

Plugged In @ Hinman Straub

Coverage of Albany and New York State government – January 6, 2012

What's Inside

- Governor Delivers State of the State Address
- Governor's Office Releases 'One Year Progress Report'
- Governor Hires New Federal Affairs Staff
- Governor Signs Local Government Open Meeting Legislation
- Department of Financial Services Issues Year End Report
- More Redistricting Lawsuits Filed
- Coming Up

Governor Delivers State of the State Address

On Wednesday, Gov. Cuomo set outlined his agenda for 2012 in his State of the State Address. [[Read](#) or [view](#) the speech, entitled "Building a *New NY ...with you*"]

He laid out his 2012 agenda as:

- an economic blueprint for growth
- a reimagined government that can make our plans a reality, and
- a New York vision for a progressive future

Looking to build on his 2011 successes, the Governor laid out an economic development blueprint that would invest billions of dollars in public-private sector partnerships to rebuild infrastructure and create new jobs.

The Governor also called for the construction of the largest convention center in the nation, to be located at the Aqueduct racetrack in Queens; for \$1 billion to revitalize the city of Buffalo; for the state to take the first step toward amending the Constitution to legalize Las Vegas-style casinos; and announced plans for an education commission to recommend reforms in teacher accountability, student achievement, and management efficiency.

He repeated his pledges to tackle several thorny political issues, including limiting retirement benefits for newly hired public workers, and promised to submit a campaign reform proposal to the Legislature.

The challenge Governor Cuomo faces in 2012 is how to maintain his momentum after what most agree was a very successful year in 2011. The Governor has said that he intends to emphasize improving how state government operates -- getting better results and greater efficiencies to ensure they produce the best results at the lowest cost.

Consistent with the format used in 2011, Assembly Speaker Silver and Senate Majority Leader Skelos gave brief remarks before the Governor's speech. Speaker Silver called for raising the minimum wage, for tax relief for the working poor, and for more state support for community colleges. Senator Skelos called for mandate relief (including pension reform) to protect the property tax cap, said that there should be no increase in state taxes and fees, and called for a statewide transportation/infrastructure plan.

While the State of the State Address includes a great deal of rhetoric, the expected release of his Executive Budget on Jan. 17 should provide specifics on much of what the Governor is proposing this legislative session.

Governor's Office Releases 'One Year Progress Report'

On New Year's Eve, Governor Cuomo's Office released a "[One Year Progress Report](#)," in which the Governor took credit for transforming Albany and making state government functional once again.

The report gives the Governor credit for passing a balanced, on-time budget, capping property taxes, driving innovative regional economic development, and enacting historic, fair tax rates as steps towards restoring confidence in state government and putting New York back on a path to job creation and economic growth. The report concludes:

"At the end of this first year, the Governor has made significant progress toward his ultimate goal: building a *New New York* with a government that serves all New Yorkers. While much has been accomplished, much more must be done to ensure that New York lives up to its promise for the future."

Governor Hires New Federal Affairs Staff

Governor Cuomo has hired Alexander Cochrane to serve as his Director of Federal Affairs.

Cochran served as a deputy at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development when Governor Cuomo served as HUD Secretary. Cochrane is an attorney who has spent much of the past 20 years with consulting and lobbying firms that do government relations and crisis communications work for municipal governments and corporate clients.

Governor Signs Local Government Open Meeting Legislation

Governor Cuomo has [signed into law](#) a bill that requires state and local governments to post materials online before a public meeting or at the meeting when possible. The new law includes some exceptions for documents that are submitted late or that would be too expensive or onerous to copy.

According to the sponsor, the new law is intended to reduce costs, since Freedom of Information Law requests often occur for public documents that are discussed at meetings but not put online.

Department of Financial Services Issues Year End Report

The newly formed Department of Financial Services ([DFS](#)) released its first [year-end report](#) to Gov. Cuomo and the Legislature last week.

