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Interfaith Impact of New York State

Working for the Common Good through
Progressive Religious Advocacy

IINYS NEWSLETTER

Summer 2010

A Voice of Sanity in a Sea of Chaos

In the fall run-up to the 2010 NYS legislative session, and throughout the regular session and during the extraordinary sessions, which are not over yet, Interfaith Impact members have been a voice of sanity in a sea of chaos. Through your donations, calls, e-mails and visits to legislators and staff policy makers, you've made a difference.

You helped beat back an attempt to reduce the promised increase in the public assistance grant, and saw the Dignity for All Students Act pass after years of advocacy. You also made your voice count on a hydrofracking moratorium. The bill passed by the Senate will only be a nine-month moratorium, not the two years we had wanted, and it has yet to be passed by the Assembly when they return in September, but it's still a good bill. IINYS will have a lot more to say about hydrofracking during the 2011 legislative session.

Earlier in the session, the Governor signed the Family Health Care Decision Act, which we supported for years. It allows family members to make health care decisions for patients who can't make decisions and have not prepared advance directives.

You worked for ethics reform, and came close to winning when a bill was passed by the legislature but vetoed by the Governor. GENDA (Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act) was a close call, failing to go to the Senate floor by one vote in committee. This was an important civil-rights bill and we will advocate for it with NYS

Assembly and Senate candidates this fall, along with marriage equality for same-sex couples.

Among those bills that did not come up for a vote in the NYS Senate are the Global Warming Pollution Control Act (S.4315-c) and the Reproductive Health Act (S.5808/A11484)

The Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act was defeated during the last extraordinary session of the NYS Senate. This was a disappointment, because several of those who had promised to support it voted "Nay." To see the Ayes and Nays, go to <http://open.nysenate.gov/legislation/api/1.0/html/bill/S8223>.

During the regular legislative session, we prepared for our annual advocacy day by holding four statewide legislative conference call briefings with Reform Jewish Voice that were open to both IINYS and RJV members.

Some 50 activists came to our joint advocacy day in April with RJV. We delivered our message to influential legislators and their staff members, and we hand-delivered our position papers to all 210 offices of state legislators. We had a room in the Legislative Office Building sponsored by Assembly Majority Leader Ron Canestrari, who also welcomed us and answered questions about the budget negotiations. As usual, the day provided a powerful networking experience and was a high point for our advocacy in Albany.

IINYS provided faithful support for allied organizations--Family Planning Advocates, Empire State Pride Agenda, Faith and Hunger Network, and many others--offering our dedication and our unique prophetic voice on issues as we joined them on their advocacy days, met with legislators and the Governor's staff, and participated in press conferences, demonstrations and prayer vigils.

We sent out more than 30 e-mails across the state to let you know what was happening and give you an opportunity to weigh in on the issues before the Legislature. We will continue to keep you informed as we move into the fall elections.

The budget process was extremely difficult for the NYS Legislature this year. Many important health and education programs have been cut, and the Governor vetoed more 6,681 line-item vetoes, many of which had been intended to support local social services and other community programs. You can see a full list [here](#) of the vetos.

We will continue to work on controversial issues, including marriage equality for same sex couples, reproductive health, ethics reform, welfare-to-work, criminal justice reform, living wage, hunger and the environment throughout the fall election season and in the run-up to the 2011 legislative session.

We rely on your donations to keep our progressive religious voice heard in Albany.

[CLICK HERE TO DONATE](#)

ATTA-BOY FOR THE SENATE WEB SITE!

The NYS Senate revamped its web site and produced a winner! With the expanded legislative bill search function (<http://www.nysenate.gov/legislation>) you can easily **find bills**, **see committee votes** (a first for the Legislature) and **leave your comments** (another first). The "Open Senate" tab is an amazing window into the inner working of the Senate. And many of the floor debates are both streamed live and available for later viewing.

From what we've heard, this may be the best State legislative web site in the U.S. This is a real step forward toward open government.

IINYS SUPPORTS MOSQUE IN LOWER MANHATTAN

The Interfaith Impact Board of Directors has adopted the following statement in support of those seeking to build a mosque in lower Manhattan:

Interfaith Impact of New York State strongly supports the construction of the Cordoba mosque and community center in lower Manhattan. In a religiously diverse land, such approval is a statement of fundamental religious freedom, a cornerstone value in our democracy. The support of many religious groups is a testimony to the spirit of cooperation that exists among major faith communities in the United States. We hope this will usher in a renewed sense of mutual respect and common mission among them and will serve as a prophetic statement to those who would sow seeds of discord.

ETHICS...IN ALBANY? CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION?

The IINYS Foundation produced two Conscience in Public Life forums during the 2010 legislative sessions.

In Rochester, we asked "**Can NYS Dysfunction Be Fixed? Pros and Cons of a Constitutional Convention.**" The featured speakers were Assembly Minority Leader Brian Kolb, Stuart Berger from Citizens for a Better NY, and Shirley Eberly from the League of Women Voters.

In Buffalo, it was "**Ethics...in Albany?**" Cosponsored by the League of Women Voters of Buffalo Niagara, the Unitarian Universalist Church of Buffalo and American Association of University Women, the keynote speaker was Blair Horner, Legislative Director of the New York Public Interest Research Group. Other speakers were Buffalo News Political Reporter Bob McCarthy, IINYS President Rev. Dr. Richard S. Gilbert, and IINYS Executive Director Robb Smith. The program was moderated by

Barbara Kloberdanz, League of Women Voters of Buffalo Niagara. The program was made possible in part by a grant from the Deblinger Foundation.

Help IINYS Make Your Voice Count

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

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