

## NASW-NYS Political Post

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Karin Moran, MSW

Jeremy Darman, MSW, MA

**Transformers** - Earlier in the week, Democratic state leaders announced they were eliminating \$1.3 billion of the governor's proposed taxes and fee hikes (aka - nuisance taxes), but perhaps, more surprisingly, they announced an intention to drastically alter the budget process this year. As opposed to employing the customary process whereby each house issues their own one-house resolution (which acts as a blueprint) from which to negotiate from during joint conference committees, Assembly Speaker Silver, Senate Majority Leader Malcolm Smith, and Gov. David Paterson agreed to bypass such a process and instead attempt to jump straight into negotiating a three-way budget. Speaker Silver noted the change in process was in large part an effort to give New Yorkers a sense of security, stating... "I think the important thing for us in this time of crisis, is to give certainty to New Yorkers. And so at this point, we and the governor have agreed that we want to look at the end result and avoid the bickering that takes place with one-house budgets, if we can. So we're going to sit down and have a framework of how we get an early budget. And then we'll see when and if we have to do resolutions. We're all Democrats; we should all be fundamentally in agreement on most of the issues." Later in the week, however, Senate Majority Leader Malcolm Smith announced that the Senate and Assembly will indeed hold budget conference committees, stating "The Senate Majority has always intended to hold conference committees as part of this year's budget process." Anyone confused yet? Welcome to Albany!

**The Empire Strikes Back** - Amidst the legislatures movement on the states strict drug laws, the New York Civil Liberties Union released a report this week (*The Rockefeller Drug Laws: Unjust, Irrational, Ineffective*) examining the impact of drug related convictions in relation to the states strict Rockefeller drug laws. The report also looks at five specific urban areas across the state (Albany, Rochester, Buffalo, Syracuse and New York City) and how the war on drugs has impacted each community. To read the report in its entirety, log onto [www.nyclu.org](http://www.nyclu.org)

**National Treasure** - Assembly and Senate Mental Health Committee Chairs, Assemblyman Peter Rivera and Senator Shirley Huntley called for the establishment of a legislative oversight committee to watchdog federal stimulus funds heading to our state. During a joint press conference, the legislators stood with members of the disabled community and representatives of the New York State ARC, who noted no stimulus dollars had been allocated to them. "We're not seeing the kind of representation that we should see," said Rivera.