

NASW-NYS Political Post

March 20, 2009

Karin Moran, MSW

Jeremy Darman, MSW, MA

No Day at the Park - It seems our state leaders are having a difficult time playing nice in the sandbox, as Senate Minority Leader, Dean Skelos, (R-Nassau) and Assembly Minority Leader, James Tedisco (R- Schenectady) reportedly left a five way leaders lunch at the Governor's mansion Thursday suggesting the Democratic Leaders (Governor Paterson, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Senate Majority Leader Malcolm Smith) were attempting to "finalize the state's \$121 billion budget with no input from the GOP and largely in secrecy." "It's tragic that all the advances we made to open up the budget process are being completely ignored and that the governor is turning back the clock to the days of three men in a room that came to symbolize the dysfunction of state government," Skelos noted during a Senate hearing on creating transparency in government. However, Democrats noted they spent the last four decades "out of the loop" while Republicans controlled the Senate. Good government groups such as NYPIRG and the League of Women Voters, each of whom have consistently criticized New York's budget process as shrouded in secrecy said this year's process is indeed "even more opaque than usual." "We are disappointed that the budget process is not transparent at all," said Barbara Bartoletti of the state League of Women Voters. "Arguably it's the worst since the 1980s," said Blair Horner, NYPIRG's legislative director. Senator Skelos, however, did note that the salmon served at the leader's lunch was "good."

Thank You, Mr. President - This Wednesday, the Obama administration withdrew a controversial proposal that would require veterans to use private insurance to cover injuries sustained during duty. After broad-based pushback from veterans' advocacy groups and members of Congress, Press Secretary Robert Gibbs announced that "the president has instructed that its consideration be dropped." Opposition to the proposal was partly rooted in concern that "pushing combat injuries onto personal insurance plans could make service to our nation a pre-existing condition," as noted by Congressman Roy Blunt. Mr. Blunt was referring to the danger in allowing utilization review under private insurance plans to potentially obstruct access to veterans' health care.