

# Getting to the Root of the Problem GRASSROOTS

The Newsletter of the Hunger Action Network of New York State

May 2004

## Faces of Hunger Action Network

Jon Greenbaum is an organizer for Metro Justice who has been the Rochester regional organizer for the ES2 and revenue campaign.

Jon, who grew up in a family of political and labor activists, has worked at many jobs from elementary school teacher to dishwasher to house-cleaner. Jon has been involved in the Nuclear Freeze, Central American solidarity, homelessness, affordable housing, neighborhood organizing, political prisoner defense, poverty rights, Kodak air pollution, education for social responsibility, globalization, corporate welfare etc.

The former chair of the Monroe Green Party, he worked as a produce manager at a natural foods store, helping transform the store into a cooperatively

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## Hundreds Rally for Minimum Wage Hike, Oppose Welfare Cuts

On March 23rd about 250 concerned citizens around the state came to Albany to tell legislators that New Yorkers need economic security now.

Hunger Action Network and the Empire State Economic Security Campaign (ES2) teamed up again this year to bring people from around the state to Albany to remind the Governor and the Legislature what our

state government's priorities should be as they continue to stall in making important decisions about policies and budgets. This year we particularly wanted to draw attention to and protest the devastating cuts to welfare the Governor has proposed, to demand a state budget in which all pay their fair share, and to call for a raise in the state's minimum wage.

Buses and vans loaded up while it was still dark out early on the morning of Tuesday, March 23rd in New York City, Buffalo, and Rochester, among other places. Participants ranged from long-

time anti-poverty advocates to folks who had never been to Albany or spoken with their legislators before.

In Albany, Westminster Presbyterian Church opened its doors and provided lots of space to our group so we could take time to learn about the status of the issues that affect us and prepare to persuade our legislators. Senate Minority Leader David Patterson (D-Manhattan) spoke to our group about what issues were facing the legislature this year and the importance of our presence and advocacy in Albany.

To get ourselves in the spirit, we held a rally and held a speak out on the steps of the Capitol. Mark Dunlea of Hunger Action and Bill O'Connell of the Erie County Commission on Homelessness put on "The Two Faces of Pataki" skit that drew attention to the fact that Governor Pataki has dramatically changed his stance on helping working families in New York by promoting programs only to cut them out in his budget plans. Participants in the speak out described their struggle to support their families in these difficult economic times and what the

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## Notes from the Executive Director...

Most of us have heard the story of former Iraqi hostage Thomas Hamill, the Mississippi farmer who lost the dairy farm that had been in his family for generations. He took the job in Iraq as a truck driver for a military contractor to support his family—and nearly lost his life doing so. Unfortunately, many New York farmers face similar economic difficulties.

New Yorkers purchase \$43 billion worth of food each year, but only \$2.8 billion goes to the State's farmers. At the same time, the number of people who must rely on Emergency Food Programs throughout New York continues to increase. Hunger Action's recent survey showed a 20% increase in demand for emergency food statewide. While hunger is increasing, so are poverty and unemployment. Ironically, New York's farmers are twice as likely to qualify for food assistance programs than the average New Yorker.

Hunger Action aims to address the gaps in the New York State food system and has launched the Sustainable Food Systems Policy Project to make stronger links between small farmers and New Yorkers of all income levels. To accomplish this goal, Hunger Action Network will develop food policy campaigns in partnership with anti-hunger groups, sustainable agriculture organizations, and regional communities throughout the State. An important part of this work will be to do regional organizing in low-income communities. Our goal is to establish regional organizers to build the local base to work on food security projects at the local level while actively participating in the policy process at the state level.

Hunger Action and a growing list of partners have been working for decades to end hunger in New York State. But even as our allies in this fight have multiplied, the problem of hunger has kept pace, and is now on the increase. To succeed in overcoming hunger, we must expand the breadth of our work by forging new partnerships at a community level with farmers, community advocates, schools, churches, gardeners, local businesses, food pantries, and lower income consumers, along with many other groups and individuals. All have unique assets to bring to the fight against hunger and poverty. Hunger-related issues touch all of these groups; for example, New York State farmers often struggle to find markets for their fresh fruits and vegetables, while many low income consumers lack reliable access to these healthy foods. New York's school children suffer from obesity at alarming rates due in part to malnutrition and food insecurity. When these problems remain separated, they continue to frustrate us. When we come together, the solutions come within our reach.

