



Interfaith **IMPACT** of New York State

IINYS NEWSLETTER

February 2010

Legislative Update and a Call for Action

The NYS Legislature is off to a rocky start this year. The budget deficit has grown to more than \$8 billion, and the Governor's proposed budget drastically cuts programs and services, with especially deep cuts in health care and education; meanwhile, there are only a few revenue enhancements. The Governor continues to hold the line on no tax increases for the most affluent among us while recommending cuts to food programs and a 50% reduction in the increase in the welfare grant that was approved last year.

There was a hint of sunshine when it looked as though ethics reform legislation would finally make it through the process, but the bill was vetoed by the Governor, and the Senate failed to muster the votes needed to override, so ethics legislation has gone back to the negotiating table.

Marriage Equality for same-sex couples is not on the legislative agenda for this session, but the Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act is alive and may come up for a vote. You can help that along. (See below for more information.) GENDA is one of those bills that really need our progressive religious voice behind it.

What makes IINYS different is that we bring a truly multi-faith perspective to progressive religious advocacy. Occasionally, you may see a reference to the "demise" of the religious right. This rumor, like so many floating around today, is greatly exaggerated. The religious right--in alliance with large, conservative denominations that oppose reproductive choice and deny full civil rights to homosexuals--is extremely powerful and capable of derailing important legislation in New York State.

An Action Agenda for the 2010 Legislative Session

This year, IINYS will focus on amplifying our collective voice on issues that involve human dignity, comprehensive health care as a human right, civil rights and protections for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered persons, environmental stewardship, criminal justice reform, and church-state separation. Watch for alerts and notices of upcoming actions. Here are some of the events on the calendar (see below for more info on each):

- IINYS is planning a new series of conference call briefings in conjunction with Reform Jewish Voice of NYS. The first call will be Monday, March 1st.
- The Interfaith Impact of NYS Foundation is sponsoring forums in Rochester and Buffalo.
- Interfaith Impact/Reform Jewish Voice Education and Advocacy Day, Monday, April 12th in Albany. (Registration is free, but we are asking everyone to register early so we can schedule legislative visits.)
- IINYS will mount letter-writing and e-campaigns in support of GENDA, Reproductive Health, ethics, economic justice and other legislation.
- Visit the IINYS blog, www.interfaithimpact.wordpress.com, to keep up to date.

Interfaith Impact Education and Advocacy Day

Save the date! The Interfaith Impact of NYS Education and Advocacy day with Reform Jewish Voice of NYS is Monday, April 12, in Room 711A of the Legislative Office Building in Albany. There is no charge this year, but the earlier you register, the easier it will be for us to schedule appointments. To register, send an e-mail to info@interfaithimpactnys.org. Please include your name, title, preferred e-mail, phone number, mailing address, religious affiliation and congregation. You can find a poster at www.interfaithimpactnys.org.

This is always an exciting event. The networking alone makes it worthwhile, but with so much at stake, this year may be more important than ever. Plan now to join folks from across the state to make your values count.

You Are Invited to a Budget Briefing Conference Call

Get an insider's view of the budgeting process in Albany and how cuts are likely to affect health and human services in New York. As a member of IINYS, or of a congregation or other organization that is an IINYS member, you are invited to participate in a Reform Jewish Voice conference call with Artie Malkin, a principal and founder of Malkin & Ross, one of Albany's top lobbying firms.

The call will begin promptly on Thursday, February 18th at 12:15 pm. Please click [here to register](#) for the call with RJV.

Sugared Beverage Tax

Governor David A. Paterson's proposed 2010-11 budget includes a penny-per-ounce excise tax on sodas and other drinks containing large amounts of sugars. We support consideration of this tax provided the proceeds from the tax are actually targeted to health care and public health programs, preventing cuts that would be required without the tax revenue.

Hydro-Fracking

Oil and gas companies have applied for permission to use high-volume hydraulic fracturing (hydro-fracking) to recover natural gas from shale deposits in New York State. The State recently released draft regulations to permit this drilling. The safety of the watershed that provides drinking water to large portions of New York State, including New York City, is a real concern with this technology. The IINYS board is looking at this issue. A report will soon be available to IINYS members.

