

New Yorkers for Fair and Affordable Utility Service

NEWS RELEASE

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GROUPS CALL ON GOVERNOR TO PUT THE “PUBLIC” BACK IN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

SENIOR, ENVIRONMENTAL, CONSUMER, MEDIA ACCESS & COMMUNITY GROUPS URGE GOVERNOR TO APPOINT PSC COMMISSIONERS COMMITTED TO TRANSPARENCY, AND PROTECTING CONSUMERS & THE ENVIRONMENT

(ALBANY) *New Yorkers for Fair and Affordable Utility Service*, a coalition of more than 40 senior, environmental, consumer protection, media access and community groups, joined by Assemblyman Michael Gianaris, today called on Governor Paterson to open up the process of appointing Commissioners to the Public Service Commission and to appoint Commissioners committed to preserving the environment, protecting consumers, promoting media access, and advancing conservation and clean renewable energy in the state.

Susan Lerner, Executive Director of Common Cause/New York, said, “This is a simple matter of effective governance and accountability – Governor Paterson should introduce his nominees to the public and allow New Yorkers to learn about their qualifications and positions. New York cannot afford a continuation of the PSC’s ‘asleep at the switch’ approach to energy, utility, and telecommunications regulation and policy. The criteria that we announce today are designed to insure that nominees are conversant with, and sensitive to, issues like worker safety and consumer and environmental protection that are too often overlooked in a selection process that has centered on industry experience or patronage in the past.”

Assemblyman Michael Gianaris (D-Queens) also sent a letter this week urging Governor Paterson to appoint new PSC Commissioners based on qualifications rather than connections. “The Public Service Commission has become little more than an industry rubber-stamp that abets utility malfeasance rather than policing it,” said Assemblyman Gianaris. “The Governor has a golden opportunity to demonstrate that his appointments are based on merit and not political considerations by appointing Commissioners experienced in the field and committed to the public interest, rather than coddling the industry.”

Gerald Norlander, Executive Director of the Public Utility Law Project, said, “We need a more transparent process to select PSC commissioners whose work will affect the everyday life and well-

being of all residents of the state for at least six years to come. The qualifications of PSC nominees and their vision of how they will discharge their quasi-legislative role in meeting major challenges on the horizon should be open to public scrutiny before they are confirmed.”

Russ Haven, NYPIRG's Legislative Counsel, said: "The Governor's Public Service Commission picks will implement the plans he's laid out for New York's energy future. The Governor should use this opportunity to talk publicly about his selection process, the important role the PSC plays in New Yorkers' lives, and how the Commission and staff will aggressively advance policies to protect consumers, expand 21st Century telecommunications and protect the environment."

Chuck Bell, Programs Director of Consumers Union, said, “At this critical time of rising unemployment and stagnant income growth, New York consumers need strong champions on the state Public Service Commission. Over the past decade, energy, phone, and cable rates have risen sharply. We need PSC commissioners who will fight to keep utility rates affordable, ensure that low-income consumers are protected, and impose tough penalties when utilities violate customer rights.”

Joshua Breitbart, Policy Director for People's Production House, said, “Public Service Commissioners have more control over our lives than anyone else we didn't elect. We need someone on the Commission who represents the ratepayers or poor New Yorkers will be without heat in the winter, without electricity in the summer, and without modern communication services year-round.”

Steve Pierce, executive director of NY Media Alliance, said, "Access to media is crucial for democracy and economic survival. The sweeping changes transforming global communication systems are leaving ordinary New Yorkers behind--especially those of us who live upstate. We need Commissioners willing to stand up to the media monopolies and bring concern for the public back to the Public Service Commission."

The Coalition released a letter they delivered to Governor Paterson this morning, urging the Governor to commit to an open appointment process for filling PSC vacancies and recommends he adopt “Proposed Qualifications” for potential nominees.

The organizations that signed the letter to Governor Paterson are:

American Lung Association in New York
Broadcast Media Review Group of Central NY
BronxNet
Brooklyn-Wide Interagency Council of the Aging
C.H.A.N.G.E.R.
Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY (CID-NY)
Citizen Action of New York
Clean New York
* Common Cause/New York
Communications Workers of America - District 1
Concerned Citizens of Greenwood Heights
Consumer Federation of America
* Consumers Union
Educable Communications Corporation

Empire Justice Center
Empire State Consumer Project
Fiscal Policy Institute
Food Bank for Westchester
Harlem Consumer Education Council
Human Development Services of Westchester, Inc., Neighborhood Preservation Company Program
Hunger Action Network of New York State
Interfaith Council for Action, Inc.
Leviticus 25:23 Alternative Fund, Inc.
Long Island Progressive Coalition
* Manhattan Neighborhood Network
Mt. Vernon United Tenants
National Hispanic Media Coalition - New York Chapter
Neighborhood Economic Development Advocacy Project
Neighborhood Preservation Coalition of NYS, Inc.
New Immigrant Community Empowerment
* New York Public Interest Research Group
New York Statewide Senior Action Council
NY Jobs with Justice
NY Media Alliance
NYS Community Action Association, Inc.
* People's Production House
* Public Utility Law Project
Rural Law Center
Senior Tenants & Landlords Reconciliation Project
Street Vendor Project
Syracuse United Neighbors
The Bridge Fund of Westchester
United Tenants of Albany, Inc.
Urban Justice Center, Community Development Project
Urban Justice Center, Human Rights Project

* indicates founding member of *New Yorkers for Fair and Affordable Utility Service*

Attachment: Letter to Governor Paterson with Proposed Qualifications for PSC Appointments