We are very excited about this new project and hope that our network members will join us in this effort. Throughout this year and next year we will be co-sponsoring several regional Sustainable Food System and Policy meetings. Out of the meetings together we will generate a sustainable food systems policy agenda for 2005 and a Sustainable Food Systems Policy Report based upon testimony of New York communities for presentation to NYS officials in early 2005, in partnership with New York Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NYSAWG). The project will also work with public officials and organizations to draft measures to strengthen New York's food system and foster the development of grassroots regional networks to work on sustainable food systems issues in New York State.

Bich Ha Pham.

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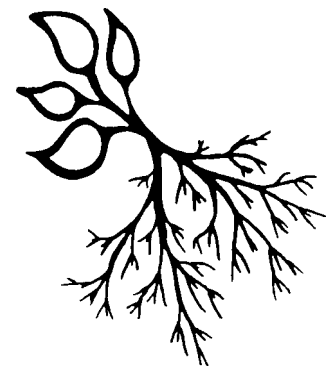
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# State Budget Cuts Programs for the Poor

Once again, April 1st has come and gone with little progress in adopting a state budget. In early March, the three budget negotiators – Governor Pataki, Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno and Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver – announced that they were relatively close on their revenue projections and confidently predicted an on-time budget. However, once it became clear that the April 1st budget deadline would be missed for the 20th year in a row, the pressure to negotiate seemed to disappear.

The state is facing a projected deficit of \$5 billion, which the Governor has proposed resolving through a combination of spending cuts (e.g., social services and health care), tax increases (e.g., sales tax increase on clothing) and one-shot budget items (e.g. the conversion of not-for-profit health insurance companies).

Since many of the cuts are aimed at the poor and politically vulnerable, the general media coverage is that “this isn’t too bad a budget.” This reduces the pressure on the legislature to develop budget alternatives; this had been little legislative support for a series of progressive budget initiatives such as closing corporate tax loopholes.

**Welfare Cuts.** The Governor’s budget includes a series of proposed cuts in social services and health care.

The “full-family sanction” proposal would cut welfare benefits for the entire family if the head of household is not deemed to be in full compliance with welfare work requirements. These families already experience a cut in their benefits for non-compliance. This proposal seeks to take benefits away from children.

The 10% reduction in the non-shelter portion of the already inadequate welfare grant for families in the program beyond 5 years, and for single adults or childless couples on welfare for more than 1 year, even though many are unemployable.

The proposed regulatory change in the welfare family budget methodology that would cut the benefit of a household with a disabled family member receiving SSI by an average of \$90 per month, or over \$1,000 per year (nearly \$2,000 per year in New York City for a disabled mother and her child).

The Governor wants to reduce and then eliminate the earned income disregard at arbitrary deadlines for welfare participants who are working. This proposal would punish low-wage workers who cannot get better paying jobs or who have to work part-time because of their disabilities or those of their children.

The Governor is also proposing cuts for a number of programs funded out of the TANF (welfare) surplus as well as imposing increased restrictions on needy households who can get assistance. He is proposing eliminating TANF funding for job creation for welfare participants, homeless assistance, adult literacy, VESID), Youth Employment, Displaced Homemakers and Green Teams. Summer Youth Employment is taking a \$10 million cut.

**Emergency food.** The Governor’s budget continues the \$2 million cut in funding for emergency food programs, despite the fact that the number of people using the programs has increased by more than 40% in the last two years. Funding for other nutrition programs would remain the same.

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# Faith and Hunger Network Mobilizes

This spring, the Faith and Hunger Network held its fifth annual regional conferences in the Capital District, Mid-Hudson Valley and Buffalo. FHN selects one state issue a year to work on as well as supporting Bread for the World's offering of letter. This year the focus is on a Fair Share of the state budget; the millennium development account; and AIDS in Africa.

The Network is an effort to strengthen the advocacy effort of the faith community in ending hunger — or, as we like to say, to move from charity to justice.

The faith community is the bedrock of the three thousand food pantries and soup kitchens that feed 900,000 New Yorkers each week. That is an incredible total. Almost half of the guests are children. Forty percent are the working poor. One out of six are disabled or elderly.



The sad reality is that no matter how hard the faith community has worked over the last two decades to help feed our hungry neighbors, the lines just keep getting longer. Charity can not be an effective substitute for government action. One study concluded that in order to compensate for the 1996 federal cuts to food stamps and other nutrition programs, each place of worship in the US would have to increase its annual food donations by \$170,000.

As long as charity constitutes the most prominent and visible response to hun-

ger, public leaders can choose to ignore or downplay the legislature's responsibility to care for our most needy citizens. Hunger has become politically acceptable in the US over the last two decades, as emergency food programs have increasingly become institutionalized as our first line of defense against hunger. This approach needs to be rejected.

