

## NEWS

# Blair Horner, prominent head of NY Public Interest Research Group, leaving post

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ALBANY — One of the most prominent government watchdogs in Albany is leaving the New York Public Interest Research Group to focus on health care issues for the American Cancer Society. The departure of Blair Horner as legislative director of NYPIRG will create a hole among Albany's good-government advocates who monitor and comment on Albany's ethical, political and fiscal actions. Horner has been at NYPIRG nearly 30 years. He worked for a year for then-Attorney General Andrew Cuomo to create a website that provides greater transparency for lobbying and government. "I think his voice will be missed," said veteran Assemblyman John McEneny, an Albany County Democrat. "I think he was respected by those who agreed and disagreed with him on the issues of which he was a tireless advocate. I welcomed his support on some issues and thoroughly enjoyed arguing with him on others," McEneny said. During his tenure in Albany, Horner helped craft legislation to improve

government transparency and routinely critiqued and sometimes praised legislation for news outlets statewide. In 2007, he was nearly alone in opposing an ethics reform package proposed by then-Gov. Eliot Spitzer. Horner saw it as weak and flawed. Spitzer's ethics enforcement system has since drawn widespread criticism. Gov. Andrew Cuomo and legislative leaders are now negotiating a new ethics bill. Other major legislation under negotiations that Horner has had a hand in includes creating a nonpartisan redistricting process. Horner, who worked on many health-related projects at NYPIRG, said he was enticed by the focus on cancer in a large, two-state organization where his title will be vice president for advocacy. He will push New York and New Jersey to create "health care exchanges" that would provide all cancer patients greater access to quality health care. "It was a good time to dig into something important to me personally and to others," said Horner in an interview. "What do people do who don't have health insurance who hear that word?" Donald Distasio, CEO of the American Cancer Society of New York and New Jersey, said Horner will lead a network of volunteers and staff. Republicans had at times felt Horner and the other good-government leaders in Albany – the League of Women Voters, Common Cause and Citizen Union among them – too often sided with Democrats. It was a claim Horner and his colleagues deny. Horner had filed the complaint against the Democratic administration of Gov. David Paterson over his secretive process to appoint a U.S. senator that led to unfounded leaks about one-time aspirant for the job, Caroline Kennedy. He also filed the complaint that led to a fine against Paterson for obtaining free World Series tickets from the New York Yankees, a registered lobbyist. This year, Horner accused Cuomo, his old boss, of a "naked political deal" with healthcare special interests that would have saved hospitals huge sums under Cuomo's cap of medical malpractice settlements. Cuomo's spokesman then accused Horner of being "a mouthpiece for the trial lawyers."