

NJCA Scores Huge Victory for Utility Ratepayers

Exelon's PSEG Buy-Out Bid Defeated

On the early evening of September 14, 2006, just after the final bell closed Wall Street for the day, Citizen Action scored a huge victory on behalf of our members and all utility ratepayers when the Chicago-based Exelon Corporation's friendly takeover bid of PSEG collapsed. That evening both companies announced that they were formally withdrawing their acquisition proposal before the NJ Board of Public Utilities (BPU) which, if approved, would have created the largest utility in the nation.

NJCA waged a two year battle to prevent the merger which, if approved, would have created a giant super energy monopoly that could have manipulated energy supplies and prices, costing ratepayers up to \$2.3 billion a year in unreasonable rate increases.

"New Jersey ratepayers are fed up with skyrocketing electric and gas bills," said Ev Liebman, NJCA's Program Director. "If approved, this merger would have added insult to the injury already perpetrated on NJ consumers by the failed promises of lower rates through energy deregulation – a system that was supposed to bring us lower rates through more competition, not less," she added.

NJCA began its campaign to stop the buy-out bid back in late 2004, building a large and unique grassroots coalition that included both residential and industrial ratepayers. Public Citizen, the NJ Large Energy Users Coalition, the NJ Public Interest Research Group, the Chemistry Council of NJ, SEIU, the Sierra Club and the NJ Tenants Organization were all key members of the coalition. Dozens more organizations supported the campaign by signing our

support statement urging the state to protect ratepayers by rejecting the merger, encouraging their members to attend public hearings and to call and write the BPU and the Governor.

A key component of the campaign was NJCA's neighborhood canvass that walked door-to-door throughout the state for months educating residents about the unfair costs of the merger. More than 11,500 letters, emails and phone calls were sent by citizens to Governor Corzine and BPU President Jeanne Fox urging them to oppose the buy-out bid.

The defeat of the Exelon/PSEG takeover bid saves NJ ratepayers up to \$2.3 billion dollars in higher electric bills and potentially less reliable service.

Citizen Action intervened on behalf of our members before the Office of Administrative Law, where the proposed merger was being examined through a trial proceeding under the supervision of Administrative Law Judge Richard McGill. The hearing included dozens of witnesses and tens of thousands of pages of evidence. Additionally we held numerous news conferences, met with editorial boards and organized ratepayers to attend 5 public hearings around the state. NJCA also successfully urged the board to adopt a higher standard by which any utility merger could be approved, a standard that requires that utility mergers only be approved if they can demonstrate positive benefits to consumers. The State's new Public Advocate, Ron Chen, also played a key

role in opposing the merger as proposed, agreeing with Citizen Action that the buy-out bid would create an energy giant so big that it could harm ratepayers.

NJCA program director Ev Liebman and Organizers Atif Malik and Marilyn Carpinteyro also co-authored a report: **Political Power Lines: Running at Full Capacity** detailing Exelon and PSEG's massive lobbying expenditures and political donations at the state and federal level. The report was released on June 7, 2006 at a state house news conference. The report revealed that the two companies had spent more than

(continued on page 2)

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or

www.NJElections.org

(Deadline for in-person delivery of absentee ballots is 3:00 p.m., Monday, November 6, 2006)

Inside This Issue

Rx Drug Retail Price Registry Bill Becomes Law	2
NJCA PAC Endorses Candidates	3
Progress on Family Leave Insurance	4
Citizen Action Seals Wachovia Deal	5
Invest in New Jersey's Future	7

Rx Drug Retail Price Registry Bill Becomes Law

Registry Allows Consumers to Easily Shop for Commonly Used Prescription Drugs and Find the Best Price



From left to right: NJCA Organizer Mike Olender, NJCA Board of Director Co-Chair Paulette Eberle, Congressman Rush Holt (D-12), AARP Legislative Advocate Marilyn Askin, Assemblyman Herb Conaway (D-7), Assemblywoman Linda Greenstein (D-14), Assemblyman Gordon Johnson (D-37), Assemblyman Patrick Diegnan, Jr. (D-18), State Senator Barbara Buono, (D-18), AARP New Jersey State President Sy Larson and other supporters join Governor Corzine (center) for the signing of NJ's Prescription Drug Pricing Registry bill.

as 25 percent from store to store. Knowing where to shop is essential for many people, and the registry will give them the tools they need to shop effectively and efficiently. "The registry will be a useful tool, particularly for the more than 1.2 million New Jerseyans who have no prescription drug insurance, the tens of thousands who have inadequate

coverage and seniors and citizens with disabilities stuck in the "donut hole" of the new Medicare Part D prescription drug program," stated Michael Olender, NJCA's lead Organizer on health care issues.