People of faith need to take action for justice beyond donating and handing out food. The overwhelming witness of Scriptures in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions speak for the dignity of people in poverty in God's sight. Our traditions insist that it is society's responsibility to address and alleviate such inequities. We need to use our voices to ensure that our nation's public policies truly benefit — and not hurt — low income people.



**The Fair Share Campaign.** With the state facing a five billion dollar deficit and increased financial obligations to fund education, we need a budget that invests in essential services while fairly raising taxes.

The major tendency in times of budget crisis is cutting programs for the economically and politically most vulnerable people. The Governor has proposed sharp cuts in assistance for the poor, elderly and disabled, while cutting back on health care. An alternative proposal to



help balance the budget is to close loopholes to ensure that multi-state businesses pay a fair share of taxes on the income they earn from doing business in New York.

At the international level, Bread is calling for increased funding for the Millennium Challenge Account to assist the poorest countries with economic development and to invest in combating AIDS in Africa. With hunger, poverty and disease rampant in our world, the US needs to step up the effort to provide assistance to governments and groups committed to helping hungry and poor people improve their lives.

In 2002, 42 million individuals suffered from AIDS, with Africa accounting for 70 percent of those living with the disease and 80 percent of new infections. AIDS has spread widely to rural Africa where it is crippling agriculture, the largest economic sector and provider of food, employment and income to two-thirds of Africa's population. African agriculture is labor intensive and loss of labor through death and illness from HIV/AIDS is reducing food productivity and farm income thereby exacerbating hunger, poverty and food insecurity.

To join FHN, please go to the HANNYS webpage.

# Hunger Action Pushes \$7.10 Minimum Wage Hike

Hunger Action Network continues to work with other community, labor, low-income workers and faith groups to raise the state minimum wage to \$7.10 an hour.

The three-step minimum wage increase has already passed the Assembly but is being blocked in the Senate by Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno. Hunger Action helped organize a rally in support of the minimum wage on April 1<sup>st</sup>, when the Senate Democrats made a motion to bring the bill directly to the floor. Fifty minimum wage supporters gathered outside the Senate chambers, including two people dressed as Ronald MacDonald: “help me keep flipping burgers for the minimum wage, keep burgers cheap and workers poor.”

48 State Senators have agreed to raise the state minimum wage, far more than needed to pass the bill in the 62 member state Senate. However, the motion to bring the bill directly to the floor was defeated by a strict party line vote.

“We had hoped that for once democracy could overcome the dysfunctional nature of the New York State Legislature. With a majority of New York State Senators saying they support raising the minimum wage, there is no excuse for failing to

take action to lift workers out of poverty. They can't pass a state budget on time but at least they could have taken action to give poor workers a raise,” stated Mark Dunlea, Associate Director of Hunger Action.

Senator Bruno says he wants to have Congress act first on raising the minimum wage, even though there is no indication that it will do so. Advocates hope that Bruno will reach a compromise with the Assembly by the end of the session in June.

The current New York State minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour falls far short of the goal of allowing full-time workers to achieve a modest standard of living. The seven hundred thousand New Yorkers receiving the minimum wage, three quarters of whom are adults, are often forced to make choices between rent, heat, health care and food for their families.

A recent study by the Hunger Action Network found that forty percent of the guests who use food pantries and soup kitchens in our state have a job. They simply don't earn enough to meet their



families' basic needs. People who work hard shouldn't have to beg for additional assistance to feed and house their families. It has been more than three decades since New York last raised its minimum wage above the federal level. If the state minimum wage had merely kept pace with inflation since then, it would be \$8.83 an hour today.

Most states in the northeast routinely have a higher minimum wage than the federal. That only makes sense since housing and utility bills are much higher in the northeast than in places like Texas and Arkansas. There are now a dozen states with a minimum above the inadequate federal level of \$5.15, including our neighbors Vermont (\$6.75), Massachusetts (\$6.75), and Connecticut (\$7.10).

A new report commissioned by the Dutchess County legislature which interviewed more than one hundred individuals who recently left welfare found that while sixty percent had jobs, “few had good jobs.” Women earned on average \$7.90 an hour, less than the three person poverty line and way below a self-sufficiency standard. Almost all of those interviewed reported daily economic difficulties. Half were behind on their rent; more than half had no health insurance; and, nearly a third ate less or went hungry.

