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## Failed State

New Yorkers should be appalled at their failed state government, particularly their corrupt and clueless Legislature. Scandal and irresponsibility have been Albany's creed for decades. This year, the gang added another outrage to the list: complete fiscal incompetence.

The only solace is this: The entire Legislature is up for re-election in 2010. And unless there is a sudden turnaround — and, so far, we see few signs of it — New Yorkers have no choice but to vote out all the lawmakers and start over.

If there is any doubt left, here are just a few reminders of this year's worst of the worst:

**WHAT, US WORRY?** New York has been on the brink of economic collapse, but the Legislature blithely ignored the problem for months. When the deficit reached a truly alarming \$3.2 billion, the lawmakers grudgingly agreed to last-minute fixes while carefully protecting their political buddies and donors. That meant rich school districts on Long Island kept their money (until Gov. David Paterson imposed a temporary, across-the-board reduction), but 500,000 schoolchildren in New York City — many of whom can't afford it — will now have to pay to ride the subway to class.

Even after draining state savings accounts and using federal stimulus dollars that were supposed to be spent next year, they still fell \$500 million short. Next year is now a few hours away. The state is already in the red, and it could be facing a \$9 billion deficit by March. Yet there is no sign that legislative leaders have spent much time thinking about how to address this disaster.

**SCANDALS "R" THEM** There were so many legislative scandals this year that we're not sure where to start.

First, there were the revelations — surfacing only after the Democrats took control in January — about how Senate Republicans had abused their 40-year majority and secretly used state money to pursue party business. Among the discoveries: a secret plant, with 75 employees, to print Republicans' mail to constituents; a Republican-only television studio; secret Republican Party research staff. The Democrats have closed a few of these scandalous operations, but they have not been energetic about scaling back their own perks

now that they're in charge.

The Republicans' longtime Senate leader, Joseph Bruno, stepped down in 2008 before he was indicted on eight counts of exploiting his office for personal gain. Earlier this month, Mr. Bruno was convicted on two felony counts involving "theft of honest services."

The trial offered more instructive and stomach-turning details about the sleazy way that Albany operates. Mr. Bruno ran his private consulting firm out of his posh, taxpayer-financed Capitol office. His Senate secretary, other staff, phones, cars and copy machines were all used to get business and campaign contributions from private clients, some of whom came to him for help in writing and passing legislation.

Worst of all, it took federal prosecutors to uncover these abuses because there was no explicit New York State law forbidding them.

We don't want to prolong the pain, but let's not forget the Republican coup in June, abetted by two of the least-qualified Democrats: Senators Pedro Espada Jr. of the Bronx and Hiram Monserrate of Queens. Never mind that Mr. Espada was — and is — being investigated for allegedly living outside his district and failing to report campaign contributions. And Mr. Monserrate already had been indicted for assaulting his girlfriend, who had been slashed — somehow — in his apartment by a broken glass.

Nothing got done for more than a month until these two switched back to the Democratic side. Mr. Espada negotiated another title and salary bonus and more money for his district. He failed, after wide protest, to slip his son into a \$120,000-a-year state job.

As for Mr. Monserrate, he was convicted of assaulting his girlfriend after dragging her through his apartment lobby and then driving her past several emergency rooms to find a hospital where he would not be recognized. His fellow senators are expected to decide next month whether to oust him. If they have any shame left, they must. He is clearly not qualified to represent New Yorkers.

**O.K., MAYBE A TOUCH UP** So do any of them get it? Not many. After all this sleaze and incompetence, John Sampson, who leads the Democratic majority in the Senate, suggested this week that legislators might need a public relations "makeover." No superficial paint job can cover such a rotten core. What is needed is a sweeping top-to-bottom reform.

Democratic leaders say they are considering changes, including an ethics reform package that, with more muscle, might make it possible to rein in some of Albany's worst abuses. There is talk about taming the state's anything-goes campaign finance system, but it will take more than talk and press releases this time.

Almost no one is focusing on two other major problems: the gerrymandering that allows so many undeserving incumbents to hold on to power and Albany's relentless greed and influence-peddling.

Lawmakers must create a nonpartisan commission for fair redistricting before the maps are redrawn in 2011. Without it, the state will go another decade with no real political competition. They must establish a small, expert financial board to advise the state comptroller on pensions, one unswayed by political pressure or favoritism. And they must enact tough new disclosure laws that require lawmakers to fully, accurately and publicly report the sources of all their outside income.

New Yorkers have waited in vain for these reforms. Every year lawmakers promise to do better. And every year Albany has gotten worse. Legislators can either start doing the public's work now, or voters should turn them out. The election is less than a year away.

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*This article is part of a series examining the political and structural crisis in the New York State government. This series can be read at [nytimes.com/editorials](http://nytimes.com/editorials).*