New Jersey's prescription drug pricing registry website will be on-line within one year, will be available in English and Spanish and be accessible according to Federal Section 508 standards ("Bobby Approved"). The registry will also be available in printed format as well as a toll-free "1-800" help hotline. Signs will be posted at retail drug counters to publicize the availability of the registry.

At the East Brunswick bill signing, New Jersey Citizen Action joined seniors, citizens with disabilities, and allied organizations to celebrate the signing of this important bill. The legislation was modeled after the pricing registry in New York State. According to recent studies, New York consumers using the registry saved an average of \$17 per prescription.

For information about the RX Registry and other health care issues, contact Mike Olender at mike@njcitizenaction.org

In August 21, 2006 New Jersey Citizen Action celebrated a great victory when Governor Jon Corzine visited the East Brunswick Senior Center to sign into law Senate Bill 1396 creating a prescription drug pricing registry for New Jersey. The legislation, which NJCA helped to write, was sponsored by State Senator Barbara Buono (D-18) and Assembly-woman Linda Greenstein (D-14). NJCA members, affiliates and allied organizations lobbied for the bill passage for close to a year.

The registry will establish an easy to use website that allows consumers to save money on prescription drugs by being able to 'shop' on line for the best price of the 150 most commonly prescribed drugs. Consumers can find information about which pharmacies in their neighborhoods offer the drug and at what price by entering their zip code, drug name and dosage into the site. The law requires that the information be updated at least weekly by all pharmacies in New Jersey.

Governor Corzine hailed the legislation as one of his legislative priorities of the year. A study by the New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute found that the retail prices for prescriptions varies by as much

NJCA SCORES HUGE VICTORY FOR RATEPAYERS

(continued from page 1)

\$23 million on state and federal lobbying activities between 2001 and March, 2006 and another \$795,000 on political donations.

"The purpose of the report was to show just how much these energy companies are willing to spend to influence state and federal energy policies and to urge NJ's regulators and lawmakers to resist the influence of this kind of campaign cash and massive lobbying expenditures," said Atif Malik, NJCA Organizer.

Coalition partners also worked together to generate support for a NJ Assembly and Senate Legislative Resolution urging the NJ Board of Public Utilities to reject the merger as proposed. The resolution, sponsored by Assemblyman and Deputy Majority Leader Joe Cryan (D- 20) received support from a majority of NJ's Assembly members.

This merger, which had already received Bush administration approval in D.C. from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and the Department of Justice, is the only utility merger ever to fail to be approved by the NJ BPU and only one of a very few proposed energy mergers around the country to collapse, despite a wave of utility mergers nationwide. "The demise of this merger demonstrates to the rest of the nation that average citizens don't have to stand helplessly by as giant energy corporations run roughshod over regulators and policy makers who are charged with protecting the public interest" said NJCA Program Director, Ev Liebman.

"This is a clear victory for ratepayers," said NJCA Executive Director Phyllis Salowe-Kaye. "It shows that citizens can win when we're organized and make our voices heard."

For more information about the campaign and other utility issues, contact Atif Malik at atif@njcitizenaction.org

NJCA's Political Action Committee Endorses

Congressional, Senate Candidates

Vote on November 7th for Candidates Who Will Support Investing in NJ's Future



BOB Menendez (D)
United States Senate

In September 29, 2006 members of NJCA's Political Action Committee (PAC) met to review questionnaires submitted by more than a dozen candidates running for Senate and Congressional seats. The Committee, chaired by Mitch Kahn of the NJ Tenants Organization, also interviewed candidates Assemblywoman Linda Stender, running for Congress in the 7th Congressional district and Senator Bob Menendez who is currently filling the expired term of former Senator Corzine and is now running for reelection to a full six-year term of office.

