



NYPIRG NEWS RELEASE

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NYPIRG REACTS TO GOVERNOR'S FIRST INSTALLMENT OF HIS 2021 STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

(Albany, N.Y.) NYPIRG responded to Governor Cuomo's *first* installment of his 2021 State of the State address proposals today, as well as his recent public announcements. While the devil is in the details, perhaps to be revealed in his succeeding presentations or more typically unveiled during the budget plan, the Governor's proposals offer a starting point for actions to improve New York.

Environment: The Governor is right that global warming poses an existential threat. The state desperately needs **new revenues** – particularly given the costs to combat the impacts of the climate crisis -- and the **oil, coal and gas** companies should be **on the hook** for paying for a crisis that they created, not just New Yorkers. In addition, the state should **eliminate nonessential tax subsidies** for the fossil fuel industry. *Those additional revenues will help the state to afford a green revolution, while making those responsible for the problems pay for the solutions.* During a global pandemic, the importance of **access to clean water** couldn't be clearer, which is why the Governor's proposal to **prohibit water shut-offs** during states of emergency is both during states of emergency is both worthy of support and based on common-sense. While the details matter, such a proposal must also include measures to ensure water is safely restored to anyone without water and that consumers are proactively provided with information about entering an affordability program.

Elections & Ethics Reforms: The Governor has offered a wide range of plans to build on recent years' changes to the state's election laws. The Governor is proposing adding more hours and days to the **early voting** period -- which makes sense, but **resources** must be added to ensure that counties can adequately handle the additional demand. The Governor also advanced proposals to improve the state's mail-in (**absentee ballot**) law. He called for **professionally-run elections**, a goal that New Yorkers expect and deserve. Despite the emerging consensus to enhance voting, the governor omitted a critical proposal to amend the constitution to **allow eligible New Yorkers to register and vote on election day**. Unfortunately, no mention was made about overhauling New York's badly flawed **ethics** oversight system.

Healthcare: The Governor's plan to more closely monitor the quality of care offered by New York's physicians makes sense. For decades, New York State has inadequately protected patients from substandard medical care. The Governor's proposal to **strengthen oversight** is appropriate and his apparent proposal to establish a system of **recertification** of physicians is also needed and may track the recommendation from the NYS Health Department in 1988. The state needs to do whatever it can to rein in the costs of **prescription drugs**. The state woefully underfunds its **tobacco** control program; the money is there, the state should follow the spending levels outlined by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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Higher Education: The Governor's plans so far made little mention of the staggering financial problems facing higher education and college students. **Community colleges** and small **independent colleges** are teetering on the financial edge. College students and their families need relief -- particularly through the **Tuition Assistance Program** and the state's opportunity programs.

Legalizing Marijuana for Adult Use: The Governor's proposal to **legalize** cannabis for adult use in New York is an important step to reduce harms that current policies inflict on New York communities. NYPIRG sees no valid reason to treat 18, 19, or 20-year-old adults differently than adults 21 or older. New York must create a legal marijuana system that considers public health and safety issues, and be led in policy discussions by impacted communities.

Mass Transit Systems: The Governor briefly mentioned forthcoming proposals to upgrade mass transit systems in New York City and the rest of the state. Of course, details matter, but the goals we share. With a looming \$8 billion operating deficit at the MTA, New Yorkers are looking to the Governor to ensure the future of New York City's existing transit infrastructure remains well funded and **doesn't burden** essential workers and transit riders with **ever-increasing fares and service cuts**.

Utility Shut-offs & Broadband Access: The Governor's proposal to **prohibit** electric, gas, water, telecommunications, cable and internet companies from shutting off services is critically important to protect consumers during the pandemic. The Governor also promised to push to ensure that all New Yorkers have access to reliable, **affordable broadband** -- proven an essential utility now more than ever, as education, civic involvement, work, and healthcare are often done over the internet.