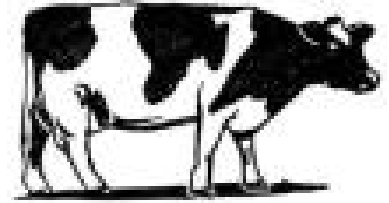
## To the Governor and Senator Bruno:

No one can live on \$206 a week. And they shouldn't have to. Raising the minimum wage might boost the price of a hamburger by a few cents, but it's worth it. Because it also makes it easier for working families to pay for rent, food, health care and child care.

Cut through the rhetoric from the Wal-Marts and the McDonalds', and it's really simple: a raise in the minimum wage is good for everybody.

As a New Yorker with a brain AND a heart, I call on our State Legislature and our Governor to put working families first and raise the minimum wage.

# Hunger Action Network Green Space



## Community Food Security Meeting in Albany

How do we increase access to healthy food in our inner cities and rural areas? What would make healthy food exciting and fun for our young people? What are our options for stopping the paving-over of hayfields and giving our farmers decent livelihoods so they can keep their farms? How do we form simple connections between all the locally grown food in our region and our lower income communities?

These were just a few of the many questions raised at HANNYS' first regional Community Food Security Meeting, held in Troy on April 3rd. The 45 participants included gardeners, government workers, farm groups, food pantry providers, low-income community residents and leaders, and local schools, among others. The diverse group shared concerns and brainstormed next steps to bridge the gap between local food and local folks, especially for those who are disadvantaged. With a little follow-through, we will have some affordable, tasty and nutritious outcomes!

The day began with a look at what shapes our food system today. Our food system is the web of connections that brings food from the farm field hopefully to our families' tables. Typically, our food travels 1500 miles in the United States; at a minimum it comes from the farm to processors, to central distributors, to our supermarkets, and then finally to us, the consumers. Yet, for 10% of New Yorkers who lack access to enough food to meet their needs, this complex food system is not working. The food system

also challenges New York's small farmers, many of whom have trouble competing with corporate agribusinesses for markets.

One of the cosponsors of the meeting, the New York Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (NYSAWG), generated a report that showed some of the shocking imbalances in the Capital District's food system. In the counties of Schenectady, Saratoga, Albany, Rensselaer and Greene, farmers earn \$117 million dollars each year, yet the region's consumers purchase \$1.9 billion in food. Thus, the Capital District has a gap of nearly \$1.8 billion between farm revenue and consumer expenditures. Anna Barnes of NYSAWG made the point that if Capital District farmers captured a mere 10% of that gap, they

would have an increase in revenue of \$180 million annually!

In the afternoon, volunteers from Mediation Matters facilitated hour long Break-Out Sessions in which smaller groups discussed their concerns, the regions' potential assets, and the next steps toward making local food connections. Participants shared their ideas with the larger group and we came up with seven common theme areas on which to focus our efforts in the future: *Food education, Food Pantries and Local Food, Farm Connections, Community Food Assessments, Produce Affordability, Youth Programs, and Food Policy*. Folks shared ideas ranging from expanding Grow an Extra Row Campaigns to creating new and more affordable farmers' markets to coordinating youth cooking competitions.

## Grow an Extra Row to Fight Hunger!

Many lower income communities in New York State do not have adequate access to enough food, namely healthy fruits and veggies. What can you do about this unacceptable reality in our State? Consider planting an extra row or two in your garden this spring and donate fresh fruits and vegetables to a food pantry in your community. There are approximately 3000 Emergency Food Programs working daily to help feed hungry New Yorkers. Fresh produce is always in high demand at these programs and is a welcome change from canned goods and nonperishable items. Your donation will help ensure that low income individuals and families have access to healthy food. For more information or to locate a food pantry near you, contact Hunger Action.

# Free Summer Meals For Children!

The Summer Food Service Program provides free nutritious food to children of all income levels under age eighteen during the summer months. Summer meals are distributed at neighborhood sites such as schools or community-based organizations.

Most places that serve summer meals are “open sites” which means that there are no income or residency requirements. Families do not have to fill out any forms and children do not have to prove that they are eligible for the meals.

This program is a vital resource for many New York families and it can prevent childhood hunger throughout our state. Yet it is greatly underutilized. The number of income eligible children who participate in SFSP drops dramatically when compared to the number of children participating in free/reduced priced School Meals. Thousands of children go without enough healthy meals during the summer months.

To increase participation, please encourage the children in your area to utilize SFSP! For a list of open sites in your community or for a promotional flyer, contact the Hunger Action Network. You can also increase program participation by becoming a site sponsor to serve more children. Site sponsors are reimbursed for the cost of meals and bring federal dollars into communities.

If you are interested in sponsorship, please contact Hunger Action.

## Faces...from p. 1

owned consumer coop. He then went to work at Wegmans Supermarket for two years and learned about the tremendous waste in the supermarket industry.

