

One New York Sustaining Progress, Sharing Sacrifices

Families across New York City are feeling the crunch of the economic downturn. This week New York City Comptroller Bill Thompson estimated that 135,000 New York City residents would lose their jobs as a result of the downturn. Many more will see reductions in hours and pay. Grocery and home heating bills are rising. Housing costs haven't eased. And for those lucky enough to have retirement savings, 401(k)s are now 201(k)s. For middle class New Yorkers, the current economic crisis will be acutely painful. For New York's poorest, the crisis is already here.

Even in the go-go era of easy money, easy mortgages and a soaring Dow, the fortunes of poor New Yorkers barely improved. Income inequality in New York City is among the worst in the country. A full 28 percent of all city residents live in poverty and in some communities the number is as high as 35 per-

cent. Now, as the Wall Street meltdown seeps into Main Street, the same New Yorkers who struggled through the boom will be hardest hit by the bust.

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needs including food, shelter, eviction prevention, medical care, childcare, and heating assistance.

Some budget cuts are inevitable given the scope and dimensions of this crisis, but getting our fiscal house in order will require shared sacrifice. While hard choices must be made and some government expenditures reduced, certain core services must actually be increased to meet rising demand in the face of an ailing economy. This is especially

While our political leaders talk about the need for drastic budget cuts, the recession will only increase the needs of thousands of New Yorkers who rely on government and the non-profit sector for essential services and basic living



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imperative given the fact that before the current crisis, anti-hunger feeding programs, legal services, and services for children and youth, the elderly, the homeless, and people with AIDS were already significantly reduced.

It is indisputable that the needs of New York's low-income children, families, older adults, immigrants, mentally ill, and homeless will be exacerbated by the downturn. It is

therefore troubling that Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Paterson have both called for across the board cuts to city and state agencies. Across the board cuts would negatively impact vital services like food pantries, soup kitchens, eviction prevention, child welfare, child care, homelessness prevention, schools, job training and literacy programs, AIDS services, senior centers, and youth programs. Across the board cuts are a blunt instrument: these times and the needs of New Yorkers call for a scalpel.

Trying to cut our way out of deficits is ineffective and short sighted and is no way to protect our city or state's future. In the face of greater human need, cuts to services that New Yorkers increasingly rely on will trigger further job loss and leave communities and people with already scarce resources even less equipped to handle this crisis.

Moreover, cutting human service programs now will simply defer and increase the costs of supporting vulnerable New Yorkers. Why would we cut funding for after school programs, only to spend money when our young people get in trouble with the law? Why would we cut eviction prevention, only to spend money on homeless shelters when New Yorkers lose their homes? Why would we cut abuse and neglect prevention services, only to spend money when children are placed in foster care? Cuts like these would exacerbate the tough economic times we

are in. Alternatively, preserving investments in communities and maintaining services will stimulate the economy from the bottom up and safeguard economic stability for the whole city and state.

While we must strive to find reasonable places to reduce government spending and make prudent cost-savings wherever possible, our elected officials must have the courage to consider raising revenue—equitably and progressively. Budgets should be balanced on the principle of shared sacrifice, and carefully examining all possible revenue sources is necessary in facing this crisis wisely and honestly and in putting the city and state on sound financial footing today and for the long term. It would be irresponsible for city or state leaders to take any progressive revenue options off the table at this time.

Taxes are not a dirty word. By taxing fairly and spending wisely, New York has created effective programs like child care and pre-kindergarten; senior centers and meals for the homebound elderly; safe and decent foster homes for abused and neglected children; legal services for immigrants and New Yorkers facing the loss of their homes; supportive housing for formerly homeless people; and youth recreation and after school programs. Without these essential services, our city and state would lose something incalculable – both in economic and human terms.

Our strong belief in preserving these safety nets has propelled us to help organize a coalition of already over 80 organizations that advocate for and serve New Yorkers. One New York: Fighting For Fairness, which recently announced its historic formation, represents organizations serving New Yorkers needing services such as AIDS services, child care, child welfare, education, health care, homeless housing, housing, immigrant services, income support, legal services, services for the disabled, senior services, and youth services, as well as advocacy organizations, unions, and community organizers.

With the economic downturn threatening those we serve, we are fighting with unprecedented unity for city and state budgets that invest in children, parents, and neighbors of all ages and support services that keep our communities strong. We believe this is a time that demands principled leadership and integrity. The City's nonprofits, advocacy organizations, unions, and community organizers are important, experienced voices on behalf of New Yorkers and we urge all to join our new effort. Time and again we have seen that when we work together we can make a difference.

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