Since 1990, NJCA's PAC has considered endorsements of candidates based on their commitment to and leadership on the issues NJCA works on – health care, fair insurance and banking, progressive and fair tax policies, housing, affordable utility rates, voting and civil rights, political reform, environmental justice – and other progressive issues. NJCA solicits information from candidates based on questionnaires, candidate interviews, voting records, prior experience in office and whether or not there is a history of working with the candidate. The PAC also considers whether or not our endorsement of a candidate and working on that candidate's campaign will serve to build the strength of our coalition and our affiliated organizations.

After interviewing candidates, reviewing questionnaires and voting records the NJCA PAC reported that it was pleased and excited to endorse the candidates above and at the right.

"These candidates demonstrated strong support for all of the major concerns facing our members and the public at-large. We were especially pleased with their support for reversing the privatization of Social Security and finding real solutions for the high cost of prescription drugs, such as by creating a real Medicare Rx Program," stated NJCA PAC Chair, Mitch Kahn. "We are confident that, as a member of Congress, they will commit themselves to protecting Social Security from privatization, supporting tax fairness, and to finding a way for US troops to return home from Iraq," he added.

The PAC was also impressed with these candidates' overall concern for campaign finance reform and budget and tax issues. NJCA will be working to register, educate and mobilize voters in the districts to get to the polls and elect all of these candidates on Tuesday November 7, 2006. For more information go to www.njcapac.org.



CAROL Gay (D)
United States Congress,
4th Congressional District
(Parts of Burlington, Mercer,
Monmouth and Ocean Counties)



FRANK Pallone (D)
United States Congress,
6th Congressional District
(Parts of Middlesex, Monmouth,
Somerset and Union Counties)



LINDA Stender (D)
United States Congress,
7th Congressional District
(Parts of Hunterdon, Middlesex,
Somerset and Union Counties)



BILL Pascrell, Jr. (D)
United States Congress,
8th Congressional District
(Parts of Essex and Passaic Counties)



STEVEN R. Rothman (D)
United States Congress,
9th Congressional District
(Parts of Bergen, Hudson and Passaic
Counties)



RUSH Holt (D)
United States Congress,
12th Congressional District
(Parts of Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex,
Monmouth and Somerset Counties)

NJCA and the Time to Care Coalition Call for Innovative Plan to Provide Family Leave Insurance for all NJ Workers

Americans are spending more and more time at work, and this usually means less time dedicated to family.

Sixteen years ago, New Jersey passed the Family Leave Act (FLA), model legislation for the nation, which ensures that workers have the right to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for newborns, newly adopted children and seriously ill family members, or to recover from their own serious illnesses. The FLA also protects workers from losing their job for taking Family Leave. In 1993, the Federal government followed the lead of states like New Jersey, and passed the Federal Family Medical Leave Act, which guarantees the same benefits to all states. The Family and Medical Leave Act was one of the most significant advances for women and families in this nation's history.

Unfortunately, because the FMLA guarantees only unpaid leave, too many women and men are still unable to take essential time off. In a 2000 national survey, 78% of people who did not take unpaid family leave said that they could not afford to survive without their income. Of those who did take unpaid leave, nine percent were forced to rely on welfare. "Women and men should not have to choose between their family and their jobs, said NJCA Program Director Ev Liebman. "There is a simple solution to correct this crisis and that is to expand New Jersey's temporary disability

insurance system to allow workers to use this program for family leave," she added.

Three years ago, working with the Rutgers Center for Women and Work, NJCA began to grow a strong coalition of labor union allies, parent, senior and women's organizations, public policy researchers and health care and disability rights groups to lobby for family leave insurance in NJ. The Time to Care Coalition has been educating policy makers and representatives of the business community on the need for family leave insurance in New Jersey. On October 16th our coalition achieved a major milestone with the introduction of legislation, Senate Bill S2249, that once enacted will expand NJ's Temporary Disability Insurance Program to provide family leave benefits for workers caring for sick family members, newborn and newly adopted children. The legislation is sponsored by state Senator Stephen Sweeney (D-3), Chair of the Senate Labor Committee.