“I saw firsthand how the supermarkets put the squeeze on farmers to produce cheap food that looks good, but isn’t necessarily good for you. The culture of the supermarket was to extract the most profit out of the product. The health of the consumer and the pocketbook of the farmer were not priority issues,” Jon said.

There was a smug obliviousness about selling vegetables from all over the world with no thought about how the process results in pollution and pesticide exposure to workers that other people will have to pay for. There was no consciousness that the true price of the “item” would have to include the cost of treating the farmworkers’ diseases, the cost of subsidizing the farmers, the cost of services to the low paid workers, or the cost to the environment of pesticide and fertilizer runoff,” he added.

## Shop at Farmers Markets!

Fresh fruits and veggies are often a rare commodity in food pantries and low-income communities. Please encourage individuals and families to utilize the Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program, which enables income eligible seniors and WIC eligible women to purchase up to \$24 worth of nutritious produce at farmers markets. FMNP coupons are available at local WIC offices and Departments for the Aging.

For a list of farmers markets in your area, see: [www.agmkt.state.ny.us/AP/communityfarmersmarkets.asp](http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/AP/communityfarmersmarkets.asp). Farmers Markets are a great way to access healthy food and support New York Farmers at the same time.

“I value the ES2 coalition for its comprehensiveness,” said Jon. “ES2 connects the dots on the issues. We’re all in this together- advocates, service providers, public assistance recipients. We are a movement fighting against a conservative agenda which seeks to shrink, cut and privatize. They want to cut taxes on the rich, raise taxes on working families, create deficits and use that as an excuse to shrink government services and regulations. Then they want to privatize whatever is government-owned, whether it is our schools, social security, Medicare or our local water treatment facility. We must draw a line in the sand and protect the network of human services that took years to create.”

Metro Justice has been active fighting the budget cuts in Monroe County and creating alternative revenue proposals. “Last year we helped with a local coalition to stop Pataki’s budget cuts, mobilizing people to forums, accountability sessions and a demonstration at Toys R Us to highlight corporate tax loopholes. This year we’ve been working with the Working Families Party for a raise in the minimum wage,” he added.

Many farmers markets in NYS now accept food stamps and can process EBT cards. Although this enables many low-income New Yorkers to access fresh produce, studies show that few people actually use their food stamps at participating markets. Help address this problem and spread the good news about farmers markets that accept EBT in your community.

For a list of farmers markets accepting EBT in NYS or for promotional outreach flyers, contact Hunger Action or the NYSD of Agriculture and Markets at (718) 722-2833.

## Groups Urge Overhaul of Empire Zones Candy Store

A diverse mix of non-profit organizations are calling upon state leaders to fix the state's Empire Zones Program. The groups released a 10-point plan designed to end the abuse, corruption and favoritism inherent in the current administration of the program. The groups estimate that the state could save approximately \$100 million per year in much needed revenue, if the program is reformed.

"This year's Executive Budget is tackling a very important issue by proposing reforms of the state's Empire Zones program," stated Frank Mauro of the Fiscal Policy Institute. "These proposed reforms address a number of the program's shortcomings but they do not deal with the problematical administration of the program such as the *'scatter shot'* approach to zone boundary amendments which has emerged since the year 2000."

In his State of the State message, Governor Pataki said, "Today, I am announcing new Empire Zones legislation that builds on our success while making the program stronger. This legislation will improve accountability, focus benefits to communities and neighborhoods that need it most." The Governor's actual proposal would "focus benefits to communities and neighborhoods that need it most" in some ways but would seriously undercut that focus in other ways.

"If the zones program's extremely deep tax discounts are made available for those who want to develop in greenfields or set up shop in the plush of suburban office parks, then how in the world can those incentives ever be effective in the revitalization of the areas of the state that are truly characterized by pervasive poverty, high unemployment and economic distress," stated Ron Deutsch, Executive Director of SENSES.

A prime example of the problems inherent in this program can be seen in what is happening in the towns of Stillwater and Malta. This "Field of Dreams" approach of "if you build it they will come" is being undertaken by the Saratoga Economic Development Corporation. Bob Radliff of the Coalition for Responsible Growth stated, "By providing Empire Zone benefits to this massive and inappropriate project, New York State taxpayer's will be encouraging the abandonment of our urban cores, while subsidizing the destruction of open space and inducement of uncontrolled sprawl in Saratoga County. Smart growth principles apparently do not apply when we let industry dictate the future of our region. Empire Zones are powerful economic development tools — they should be used to solve the Capital Region's most pressing needs."