Economic Justice

The Governor's budget contains a **50% cut in the increase to the welfare grant** that was approved last year. If this goes through, it will be a bitter disappointment for families across the state. Interfaith Impact joined with other organizations and signed a letter to the Governor asking him to restore the cut when he delivered his 21-day revised budget. The cut remains in the budget, so our next step is to advocate with the Legislature. IINYS will work with the Faith and Hunger Network and the Hunger Action Network of New York State to advocate for restoration of the full 10% increase

The Commissioner of Labor has received a petition asking for an investigation of the **minimum wage**. Several responses are possible, and we are waiting to see what the Labor Department will do.

After years of negotiations, the Senate Labor Committee finally passed the **Farm Workers Fair Labor Practices Act** (A01867B/S2247B). Supporters of the bill were stunned when, instead of sending the bill to the floor for a vote, Senate President Pro Tem Malcolm Smith sent it to the Senate Agriculture Committee where there is little likelihood that it will be approved.

LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) Civil Rights

Defeat in the NYS Senate in December of **marriage equality** for same-sex couples was a major disappointment. The legislation will not come up again for a vote this year, but it will be back in 2011, and IINYS will be unwavering in its support for this basic civil right for all New Yorkers.

The focus now is on **GENDA (Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act)**, which would amend the state's human rights law to include anti-discrimination protections based upon gender identity and

expression, providing crucial civil rights protections for transgender New Yorkers by banning discrimination in housing, employment, credit, public accommodations, and other areas of everyday life. It would also add gender identity and expression to the state's bias crime laws to help protect transgender people from violence.

IINYS will support Empire State Pride Agenda's GENDA call-in day by mounting an e-campaign, which we will time to add our unique voice to theirs as we advocate for this important civil protection. You may also want to consider directly supporting the Empire State Pride Agenda campaign.

Conscience in Public Life Forums

The IINYS Foundation is sponsoring two Conscience in Public Life Forums this spring:

- **Can NYS Dysfunction Be Fixed? Pros and Cons of a Constitutional Convention**, April 11, 2009, at 2:15 p.m. at the First Unitarian Church, 220 S. Winton Rd., Rochester, NY. The featured speaker is Assembly Minority Leader Brian Kolb.
- **Ethics in Albany?**, April 25, 2009, at 2:00 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo, 695 Elmwood, Ave., Buffalo NY. The keynote speaker is Blair Horner, Executive Director of the New York Public Interest Research Group.

These and other IINYS Foundation forums across the state are made possible through a grant from the Deblinger Foundation.

Forums will be recorded on video and selected clips made available on the Internet. Information will be posted on www.interfaithimpactnys.org and www.interfaithimpactnys.wordpress.com.

Update on Other Legislation

Criminal Justice Reform: The Governor's budget (Article 7) contains money to address the unequal representation that the counties provide to defendants who use the Public Defense system. While the Governor recognizes the problem, the proposed solution needs work. We will be following this as it moves through the budget process.

Family Health Care Decisions Act (A07729D/S03164B): This relatively small but vital statutory fix allows family members to make health decisions for incapacitated loved ones. It was finally passed by the Senate last summer and sent to the Assembly, which has now returned it to the Senate where it should come to a vote this session. IINYS is closely watching this bill, which has widespread support.

Reproductive Health Act (S05808): This bill provides a fundamental right to choose contraception and the right of a female to determine the course of a pregnancy. It authorizes abortion prior to viability, defines terms, and decriminalizes abortion. It is strongly supported by Family Planning Advocates of New York State, Planned Parenthood, and more than 1,000 clergy across the state.

If you have questions or want help developing a letter-writing campaign for your congregation, e-mail robb@interfaithimpactnys.org or call 518-441-3231.

Help IINYS Maintain an Effective Voice in State Government

Interfaith Impact of New York State relies on member contributions to maintain a year-round presence in Albany. A progressive religious understanding of our obligations to community, justice and compassion is essential to good government.

Donate Now!



Yes, I'll help make our shared progressive religious values heard in the New York State Legislature and Executive Chamber. I want to donate to (please check one, IINYS membership included with either):

Interfaith Impact of NYS, Inc. to support direct issue advocacy (not tax deductible)

Interfaith Impact of NYS Foundation, Inc. to support issue education and encourage civic participation (tax deductible)

Name and title: _____

Street: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Congregation name/religious denomination: _____

Suggested individual donation: ___\$25, ___\$50, ___\$100, ___\$200, ___\$500, ___ other

Suggested congregation/organization donation: ___\$100, ___\$200, ___\$300, ___\$500, ___ other

Amount enclosed: \$_____ (Cash or check made out to Interfaith Impact of NYS)

Mail to Interfaith Impact of NYS, 646 State Street, Albany NY 12203

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