The legislation is based on a similar program in California. Under the new program, workers would pay an additional, minimal amount into the TDI program (depending on salary this would range from \$0.28 - \$1.71 per week) through their paychecks in order to receive two thirds of their usual income for up to 12 weeks in any 12 month timeframe. Like the unemployment insurance program, benefits are



L to R: Dr. Eileen Applebaum, Rutgers Center for Women at Work, US Senator Barack Obama (D-Illinois) and Ev Liebman, NJCA Program Director at May 3, 2006 Washington D.C. national meeting on Family and Work Issues

capped.

"Workers need to care for their families in time of need and are willing to pay a few bucks a month in order to have the ability to do so," said NJCA Organizer Atif Malik. "We also think this program will serve as a real benefit to businesses, particularly small businesses that often can't afford to provide family leave benefits like many large corporations can. And studies show that workers who are not forced to choose between their families and their jobs exhibit less absenteeism at the worksite," added Malik.

For more information about S2249 and to learn more about the Time to Care Coalition contact Atif Malik at njcitizenaction.org.

Empowerment through Community Education

New Jersey Citizen Action's Community Education Program provides free workshops and trainings to community organizations to help empower New Jersey residents make more informed decisions about issues that affect their everyday lives. Our Community Education Program is currently conducting workshops on [How to Avoid Becoming a Victim of Predatory Lending](#), [Quality Education](#), and [Easy Energy Savings](#). Beginning in January of 2007, a new workshop focused on lead poisoning prevention will also be offered.

Program Summaries

Avoiding Predatory Lending - This presentation provides information about scams and risky investment ideas, many of which are targeted at minorities, seniors, non-English speakers and people with disabilities in low income urban communities.

Easy Energy Savings - This presentation offers participants easy and affordable solutions to reduce their energy bills and protect the environment through energy conservation.

Quality Education - This presentation provides

information about proven educational reforms that will improve public education. The presentation also provides participants with an overview of NJ's Abbott funding programs and the myths and realities of school voucher initiatives.

Lead Poisoning Prevention - This presentation will provide information about grants and low interest loans available to help remove residential lead hazards.

You can schedule one of these FREE presentations at your organization's meeting place, by calling Luz Hernandez at 973-643-8800 x11.

Wachovia Bank Commits \$8 Billion to New Jersey Residents

New Jersey Citizen Action and the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey signed an historic \$8 billion agreement with Wachovia Bank on July 31, 2006. Wachovia is New Jersey's second largest bank. This new agreement dwarfs all previous Community Reinvestment Act Agreements in size and is, in fact, 50% more than the agreement with New Jersey Citizen Action and the Housing and Community Development Network that expired in 2003 after the merger of Wachovia and First Union.

Phyllis Salowe-Kaye, Executive Director of New Jersey Citizen Action (NJCA) stated, "For the past two years, we have not had a written agreement that reflects a joint effort to lay out ways Wachovia would address the needs of NJ's low and moderate income community. Citizen Action is proud to be a part of making this truly historic agreement possible."

The \$8 billion will be spent over the next five years to provide mortgage, consumer, and small business loans, as well as multi-family housing and community

development loans and capital in low and moderate income (LMI) communities. The plan calls for \$2 billion in affordable mortgage loans, \$50 million in a below market affordable housing mortgage product, \$1 million in down payment assistance and \$400 million in multi-family housing and community development loans.

The plan also includes \$5 billion in small business loans, \$500 million in consumer loans, \$35 million in community development investments (including \$3 million in the NJPLAN administered by The Reinvestment Fund), and a \$10 million investment to serve community development credit needs for amounts between \$250,000 and \$2 million. In addition, Wachovia will provide \$10 million in contributions and in-kind donations — \$3.5 million of which will be directed to community development activities — and \$3 million in scheduled grant disbursements from the Wachovia Regional Foundation.

The plan also addresses the needs of the physically challenged by creating two model centers that are designed to exceed

the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance standards. Forty three percent of Wachovia's New Jersey ATMs are now audio-assisted, and by the end of 2006, 109 more ATMs with this feature will be added. Also, over the next five years, Wachovia will make available free check writing guides for the visually impaired, which will be available at all branches and from organizations that support the visually impaired.

Pat Morrissy, founder of HANDS, Inc. and Paige Carlson-Heim, acting Executive Director of the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey praised the strong commitment to community development and urban renewal. As Morrissy said, "We can't hope to rebuild our urban neighborhoods and make them good places to raise a family without the active participation of New Jersey's major banks."