"In this era of multi-billion state budget deficits and moribund upstate economies, it is essential to ensure that public funds invested in job creation produce the intended results. The first



five years of the Empire Zones have fallen woefully short of revitalizing inner city neighborhoods. Instead they have all too often been used to divert essential public resources to the politically powerful and well-connected. The Governor and Legislature need to dramatically overhaul the Empire Zones and other economic development program to protect our tax dollars. The proposals we have outlined today are a small but critical step in restoring integrity to this program," said Mark Dunlea, Associate Director of Hunger Action Network of New York State.

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## Lobby Day... from p. 1

impact of proposed cuts to social programs will have. In addition, speakers highlighted the many ways in which we can actually help families move permanently out of poverty, such as access to education and training, and revenue enhancing alternatives that would make budget cuts to programs that serve all New Yorkers unnecessary.

After getting fired up at the rally, we spent the afternoon conveying our messages to Legislators and staff. As a whole, we met with over 50 legis-

lators or their staff. At the end of the day, we loaded our buses, vans, and cars back with plenty of stories of both positive and negative experiences from the day and excited people all around, despite our exhaustion!

Legislative Education and Action Day served its name well. We will keep working to follow up with these legislators and keep folks active in working toward economic security for ALL New Yorkers!

# NYC Groups Rally for TANF Reform

On March 10, 2004, required reading for welfare policymakers was displayed on the steps of New York City Hall for the Welfare Made A Difference (WMAD) campaign's "*The Shirt Off Our Backs*" press conference. Families receiving welfare and groups from all across the city assembled at New York City Hall to depict how welfare made a difference to their families and to voice their vision for more effective and humane federal, state and city welfare policy. WMAD members, Hunger Action Network of New York State and Welfare Rights Initiative of Hunter College, sponsored the event.

Irma V. Williams from Welfare Rights Initiative (WRI) reported on the positive



impact of welfare in her life, "I am on my way to joining the almost 90% of people receiving public assistance, just like me, who move permanently out of poverty upon earning a four-year college degree," she said. Irma also noted the negative impact to NYC families of current welfare policy, "There are thousands of women and men receiving

welfare who are prevented from realizing the education and training they need to help them and their families. CUNY alone has lost 23,000 students because of short-sighted welfare policies."

Reverend Ozzie Edwards, a member of the HANNYS board, spoke to the crowd and media gathered, noting, "Welfare makes a difference by helping families to self-determination. Welfare can also hurt families by taking the shirt off their backs with policies that ignore people's real lives."

WMAD asks that Congress reject current TANF proposals and pass a clean 2-year extension of the welfare program. In order to shape coherent welfare policy, WMAD asks New York State and the U.S. Congress to call on women and families with **first-hand experience of welfare** to be involved in the decision-making that affect their lives.

## Congress May Finally Act on TANF

The federal reauthorization of the TANF (welfare) law may be approaching the ninth inning having starting this process in 2002. With the delay in the reauthorization, many groups have not been able to follow the happenings in D.C. closely—however, now is the time to re-focus our efforts. We are hearing that the House Republicans are chomping at the bits to move forward their more punitive version of the bill containing few additional funds for child care, increased work requirements, decreased access to education and training, decreased time for barrier removal activities (to help the disabled and victims of domestic violence), no lifting of restrictions for documented immigrants and superwaiver.

We are concerned that when the current TANF continuing resolution expires at the end of June 2004 that the House will once again threaten to include the above

provisions in the new resolution—which would get the House what they want prior to the full reauthorization process.

Hunger Action is working with the Welfare Made A Difference National Campaign and the National ENGINE Committee to push for a **multi-year extension of the law as is**. We believe we need to do all we can to keep Congress from enacting a bill that will do even more harm to low-income families. The House bill would cause more harm. The Senate bill, though not as bad as the House bill, also includes increased work requirements and reduced access to basic education and job training and barrier removal activities—and even with that the Bush Administration has come out opposing the Senate's recently passed \$6 billion in child care funding and against access to college. So the concern is that even if the Senate bill

could be improved with amendments, we can expect it to be watered down during conference committee with the House and then face veto threats from Bush.

We urge you to join us in the following actions this Spring on TANF advocacy. We have worked long and hard for the past several years to safeguard our nation's safety net for the poorest amongst us, let's not lose sight of the goal now that the finish line may be ahead of us.

**Week of May 9th:** National call-in week (go to our web page)

**Wed., June 16:** Local actions (e.g. rally, speak-out, press conference, forum) in your city to get the word out

**Thurs., June 17:** Washington, DC Legislative Action Day—come join us in our nation's capitol to meet with key legislative leaders and staff.

