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September 26, 2006

Section: Opinion

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Gov. candidates forum

Staff

Why we won't be on the panel

Questions that Ithaca Journal readers sent us to ask gubernatorial candidates at tonight's **debate** at Cornell University were rejected by the event's media organizer.

Because we can not present our readers' questions to Republican John Faso and Democrat Eliot Spitzer, The Journal has withdrawn from participating in the event.

The Journal selected two primary questions and a third back-up question from a few dozen reader submissions. The questions were:

(right triangle)Thousands of New Yorkers continue to suffer from the 2001 terror attacks in NYC. Families and surviving victims have sought additional investigations on the attack that were never addressed by the 9/11 Commission Report. Do you accept the findings of that Commission, or are there areas of that investigation that still leave you with unanswered questions? Would you as **governor** act to open a state investigation to answer those questions?

(right triangle)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?

(right triangle)A bill will be proposed in the next legislative session titled "The Clean Money, Clean Elections Bill." This bill would create a new system in New York that provides "clean money" candidates with a fixed and equal amount of public financing for their political campaigns. If elected, will you support this bill?

In the planning for tonight's forum, we told event organizers at New York 1 News that we would ask our readers to suggest questions. We explained that while topics such as gay marriage and local taxes are possible topics on the minds of Ithacans, we could not predict what our readers might offer.

A solicitation for questions and our plan to use those questions was published on this page for a week through last Friday.

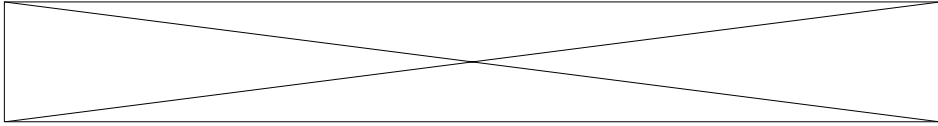
Last Friday evening, the questions our readers wanted to pose to the candidates were rejected by New York 1 News. The question on a possible state investigation related to the Sept. 11 attacks in New York City was deemed irrelevant. The question about housing for the mentally ill was deemed too narrow to have statewide interest. And the backup question on campaign financing was considered redundant of another panelist's question on Albany reform.

We regret our readers' questions did not make the cut for tonight's candidate forum at Cornell. However, we are happy to let the candidates know what our readers would have asked by printing the topics and questions on this page and our Web site, www.theithacajournal.com.

Maybe Spitzer or Faso will decide that questions from regular people deserve answers. We'd be happy to publish them.

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Our readers call for answers

Readers

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?

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:
(right triangle) the large cost to taxpayers of privately-funded campaigns for office,
(right triangle) the number of uncontested seats,
(right triangle) the high (98 percent) rate of incumbents returned to office, and
(right triangle) 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.

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?

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[UTF8]C296[/UTF8]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

Address global warming?

In light of the virtually total inaction of the federal government on the crisis of global

warming, it has become incumbent upon states and communities to take steps. The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative is an important step but evidence is rapidly mounting that nothing short of an 80 percent reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050 or earlier will be sufficient, and that we may in fact reach a "tipping point" in less than ten years. As **governor** what would you do to address this crisis from "Day One" on both the state/regional level and to exert influence on the federal government to move on it before it is too late.

Jeanne Fudala

Alpine

Help locals deal with tax-exempt properties?

In the City of Ithaca, we pay a combined school and local property tax of \$40 per \$1,000 assessment (i.e. 4 percent of a properties value each year). While there are a number of reasons for this high tax rate - about three times the national average - two primary reasons stand out. First, over 70 percent of the assessed value of land in the City of Ithaca is tax exempt due to non-profit status (mostly educational) and the same is true of approximately 50 percent of the assessed value of land in Tompkins County. Second, according to our elected representatives, at both the city and county level, New York State has mandated that the county pick up many costs associated with Medicaid and other services to the poor. My questions are as follows:

1) What do you plan to do to address issues of property valuation and taxation issues in localities that have a high percentage of property (greater than 30 percent) having tax exempt status:

- a. Would you consider changing the criteria for tax-exempt status so that all property within a community contributes to the welfare of that community?
- b. Would you consider a special assessment for educational and other non-profit entities located in communities with a high percentage of tax-exempt properties?
- c. Would you consider providing state aid, particularly for schools, to communities having a high percentage of tax-exempt property?

2) How do you plan to address requirements that counties provide healthcare, etc. to low income individuals:

- a. Will you provide for state funding for these initiatives?

b. Will you mandate a property tax ceiling, above which state aid would be used to fund state mandated initiatives, and if so, at what level?

William Laratta

Ithaca

Equitable funding in education?

What is your plan for making the funding of our public schools more equitable?

Christine Finnigan

Ithaca

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Question the candidates

Staff

The Ithaca Journal has agreed to take part in an upcoming live **debate at Cornell University** featuring gubernatorial candidates **Elliot Spitzer** and John Faso. The **debate** will take place before a live audience Tuesday, Sept. 26 in Cornell's Bailey Hall and be broadcast live on Time Warner cable and area public radio stations. As one of four news agencies on the panel that will be questioning both candidates, The Journal wants to know what issues you feel the future **governor** of New York should address.

What would you ask the next **governor**?

Panelists must have their questions ready by Friday, Sept. 22, so time is tight. If you have a question for the next **governor**, send it to us at ith-letters@ithaca.gannett.com by 5 p.m.

Thursday, Sept. 21. **We'll take the best of your questions and make sure Faso and Spitzer give the answers voters in New York deserve.**