding for public schools while at the same time increasing the funding for private charter schools. Would you please tell us how that can not be considered transference of taxpayer funds away from the less-wealthy and for the benefit of the already-wealthy?

John Rice
Ithaca

Support property tax relief?

In one of Mr. Spitzer's TV ads, he says that New York homeowners are in dire need a decrease in their property taxes. If elected, how will he accomplish this goal? What is Mr. Faso's stand on the property tax situation?

Judith Andrew
Ithaca