# State Budget Negotiations Stall...from p. 3

**Education.** Education spending and health care costs are two of the main sticking points to the state budget. Last year the state's highest court ordered the state by July 30th to resolve the illegal underfunding of the New York City school system. It is also assumed that other parts of the state – urban and rural areas – are also underfunded.

The controversial Commission appointed by Governor Pataki to examine the school funding issue estimated that \$2.5 billion to \$5.6 billion would need to be added over five years to the state's annual \$14 billion contribution to public schools. The Campaign for Fiscal Equity and the New York State School Boards Association has said the state should spend \$9.6 billion extra annually by the end of the four years to comply with the ruling. The state Board of Regents has called for an increase of \$6.7 billion over seven years.

The Governor has proposed only a small increase in this year's funding for education — less than needed to maintain present level of services, leading to either local property tax hikes or service cuts or both. He basically ignored the Court decision, merely proposing that the state consider additional gambling revenue (e.g., from video lottery terminal) to fund education in the future. However, as the budget discussions drag on, the legislature is discussing not only how to resolve this year's education funding but whether it wants to make any funding commitment this year to the looming multi-billion increased investment that will be required.

## Medicaid and Health Care

The health care issue has a number of complexities. The Counties are pushing for the state to pickup their contribution

to the Medicaid program; New York is unusual in that it requires local government to pick up part of the cost of Medicaid. Outside of NYC, about ¾ of the Medicaid bill is for long term care for seniors and the disabled. As the state's population ages, long term care costs are rapidly rising, leading to double digit local property tax increases.

The Governor has proposed that over ten years, the State pick up the long term portion of Medicaid. (Note: this helps NYC less than the rest of the State). However, in order to pay for the increased state contribution to Medicaid, the Governor has made a series of proposals to cut Medicaid, Family Health Plus and health care services, while also re-imposing the so-called sick tax on hospitals.

The Governor is also proposing \$425 million in spending cuts in Medicaid and Health care. This includes eliminating adult Medicaid access to podiatry, dentistry, audiologists and psychologists; eliminating Family Health coverage for dental and vision services; increasing copays for services and prescription drugs in FHP, EPIC, etc; eliminates certain individuals from obtaining FHP coverage (e.g., works for government or large business); imposes a 12-month waiting period for FHP if you had group coverage previously; and transfers children ages 6-19 with incomes between 100% and 133% of poverty from Medicaid to CHP. The latter move prevents severely disabled children from obtaining needed services.

**Universal health care.** Unfortunately, neither the Republicans nor Democrats are discussing the sensible long-term solution to the state's health care crisis: the creation of a universal single payer health care system. More than 8,000 doctors

recently endorsed such a system at the national level, estimating that it would save up to \$200 billion annually by eliminating wasteful bureaucracy and profit margins. These savings would be invested in providing coverage to the 45 million Americans without health care insurance while also dealing with long term care and pharmaceutical costs.

## Prescription Drugs

Drug prices are also part of the budget negotiations. The cost of prescription drugs is rising at an unsustainable rate for individuals as well as for private and public health care programs. The increase in spending on drugs has risen by over 12% in the Medicaid program, forcing the state to consider a number of cost containment measures.

StateWide Senior Action supports expansion of the EPIC (Elderly Pharmaceutical Coverage) program to include disabled persons. EPIC funds saved by a federal Medicare drug benefit should be used to finance this expansion and reduce fees for lower income beneficiaries.

StateWide also supports legislation that would set payments for prescription drugs for state programs at no more than the average of those in a number of industrialized countries, and the use of Preferred Drug Lists in New York State to reduce pharmaceutical costs, provided that adequate consumer safeguards are included to protect patients from added risks and allow doctors to prescribe other drugs if necessary.

StateWide supports HR2427 which allows the importation of prescription drugs into the US from Canada and other specified countries by commercial entities including pharmacies.

# Become a Member of Hunger Action

Hunger Action Network of New York State (HANNYS) works to end hunger by addressing its root causes, including poverty. We bring together low-income individuals, communities of faith, food providers and community advocates to increase the amount of food provided to hungry New Yorkers, while building unified statewide advocacy for long-term solutions to hunger, and its root causes, including poverty.

Across the state, HANNYS' non-partisan work includes: legislative advocacy on anti-hunger and economic justice issues; technical assistance for emergency food programs; promotion of community food programs such as Community Support Agriculture (CSA) and community gardens; monitoring the performance of local Departments of Social Services offices. We are working to reduce hunger and poverty in our communities by: Advocating for an increase in the minimum wage and public assistance benefit levels to lift families up and out of poverty; Expanding food security policies, gleaning, grow-an-extra-row, community gardening and community food buying clubs; Advancing a comprehensive Jobs Creation Program; and, Promoting universal health care and universal quality child care.

