

The Legislative Gazette

Spitzer introduces 'patient-first' health agenda.....	page 2
Rivera named deputy secretary of education.....	page 3
Chartock.....	page 4
Saving state's farms becoming more difficult group sovs.....	page 17
NYS Financial Aid Administrators Association.....	pages 9-14
NY Association of Naturopathic Physicians.....	pages 23-28

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Page 6

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Environmental groups applaud Spitzer's budget

By ROY KILKEARY

Gazette staff writer

Environmental groups voiced widespread support for a proposed increase in environmental funding announced in the Executive Budget proposal last Wednesday.

Some of the groups praising Gov. Eliot Spitzer's budget plan are the Adirondack Council, the Alliance for a Toxic-Free Future, The New York Public Interest Research Group, The Nature Conservancy, Environmental Advocates of New York and The Sierra Club.

Spitzer's 2007-2008 budget would include allocations for 166 new staff positions and \$100 million for the Environmental Protection Fund over the next two years. Some of the funding would be contingent on passage of a bottle bill that would require a deposit on all beverage containers sold in the state, including water and juice products.

The new positions would include 109 new staff at the Department of Environmental Conservation, 52 at the Office of Parks

Environmentalists endorse Johnson in 7th Senate District

By BENJAMIN KLEIN

Gazette staff writer

Environmental advocacy groups are coming to the support of state Senate candidate Craig Johnson in the hopes of giving him extra momentum leading to this Tuesday's special election against Republican opponent Maureen O'Connell.

The Long Island's 7th District seat became available when Republican Michael Baboni left the Senate to join

and Recreation and five new staff for the Adirondack Park Agency.

Robert Moore, executive director of Environmental Advocates of New York, applauded "Gov. Spitzer's commitment to adding 109 new technical, enforcement, and citizen participation staff to the DEC's depleted ranks."

"These badly needed environmental scientists, planners and Parks staff will help to ensure that these agencies have the capacity and the skilled and committed employees needed for priority

Gov. Eliot Spitzer's staff as his homeland security czar.

With the election drawing near, some environmental advocacy groups are throwing their support Johnson's way by publicly endorsing his candidacy. Pat West of the Long Island chapter of the Sierra Club believes strongly in Johnson. "He brings transparency to the conversation on the environment," West said. "I think his commitment to

See Johnson on page 33

programs," said Moore.

The new budget would devote more than \$100 million to the EPF over the next two years, including \$2 million toward the creation of a pollution prevention institute, which would focus its efforts on curbing the production of toxic materials, as opposed to costlier after-the-fact clean-up.

"We need to help New York businesses remain competitive with neighboring states and Europe that have already taken steps to find safer alternatives to

toxic chemicals," said Steve Breyman of the Citizens' Environmental Coalition.

A significant portion of the fund would come from passage of an expanded bottle deposit law which would devote any unclaimed deposits to the environmental protection fund, as opposed to bottling companies.

"Both the governor and the Assembly have supported making our communities cleaner and healthier by updating the bottle bill to include bottled water and other non-carbonated drinks. We hope the Senate will support this common-sense measure," said Laura Haight, senior environmental associate at NYPPIRG. The bottle bill has passed repeatedly in the Assembly but fails every session the Senate.

Marcia Bystryn, executive director of the New York League of Conservation Voters, said that the bill is essential to both the budget and the environment, stating "we must find a way to move the bottle bill this year.

"Frankly, this is critical for environmental funding in New York State," said Bystryn.