



NYPIRG NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release:

Friday, July 24, 2020

For more information:

Blair Horner 518 436-0876 x257

bhorner@nypirg.org

**NYPIRG'S ANNOUNCES THAT GENE RUSSIANOFF, ITS
"ATTICUS FINCH," RETIRES**

(New York, N.Y.) The New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) today announced that legendary civic activist Gene Russianoff has retired. Mr. Russianoff has been on staff at NYPIRG since 1978 and was the long-time head of its Straphangers Campaign. Like the fictional lawyer Atticus Finch in "To Kill a Mockingbird," Gene has spent his entire career fighting for justice and defending the interests of an underrepresented public.

Russianoff, a graduate of Brooklyn College and Harvard Law School, started working for NYPIRG as a Project Coordinator working with Brooklyn College students on issues of civic engagement, including bank redlining. From there, Gene led NYPIRG's efforts to fight the closure of public hospitals in Brooklyn.

Russianoff took over NYPIRG's Straphangers Campaign and began a long and impactful career advocating for better mass transit in New York City. In 1997, he was named a New Yorker of the Year by *New York 1 News* for his work to establish unlimited-ride transit passes. In a 2017 profile, the *New York Times* called Russianoff "a wisecracking, press-savvy, deeply informed public citizen." Tom Robbins in a 2015 *Village Voice* article rightly called him "the city's conscience for 25 years."

Russianoff was deeply involved in the overhaul of New York City government in the 1980s. As a result of the efforts of Gene and other reformers, New York City embarked on a remarkable experiment in campaign financing. New York City's voluntary system of public financing is now considered a model of reform for a nation awash in special interest cash. His reform efforts in municipal government also include the establishment of an Independent Budget Office, a non-partisan, independent watchdog of the City's finances.

"For over 40 years, Gene Russianoff has been a man of principle, standing up for ideals and against injustice, and he's sent out waves of hope and made a huge difference in the lives of countless New Yorkers. NYPIRG thanks him on behalf of all New Yorkers and wishes him well in this next chapter," said Blair Horner, NYPIRG's Executive Director.

Jaqi Cohen has taken over as Director of the Straphangers Campaign, which continues to fight for better, safer and more affordable and accessible mass transit for New York City riders. She can be reached at jcohen@nypirg.org.

-30-