

Interfaith Impact of NYS Update

January 15, 2009

2009--The Change is Real and the Time is Now!

This year, with the change in the leadership of the New York State Senate from Republican to Democratic, our progressive religious voice for the common good is more important than ever before.

For decades, the Senate Democrats have been making promises. Now we need to help them keep those promises. The IINYS presence in Albany is one way we will do that, but as NYS Comptroller Tom DiNapoli said recently, "build relationships with your representatives back in your district office. That's how they get the reinforcement they need on your issues." Every vote is important--Republican and Democrat alike--and your representatives need to hear from you.

Another way we reinforce our values is through phone calls, letters and e-mails. This year, IINYS is going to pump up the volume by offering e-advocacy. This is a system that lets you register once on our web site and then--in response to IINYS alerts--send e-mails to your legislators with a few mouse clicks. For the first time, mass e-advocacy will reinforce progressive religious values in New York.

Here are a few of the issues we will be working on together in the coming months:

- **Reproductive Health:** On the first working day of the new Legislature, President Pro Tempore and Majority Leader Sen. Malcolm Smith promised to make passage of the Healthy Teens Act and the Reproductive Health Act top priorities. At the same time, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver promised to pass the Healthy Teens Act and the Emergency Contraception Act. All these bills are top priorities for Interfaith Impact.
- **LGBT Rights:** Sen. Smith said that reform in the Senate cannot include bargaining away civil rights. We applaud that statement, and we will continue to work with legislative leaders from both parties and our allies across the state to get the votes needed to bring the marriage equality bill to the floor of the Senate for passage. This year, we also hope to see the Dignity for All Students Act and the Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act passed.
- **Economic Justice:** The Governor's FY 2009-2010 budget contains a 10% increase to the basic public assistance grant each year for the next three years. The basic amount has not been raised in 18 years. IINYS and

our allies in the Faith and Hunger Network (Reform Jewish Voice, Focus Churches, NYS Catholic Conference of Bishops, Hunger Action Network, NYS Episcopal Public Policy Network, and the NYS Council of Churches) have been meeting with Executive Chamber staff for the past two years about this, providing facts and initiating a moral dialog. During our last meeting with the State Director of Operations and the Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare, they told us the Governor realized it is a moral issue. It was good to hear our moral argument resonate in the Executive Chamber. Now we'll have to make sure it resonates in both houses of the Legislature. IINYS will submit written testimony in support of this budget item to the joint legislative hearing on the human services budget.

- **Reform of the Rockefeller Era Drug Laws:** In his State of the State message, Governor David Paterson promised major reforms of the unfair Rockefeller era drug laws. These Draconian laws criminalizing possession of small amounts of illegal drugs have had a devastating impact on minority communities across the state. A report from the Commission on Sentencing Reform will be out soon, and with that as a basis, we can expect the Governor and Legislature to finally move toward real reform.
- **Universal Health Care:** The Urban Institute Report on Universal Health Care will be out soon. This report is expected to provide econometric models of various approaches to health care in New York, including single payer, New York Health Care Plus and Massachusetts type plans.
- **Bigger Better Bottle Bill:** Among other things, this bill would require deposits on water bottles that currently litter the landscape and clog landfills. It's time for this to pass.

This year, we are also making increased use of the bulletin board on our web site, www.interfaithimpactnys.org. There you can access up-to-the-minute information, discuss issues, and review a calendar of opportunities for progressive advocacy. I hope you will make use of this option. The more we communicate, the more powerful we are.

Yours in Community,
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Interfaith Impact of NYS: working for the common good through progressive religious advocacy