For more information about New Jersey Citizen Actions' Community Reinvestment and Fair Banking and Insurance initiatives contact Maryellen Marino at maryellen@njcitizenaction.org

Cut the Cake, Not Social Security!

Citizen Action continues to wage an aggressive campaign to protect Social Security from the Bush Administration's privatization scheme to hand its assets over to Wall Street, cut benefits and plunge the nation into even more debt.

Citizen Action staff, allies and volunteers constantly remind our elected representatives that Social Security is one of the best retirement security programs in the world and needs to be improved, not gutted. In August and September of this year, the campaign delivered Social Security birthday cakes to members of Congress reminding them of the importance of protecting Social Security on the occasion of the program's anniversary.



Members of the Willingboro Senior Center and New Jersey Citizen Action delivered a Social Security birthday cake to Congressman Jim Saxton's (R-4) Mount Holly office on Thursday, September 7, 2006 with the inscription "Cut the Cake, Not Social Security".

New Jersey Citizen Action NEWS

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Executive Director: Phyllis Salowe-Kaye

Program Director & Editor: Ev Liebman

Reporters: Marilyn Carpinteyro, Luz Hernandez, Bonita Holmes, Atif Malik, Maryellen Marino, Wende Nachman, Mike Olender and Eve Weissman.

2006 NJ Citizen Action Annual Membership Meeting

All Members Invited
Wednesday, December 6, 2006
5:00 pm

New Jersey Citizen Action
744 Broad Street, Suite 2080
Newark, New Jersey 07102

Stop GEICO's Discriminatory Auto Insurance Rate-Making Practices



Earlier this year, the Newark *Star Ledger*, based on information supplied by NJ Citizen Action, broke the story that the Government Employees Insurance Company (GEICO), the nation's 4th largest auto insurer, has adopted rating methods and underwriting guidelines in 44 states that directly

base rates and eligibility for auto insurance on education and occupation. As a result, GEICO customers with less formal education and with non-professional jobs may be paying more than customers with higher education degrees and professional careers, regardless of their driving records.

On June 12, 2006 NJCA's Executive Director Phyllis Salowe-Kaye testified before the NJ Senate Commerce Committee in support of S1714, sponsored by state Senators Nia Gill, (D-34) and Joseph Vitale (D-19), banning the use of education and occupation as a rating factor in establishing auto insurance rates. "GEICO is using rating methods and underwriting guidelines that have serious adverse effects on minority consumers and lower income New Jersey residents. I am here asking you to ban the use of rate making methods that directly base eligibility and premiums upon the educational background and occupation of consumers. The use of this information results in unjustified increases in insurance rates for many lower income and minority residents of New Jersey," stated Ms. Salowe-Kaye.

An identical bill, A2819, has been introduced in the state Assembly by Assemblymembers Neil Cohen (D-20), Jeff Van Drew (D-1), Vincent Prieto (D-32), Upendra Chivukula (D-17) and Joan Quigly (D-32).

Unbeknownst to many applicants, GEICO uses four separate insurance companies – GEICO, GEICO General, GEICO Indemnity and GEICO Casualty – to insure drivers. Each one of these companies has different base rates. If a driver qualifies for the preferred GEICO insurance company, that driver will receive their lowest rates. If a driver does not qualify for the preferred company, that driver will get a quote from one of their less than preferred companies and pay substantially higher rates.

While GEICO is not required by law to publicly disclose how various factors are weighted in determining rate quotes, research that anyone can perform on GEICO's website, demonstrates that education and occupation alone can have a considerable affect on the rate quote a consumer receives. NJCA is currently working on a study to assess the extent to which GEICO's use of education and occupation impact consumer rate quotes and has already collected hundreds of rate quotes from GEICO's website. NJCA will be publishing the results of our study shortly.

Using GEICO's website, drastically different rate quotes have been generated when the identical information regarding the consumer, the vehicle, and the level of coverage is entered but the education and/or occupation of the applicant is varied.

For example, a 51 year-old woman who lives in Camden, NJ, drives a 2000 Buick Century Custom, Sedan 4 Door, works as a vice president for a private business, and has a PhD, receives a rate quote of \$855.00 from GEICO's website. However, if the exact same woman, living in the same place, driving the same car, and performing the same job has only a high school diploma, she receives a GEICO rate quote of \$1,521.90, an increase of \$666.90 or 78%.