The report highlights an expected 10% spending in its first year, achieving mortgage servicing reform to protect consumers, requiring the health insurance industry to publicly disclose rate increase applications, requiring the life insurance industry to return tens of millions of dollars in unpaid death benefits, and reducing medical malpractice costs by implementing the Medical Indemnity Fund, which will pay medical care costs for infants who are injured at birth.

DFS was created as part of the 2011-12 state budget by merging the state Banking and Insurance departments.

DFS Superintendent Ben Lawskey writes in his message to the Governor and lawmakers that in 2012 the agency will work toward attracting new companies to the state, expand oversight of financial services that have fallen into “regulatory gaps,” and clear up backlogs in both handling consumer complaints and reviewing industry filings.

More Redistricting Lawsuits Filed

In mid-November, six New York voters filed a [lawsuit](#) against the state for failing to move forward with the redistricting process, arguing that a federal judge should take over the process by appointing a special master to redraw the lines.

Last week, a group of Asian-American voters in New York City and the Senate Democrats sought to join this case.

Through the [Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund](#) (AALDEF), a group of Asian-American voters in Queens and Brooklyn filed papers arguing that New York City’s largest Asian-American neighborhoods are split up into different districts, breaking up what they argue could be a powerful voting block.

The Senate Democrats [filed papers](#) in support of a “special master,” who would create new district lines for legislative and congressional districts.

The Legislative Task Force on Demographic Research and Reapportionment ([LATFOR](#)), which is largely made up of legislators, is responsible for drawing new district lines. Critics say the incumbent officials draw maps that are intended to advance their own political interests. Governor Cuomo has said he will veto any redrawn map that is “not independent” or “partisan.”

LATFOR Co-Chairs Sen. Michael Nozzolio (R-Seneca Falls) and Assemblyman Jack McEneny (D-Albany) and have defended LATFOR’s work, saying that the lawsuit is premature and they are working to draft fair and representative district lines.

LATFOR is schedule to meet next Tuesday to finalize the counting of state prisoner inmates. Draft legislative lines may be released for public review later this month.

Hinman Straub Education and Human Services Newsletter Available Online

Hinman Straub’s Education and Human Services team has begun distributing *Education and Human Services News*, a periodic newsletter with updates to keep our clients informed about important developments in education and human services issues within New York’s government. The newsletter highlights recent requests for proposals, proposed amendments to regulations and latest press releases in education in human services among other items.

Click [here](#) to read the December 1, 2011 issue of *Education and Human Services News*. (The December 22nd issue will be posted to our web site next Monday.)

Coming Up

The Senate and Assembly are in session next Monday and Tuesday.

On Monday, Jan. 9, the Senate Higher Education Committee will be holding a [Forum/Town Hall](#) in Albany to examine alternative project delivery methods.

The New York State Board of Regents [January meeting](#) is scheduled for Monday, Jan. 9 and Tuesday, Jan, 10.

On Tuesday, Jan. 10, the Legislative Task Force on Demographic Research and Reapportionment (the Redistricting Task Force) [will meet](#) to discuss and ratify the finalized Prisoner Count and Reallocation.

On Thursday, Jan. 12, the Assembly's Energy and Corporations, Authorities and Commissions committees are holding a [public hearing](#) in Manhattan "to examine the impact of the potential closure of the Indian Point Energy Center (IPEC) on New York's economy and electrical system, and to identify alternatives to offset or replace power provided by IPEC." (This hearing was originally scheduled for Dec. 8.)

The last day for the Governor to submit the 2012-13 Executive Budget to the Legislature is Tuesday, Jan. 17.

On Friday, Jan. 20, the Senate Standing Committee on Investigations and Government Operations is holding a public hearing in Manhattan "to examine executive compensation at not-for-profit organizations receiving State funding and the actions needed to prevent State tax dollars from being wasted on excessive salaries."

Plugged In @ Hinman Straub is intended to help keep our clients informed about important developments at the State Capitol and elsewhere within New York's government. If you prefer not to receive these updates, please respond to this e-mail and so indicate. ©[Hinman Straub](#) 2011.