

NASW-NYS Political Post

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Governor Spitzer Signs SHU Bill - In a historic move on Monday, January 28, 2008, Governor Eliot Spitzer signed a bill banning the use of SHU's in New York's prisons. Also referred to as "The Box," a SHU, or Special Housing Unit is a segregated disciplinary cell that isolates inmates from all other prisoners for twenty-three to twenty-four hours a day, very often for years at a time. And although routes to such cells are paved with rule infractions, debates over whether such punishment fits the crime have raged for years, especially in light of the fact that many SHU inhabitants suffer from severe psychiatric disabilities.

Last year, NASW-NYS joined the longstanding battle to end such inhumane treatment and we're now happy to report on its success. In anticipation of enactment of the SHU Ban bill, the Executive Budget recommendations included \$4.5 million, and 61 additional full time employees to provide services for state prison inmates with mental illness who are currently housed in special housing units.

Budget Battles Beginning? It appears that the Governor may be running into resistance from members of his own party regarding his Executive Budget proposal. Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver (D-New York), has reportedly (WXXI) stated his concerns about the Governor's initiatives to sell or lease the lottery and cap property taxes. Silver's objections are rooted in concern that each of the proposals could "constrain sources of education funding." Senate Minority Leader and fellow Democrat, Malcolm Smith has also voiced concerns, stating that "I think we're spending too much" and "... the spending may need to be pared down given the financial markets."

On the National Front - The race for the White House certainly heated up this week as long time Clinton supporter / friend, Senator Edward Kennedy and his niece Caroline Kennedy threw their support behind Barack Obama. Speculation swirled around the impetus for the endorsement with many theories suggesting the Kennedy's disliked recent tactics employed by the Clinton Campaign, however, when asked about his reasoning on the TODAY Show Senator Kennedy responded with..."I have great respect for President Clinton and great respect for Senator Clinton, but this race really isn't about President Clinton. It's a race of enormous importance and consequence for our country. The stakes are extremely high when we look at the challenges that we're facing at home and abroad, and I made a judgment and decision that Barack Obama has the ability and is the source of inspiration for our country at this time and can really make the difference, not only in this election, but as president of the United States." Meanwhile, failing to gain any traction with his campaign, John Edwards bowed out of the race on Wednesday, saying it was time to step aside "So that history can blaze its path." Similarly, after placing a distant third in the Florida primary, Rudy Giuliani abandoned his bid for the White House and threw his support behind John McCain's campaign. With 36% of the vote in Florida, McCain took the lead with 93 delegates, Romney still holds at 59, and Huckabee has 40. Can't wait for the Super Bowl of politics next week – Super Tuesday! With 23 states scheduled to hold caucuses or primaries, we're sure to have some further excitement!