GEICO's use of drivers' education and occupation to determine rate quotes harms low-income and minority consumers. There is an indisputable correlation in this country between both education and occupation with race and income. Using such factors could simply be a way to create a proxy for a person's racial and/or ethnic background. However, there is no evidence that such factors have any relationship with an individual's driving ability.

NJCA is urging the New Jersey Department of Banking and Insurance to ban the use of education and occupation in rate-making due to its discriminatory impact. Furthermore, the transparency of underwriting guidelines must be improved. Consumers have a right to know the factors on which their insurance rates are based and should not be subject to unfair and inequitable rate-making practices. Such reforms are imperative to ensure that the use of education and occupation in rate-making is ended.

Take Action Today: Please write your Assemblymembers and State Senators, urging him/her to support S1714 and A2819. For more information contact Eve Weissman at eve@njcitizenaction.org.



Do You Heat Your Home or Commercial Property with Oil? Join NJCA's Oil Group and Save Money this Winter!

The New Jersey Citizen Action Oil Group pools our members' buying power to provide heating oil to members at a discounted rate. Members, who receive their oil from full service, well-established suppliers, can save up to 30% off of retail market rates. Our dealers offer full service contracts, budget and 20/30 day billing, COD, automatic or will call fills, tank insurance and price caps in some areas.

For more information, please contact us toll-free at 1-800-464-8465, or visit our website at www.njcaoilgroup.com

From the Executive Director's Desk

Let's Invest in New Jersey's Future



Americans are ready for change and big ideas. Two-thirds of all voters are angry at the current state of affairs and want change. Citizens overwhelmingly believe that the country has been and will continue to move in the wrong direction if Congresses' priorities don't change. This November we have a unique opportunity to replace members of Congress complicit in the failed policies of the past six years with ones who are committed to an agenda that is consistent with a progressive world view.

It is time for New Jerseyans, indeed all Americans, to move in a new direction, one in which we begin investing in strengthening education and affordable health care and in developing "clean" technology to achieve energy independence. Our elected representatives need to invest in education and training programs so that all Americans have what it takes to compete in the global economy and have the opportunity to

achieve the American dream. It is time that we make these responsible investments by rolling back tax breaks for corporations and taking steps to hold government more accountable, like implementing full public campaign financing.

New Jersey Citizen Action, along with our national partner, USAction, and affiliates from all across the country has launched an exciting new initiative call the Invest in America's Future Program. Here at home we're calling it the Invest in New Jersey's Future plan. This aggressive program is what we need to achieve opportunity and prosperity in the globally competitive, knowledge-based economy of the 21st Century. The investment agenda is simple and will pay for itself as these investments bear fruit and by eliminating tax breaks to millionaires and special interests.

Recent polling by Greenberg, Quinlan, Rosner Associates indicates that

the investment agenda has broad support, including support of more than 60% of so-called 'swing' voters. A strong majority of Americans support an agenda that, along with plans to roll back tax breaks for corporate interests, bring down the deficit and make government more accountable, would ensure high-quality, comprehensive education for all (from early childhood through college); quality, affordable health care for all; and clean energy and reduced dependence on foreign oil.

It's time to make a bold move for opportunity and prosperity in our future. It's time to make sure that those who represent us in Congress bring these issues into the political debate. Please join me in the Invest in NJ's Future campaign. I'm looking forward to talking to you about it.

Phyllis Salowe-Kaye

NJCA Calls on Legislature to Act on CLEAN ELECTIONS NOW!

The Answer to NJ's Political Corruption Scandal-A-Day Landscape

With political corruption scandals gracing the front pages of New Jersey's newspapers on what seems to be a daily basis it is hard to understand why, nearly a year after New Jersey made history by implementing the first legislatively enacted full public campaign financing program – New Jersey's Fair and Clean Elections Pilot Project (FACE) – the legislature has yet to act on expanding the program for 2007. The law establishing the Pilot calls for expanding the program to four districts in 2007, include both Senate and Assembly races and the primary and general elections. But to do so the legislature must pass and the Governor must sign legislation reauthorizing the program.

