



**Testimony of Josh Nachowitz  
Policy Director  
New York League of Conservation Voters**

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**New York State Division of the Budget  
Town Hall hearing on the FY2009 State Budget**

**November 29, 2007**

Good afternoon ladies and gentleman. It is a pleasure to testify here about the upcoming New York State budget. The New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV) is deeply concerned about ensuring adequate funding for a variety of crucial environmental programs and projects throughout the State.

The State's budget is an important declaration of the Governor's policy priorities. It is essential that the budget reflect an adequate commitment to meeting the growing challenges of New York's environmental problems. The NYLCV supports increased funding for infrastructure and smart growth programs through enhancing the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), a rededication to State support for open space through funding for New York City waterfront park projects, an enlarged financial commitment to mass transit, passage of the "Bigger, Better Bottle Bill," and a commitment to incentives for renewable energy and alternative fuels. Additionally, it is vital that the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) be provided with adequate staff in order to successfully advance its mission.

Funding for environmental programs supports the State's economy and will help lay the foundation for growth and prosperity in the future. While we recognize that New York State is expected to face an increasingly precarious financial situation in the coming fiscal years, we call on Governor Spitzer to increase funding for these vital programs that will pave the way for a prosperous future.

**Increase funding for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF):**

New York State's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) is the principal vehicle for State environmental funding. The fund supports land purchase and conservation programs, parks projects, waterfront revitalization programs and a variety of other agricultural and open space programs. The EPF also provides invaluable support for municipal recycling and other solid waste management programs. Other EPF programs include smart growth efforts. The NYLCV strongly encourages the State to increase funding for the EPF and its critical programs to \$300 million in FY2008-2009 with the eventual goal of reaching \$500 million in funding

by 2010. We also strongly urge the Governor to fully spend the EPF appropriation and not to use EPF funds to support staffing increases at DEC.

**Adequately fund the Brooklyn Bridge, Hudson River and Governor's Island Park Projects:**

As an island city, New York is home to one of the largest, most diverse and most spectacular urban waterfronts in the world. Sadly, our waterfront's potential has been lost due to decades of poor planning and inappropriate uses. Three ambitious park projects, the Brooklyn Bridge Park in downtown Brooklyn, Manhattan's Hudson River Park and the proposed redevelopment of Governor's Island represent priceless opportunities to reverse this unfortunate trend and reclaim our waterfront. These parks represent more than open space projects. Taken as a whole, these three project form the foundation of an ambitious and groundbreaking "harbor district" that will, for the first time, create a unified recreational district centered on one of New York State's most spectacular natural resources. As large "regional" parks, they are critical economic development engines that will greatly enhance the economic viability of the city and region. The NYLCV strongly encourages the State to make a significant financial commitment to these projects. Additionally, the NYLCV calls on the State to adequately fund the enormous capital needs of all State parks. Years of underinvestment have left our nationally acclaimed State park system in dire need of capital improvement. It is crucial that this problem be addressed before our parks are allowed to decay further.

**Increase funding to the MTA:**

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) is the largest mass transit operator in the United States, with responsibility for the New York City transit system as well as the Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North and suburban bus systems. Supporting mass transit is absolutely essential to addressing climate change, arguably the most urgent environmental problem facing the world at this time. Unfortunately, the MTA faces significant budgetary hurdles. Its extensive and aging infrastructure is in critical need of capital improvements. The MTA is planning a significant capital campaign aimed at making the infrastructure improvements and upgrades that will preserve a reasonable level of service. Additionally, the system must expand in order to meet expected population increases. The authority's plans include completion of the long awaited Second Avenue Subway, the East Side Access project, and adding a third track to the LIRR's main line. The NYLCV strongly supports these projects. Without greatly enhanced support from New York State, however, the MTA cannot hope to fulfill its capital plan. The NYLCV urges the State to greatly increase direct support for the MTA. Investments made now in transit infrastructure will reap enormous dividends in the future and will secure the economic future of the New York City region.

**Pass the "Bigger, Better Bottle Bill (BBBB):"**

New York's bottle bill provides the financial basis for the EPF and is in need of significant updating. The BBBB would expand the definition of "beverage" in the state

returnable container act (the original bottle bill) to include non-carbonated drinks other than milk and liquor, and to direct the unclaimed deposit money derived from that program to the Environmental Protection Fund. This legislation will dramatically increase funding for the EPF without putting additional strain on the State's precarious budget will also improving recycling rates throughout the state.

**Make a commitment to renewable energy and alternative fuels:**

Climate change is among the most important public policy issues of our day. In order to meet the increasingly difficult challenges posed by this problem, New York State needs to make a deep financial commitment to encouraging the use of renewable energy and alternative fuels. The NYLCV applauds Governor Spitzer's ambitious "15 by 15" energy plan. However, we urge the Governor to make a more significant commitment to funding programs that will encourage the developments of renewable energy sources and the use of alternative fuels. We urge the Governor to support a solar tax credit that will provide support for individuals and businesses to use solar power. We also urge the Governor to include a new bioheat tax credit in his Executive Budget.