## Member Benefits Include:

Free quarterly newsletter: The Grassroots newsletter will be mailed to you throughout the year to keep you apprised of what's going on throughout the state, as well as regional information and federal updates.

Email and fax policy alerts:

Notification of and Reduced Admission to HANNYS Events: Members are informed about HANNYS events in their areas (such as Food Stamp workshops or budget forums)

Opportunities to Shape HANNYS' Policy Agenda: HANNYS members meet annually to share with us their insights on current policy issues and problems they see in the community. .

## Groups Lobby Against Conversion of Non-Profit Health Insurers

Consumer organizations and health care advocates joined together on Wednesday, April 14 to urge the Assembly and the Senate to reject legislation proposed by Governor Pataki that would authorize additional nonprofit health insurers to convert to for-profit companies in New York State and divert 95% of the proceeds to state government programs.

"New York State has already enacted gravely flawed legislation that deprives consumers of their stake in \$2.5 billion in charitable funds from the Empire Blue Cross conversion. The Governor's plan is bad fiscal policy and flat out anti-consumer," argued Chuck Bell, Programs Director for Consumers Union.

Bell added, "The Governor's plan is highly questionable from a legal point of view. We are also concerned that his plan will essentially eliminate the role of

the courts and the Attorney General in providing public oversight of future non profit insurance conversions.

Since the 1930's New York's consumers have purchased affordable health insurance from non-profit insurers. Under New York law non-profit insurers are classified as charitable corporations. Under law, their resources must remain dedicated to their charitable mission of expanding access to health care coverage. In most states where nonprofit insurer conversions are permitted, the assets of the converting insurer are used to endow nonprofit foundations that provide grants to expand access to health care and health coverage.

New York State's confiscation of 95% of the Empire Blue Cross/Blue Shield assets in January 2002 represented the largest taking of charitable assets by a

state government in United States history. Consumer groups fear the state's next big target is HIP of Greater New York, which has an estimated value of \$1.5 - 2 billion.

Consumers Union, StateWide Senior Action Council and other nonprofits sued the state over the Empire conversion. That case is still pending and all the charitable assets from the sale of stock are now in an escrow account, pending the outcome of the court case.

"StateWide does not support the state taking these assets for purposes that do not further the mission of non-profit health care in New York State," noted Amy Button, speaking for StateWide at the press conference.

# Feast for Famine - Wed. May 26

Hunger Action Network will hold its 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Feast for Famine on Wednesday, May 26<sup>th</sup> from 5:30 to 8:00 PM at the Egg in the Empire State Plaza, Albany.

Feast for Famine has become one of the premiere food events in the Capital District. The benefit is a food and beverage tasting to raise support on behalf of the 40,000 individuals who use food pantries locally each month. Participants are able to enjoy food prepared by some of the Capital Region's best chefs, accompanied by teas, microbrews, coffee and a silent auction.

Some of the participating restaurants, food places and microbreweries include Café Bayou, Cascade Mountain Winery & Restaurant, Dakota, Debbie's Kitchen, Divintea, El Loco, El Mariachi, Fior Di'Italia Pasta and Cheese, Hattie's, Ichiban, Justin's, Miss Albany Diner, McCadam Cheese, Moscatiello's, Nettle Meadow Farm, Olde Saratoga Brewery, Prejean Winery, Rock Hill Bakehouse, Shades of Green, The Palmer House, Quintessence, Shalimar and more. There are normally twenty-five to thirty food and beverage participants.

The event is co-sponsored by CSEA, Public Employees Federation, Albany Public School Teachers Association, and NYS Nurses Association, along with Metroland, Albany Times Union, Troy Record and FLY92.

The suggested tax-deductible donation is \$40 per person.

## HUNGER ACTION NETWORK OF NEW YORK STATE MEMBERSHIP COUPON

Yes, I want to help end the root causes of hunger by becoming a member:

- \$30 Individual     \$5(low/fixed income)     \$35small organization  
 \$60 mediumorganization     \$120 large organization

Please send me information about volunteer opportunities

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Organization \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone (day) \_\_\_\_\_ (eve.) \_\_\_\_\_ (FAX) \_\_\_\_\_ (E-Mail) \_\_\_\_\_

Please return to Hunger Action Network of NYS, 260 W. 36th St., #504, NY NY 10018

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