"With public opinion at an all time low

concerning politicians, New Jersey must take bold steps to change the way we do politics in this state," stated Ev Liebman, NJ Citizen Action Program Director. "Connecticut recently enacted full public campaign financing for all state races and there is no reason why NJ can't do the same. At this point it's really just a question of whether or not NJ's elected representatives have the courage to move to a system of voter owned elections and the will to wean themselves off of the current system of private campaign cash," she added.

Public campaign financing targets the system of big money, private special-interest campaign funding. It enables qualified candidates to run for state office who don't have access to NJ's 'old boy network' of

backroom power brokers and access to wealthy individuals and corporate donors. Under this voluntary system, qualified candidates agree to collect small contributions (\$5) from voters in their district, (to demonstrate the viability of their candidacy), and forgo private campaign cash. Modeled after successful clean elections programs in Maine and Arizona, the NJ Pilot Program provided public campaign funding for qualified candidates running for office in District 13 (parts of Middlesex and Monmouth Counties) and District 6 (parts of Camden County).

As demonstrated in other states and municipalities that have embraced Clean Elections, full public campaign funding fundamentally alters our electoral system

(continued on page 8)

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CLEAN ELECTIONS

(continued from page 7)

and allows average citizens, including women and people of color, the opportunity to run for office, and win! Moreover, full public campaign financing results in an increase in voter participation while reducing the amount of money that is spent on campaigns.

The purpose of the 2005 Pilot Project was to determine the best way to establish a permanent, statewide system of public financing. The law created the bi-partisan New Jersey Citizens' Clean Elections Commission (NJCEC), that was charged with monitoring the Pilot and making recommendations for 2007. NJCA founding member and current Board member Vic DeLuca is a member of the Commission.

The NJCEC spent months analyzing the program and listening to experts from around the country to determine best practices for NJ. The Pilot Program proved to be successful on many levels and the

NJCEC's number one recommendation is that the program is right for New Jersey and should be continued and expanded in 2007. The Commission made numerous recommendations including providing candidates with a longer period of time to collect voter contributions, requiring fewer contributions and streamlining reporting requirements. The NJCEC's reports are available at http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/committees/NJCEC_FINAL.pdf.

"We need to restore the rights of citizens to have their voices heard and restore confidence in our democracy," said Phyllis Salowe-Kaye, NJCA Executive Director. "The legislature has had months to develop legislation. In fact the Citizen's Commission included a draft bill in their final report," she added.

Citizen Action is calling on all members of the NJ Legislature and Governor Corzine to support legislation reauthorizing the program. As part of our campaign to get the legislature to develop and pass legislation

NJ Citizen Action Conducts Free Workshops on Predatory lending

On August 8th, 2006 NJCA's Loan Counseling Department presented a free educational workshop on predatory lending at the Irvington Public Library. The Honorable Mayor Wayne Smith welcomed the group of 25 participants, several of which were urged by the Mayor to attend this event to learn if they might be a victim of a fraudulent or predatory loan scheme.

Bonita Holmes, New Jersey Citizen Action's Loan Counseling Director stated "Many consumers have no idea of the many abuses that could be found in their own mortgage documents or re-finance offer and few know any of the fair lending laws that protect them".

The evening's presenter, NJCA Organizer MaryEllen Marino, informed participants on how to determine if you are a victim, forms of predatory lending, ways to avoid financial fraud, fair lending laws that protect consumers, how to report abuses and how to obtain NJCA's free HUD-Certified Loan Counseling Service. Representatives from the NJ Division of Consumer Affairs, Department of Housing and Urban Development along with NJCA's Loan Counselors were available for questions after the presentation.

NJCA, the League of Women Voters, the New Jersey Public Interest Research Group and the AARP-NJ launched The Alliance for Clean Elections (ACE), a New Jersey coalition dedicated to reducing the corrupting influence of money in politics and establishing a permanent, state-wide system of full public campaign financing.

Take Action Now: Contact Assembly Speaker Joseph Roberts (D-5), Senate President Dick Codey (D-27) and Governor Jon Corzine and tell them to reauthorize NJ's Clean Elections Program NOW!

To learn more about Clean Elections and/or to join the Alliance for Clean Elections contact Marilyn Carpinteyro at marilyn@njcitizenaction.org.