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OUR VIEW: Albany's failures are on every elected representative

Jun 26, 2016



Talk.

In the end, that's what New York voters got, again, from their elected representatives in Albany.

State lawmakers wrapped up another legislative session at mid-month and could not come through with the sorts of reforms voters believe they need and good-government groups have been calling on for years.

It is disappointing, but it cannot be all that surprising to those who have been following the sordid history of insider horse trading, back room deals and outright corruption that have plagued Empire State government for decades now.

Back in January, Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Democrats and Republicans alike in the state legislature were talking tough about addressing the state's porous campaign finance laws, beefing up ethics enforcement and putting limits on pay they could earn from outside jobs.

And really, what choice did they have? Albany politics and government were absolutely rocked by revelations about the conduct of two of the legislature's most powerful figures, former state Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos and longtime Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver. Both men were investigated by the U.S. Attorney's Office in Manhattan and subsequently convicted of crimes involving public corruption. Their situations cast a pall over New York state government as a whole.

So of course it made sense, from a political standpoint, for Cuomo — whose administration is now embroiled in a federal probe involving the Buffalo Billion program — and his legislative counterparts to talk tough about reining in their own behavior.

Talk is one thing. Action is what's needed — and what has been lacking in this state for too many years now.

Not a single meaningful ethics measure was pushed through the legislature during this most recent session, adding another six or so months to the amount of time wasted as state leaders “debate” how to address one of the New York’s most serious issues.

Since 2000, more than 20 state lawmakers have left office under a cloud, facing allegations of ethical impropriety or outright criminal charges.

Time and again, public opinion polls show that most New Yorkers consider corruption to be one of the most pressing concerns of state government. Last month a Sienna College poll showed 96 percent of voters think ethics reform should be a top priority for state lawmakers — although the same poll indicated 67 percent were pessimistic about the chances of reforms actually being adopted this year.

And the majority called it correctly, which is a real shame, and yet another indication of the real priorities of those who currently serve in state offices.

Now, from Niagara Falls to Manhattan and every place in between, the question for every voter is: What are you prepared to do about it? This is a state election year. Charming and effective though they may seem when they’re working the local chicken-dinner circuit, are you finally ready to hold your own representatives responsible for Albany’s collective failure to get the message?

Talk is one thing. Action is what’s needed.

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