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Why New York needs to rip up its constitution!

by MOSES JEFFERSON

New York's state capital is a den of corruption controlled by just three men that must be cleaned up — and the only way to do it is to rip up its constitution and rewrite it from scratch, claims a man who worked in the belly of the beast for almost 10 years.

Appearing on this week's edition of Brooklyn Paper Radio, former state Sen. Seymour Lachman — a Democrat who represented portions of Southern Brooklyn and the North Shore of Staten Island during his stint in the state Senate from 1996 until 2004 — told hosts Gersh Kuntzman and Vince DiMiceli that Brooklynites have a chance to make things right by voting for a constitutional convention this Nov. 7.

“The democratic process in Albany doesn't exist,” Lachman said. “A new constitution is the only way to achieve reform.”

Lachman, who is director of the Hugh L. Carey Institute for Government Reform at Wagner College on Staten Island, says he spells it all out in his new book on New York State's dysfunctional legislative branch, “Failed State: Dysfunction and Corruption in an American Statehouse,” and explained to our hosts how he was asked to compromise his principles — or bribed to — by then-Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno and then-Gov. George Pataki, but refused to take the bait.

“As soon as I came into the room, I realized something was happening,” Lachman said. “Sen. Bruno offered me something extra.”

Lachman said Bruno promised to get more than \$2 million dollars to spend within his district — up from less than \$200,000 — if he started to vote along Republican lines. He then claims Gov. Pataki gave Bruno a call while Lachman was still in the office.

“He handed me the phone, and I realized I'd been had,” he said. “I told him what he was asking me to do violates my conscience. And I walked out the door.”

Standing outside that day was another Southern Brooklyn state senator, Carl Kruger, who ended up doing the deal with Bruno and Pataki— and becoming head of the state's powerful Finance Committee.

Oh, and he went to jail a few years later for accepting \$1 million in bribes — a scandal unrelated to the meeting Lachman claims happened that day.

Lachman added that because he didn't play ball, the leaders tried — and failed — to redistrict him out of office by adding a portion of Staten Island to his district. But Lachman still won the seat, and served one more term before having enough and stepping down.

Since then, he's written four books on New York State government, including “Three Men in a Room: The Inside Story of Power and Betrayal in an American Statehouse”; “The Man Who Saved New York: Hugh L. Carey and the Fiscal Crisis of 1975”; and “Mr. New York: Lew Rudin and His Love for the City.”

Lachman is not the first to demand state voters demand a constitutional convention in New York State. Back in January, guest John O'Hara, fresh off his vindication in a voter fraud case, talked about the importance of a new constitution to weed out corruption in Albany.