



Interfaith **IMPACT** of New York State

# IINYS NEWSLETTER

September 2009

## More Special Legislative Sessions Promised

After 31 days of turmoil, control of the NYS Senate went to the Democrats, we saw a new line-up of Senate leaders, and two of our issues were handled in the final hours, along with 133 other bills. Another short special session was held in August to deal with governance issues in New York City. An additional special session of the NYS Senate is scheduled on September 10<sup>th</sup> and the Governor is likely to call additional special sessions. Here's the wrap for the regular (January-June) session:

What passed?

- The Senate passed **real rules reform** for the first time in 70 years. Thank you for your calls and e-mails supporting equitable distribution of member items and staffing resources. **YOUR VOICE WAS HEARD!** This is a victory for the common good.
- On the very last day (July 16<sup>th</sup>), the Senate passed the **Family Health Care Decisions Act** (S03164/A7729-C). This bill establishes procedures for family members, surrogates and others close to an incapacitated patient so they can make health care decisions on behalf of patients who are unable to decide about treatment for themselves. Now it's up to the Assembly to pass the bill.
- During the budget negotiations earlier in the spring, we saw **major reform of the Rockefeller Drug Laws, a 30% increase in the basic welfare grant, and steps toward more progressive tax policies**, all of which are now law.

What's hanging fire when the Senate returns in September?

- **Marriage Equality** for same-sex couples
- **Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act**
- **Reproductive Health Act**
- **Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act (GENDA)**
- **Healthy Teens Act**
- **Dignity for All Students Act**

What's working its way through both houses?

- **Universal Health Care**
- **Public Defense Act of 2009**

IINYS will send out action alerts as bills come up for consideration in the Senate and Assembly. We will continue to meet with key legislators and staff who have expertise on our issues, and we will participate in press conferences and other events to ensure that your progressive religious voice makes an impact.

## Get to Know Your NYS Representatives

Any time from now through the end of the year is a good time to put together a group to visit your Assembly Member and Senator in their home offices. Focus on developing close relationships with your representatives and their local staff.

There are multiple factions in the NYS Senate, no strong leader has emerged in either party, and rules changes give your Senator—and therefore you—new power, regardless of party. Under the new rules, rank and file senators can have more influence over member items, which gives you a greater opportunity to advocate for how these monies are spent. (For information on member item appropriations see <http://www.seethroughny.net/Expenditures/ReportType/tabid/74/Default.aspx>.) It is also possible to get bills on the calendar from either side of the political fence, since neither party has an indisputable majority. Now is the time to make your voice heard!

## Two Top-Priority Issues for the Fall Special Sessions

**Marriage equality for same-sex couples:** This bill passed the Assembly and was on the Governor's agenda during the special sessions of the Senate after the attempted Republican coup. It never came up for a vote; however, Governor Paterson has promised to put marriage equality on the agenda for the Senate's special session this month. We are hoping for a Senate debate and vote on the bill.

Marriage equality is being vigorously opposed on religious grounds by some Senators, but there is a growing consensus that marriage is a civil right and that Senators should not use their power to impose religious dogma on those who do not share their views. Republican Minority Leader Sen. Dean Skelos has told the members of his conference that they can vote their consciences on this, so it's very important that your Senator hear from you.

**The Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act** did not make it to the floor for a vote, but it was gaining bipartisan support before the Senate meltdown. Advocates hope it will come up for a vote in September.

**What are Your Top Priorities:** Do you or your social action committee have issues that you would like to see at the top of the IINYS advocacy agenda? Send an e-mail to IINYS Executive Director Robb Smith, [robb@interfaithimpactnys.org](mailto:robb@interfaithimpactnys.org), and let us know what you think.

## Two More Bills Gathering Support

**GENDA:** The Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act has taken on increased urgency in the wake of the murder of a young transgendered Syracuse woman. In July, her killer was found guilty of a hate crime. This is the first time New York's Hate Crime law has been applied to the killing of a transgendered person. The Assembly passed GENDA during the regular session and we hope to see the Senate pass it this fall or during the regular session that starts in January.

**Public Defense Act of 2009:** This bill continues to gather support in both the Senate and Assembly. It provides state oversight, funding and control of public defense services for defendants who can not pay for a lawyer. Currently, the quality of services varies enormously by county. This bill will help provide equal justice for defendants across the state.

## On the Drawing Board

**Universal Health Care in New York State:** On July 17<sup>th</sup>, the NYS Department of Health released the final report on [“Achieving Quality, Affordable Health Insurance for All New Yorkers: An Analysis of Reform Options.”](#) Depending on the outcome of federal health care reform, New York may need to proceed on its own toward universal coverage. Of the various options considered in the report, only single-payer (the Medicare model) and New York Health Plus (an expansion of New York's current public health insurance program) would be truly universal. Advocates have asked the Governor to hold hearings on the report.

At a press conference in July, IINYS Executive Director Robb Smith said, “The report clearly shows that adequate health care for every New Yorker is achievable. Now we need the will to make it happen. Health care for everyone is a fundamental moral issue. It is a human right that gets at the very foundation of what it means to be human and live in community.”

## IINYS Resources and Alerts

Interfaith Impact relies primarily on e-mail alerts and e-campaigns to communicate with members. **If you have not been receiving e-mail from IINYS, please send an e-mail to [info@interfaithimpactnys.org](mailto:info@interfaithimpactnys.org) to update your address.** And if, by chance, our e-mails are ending up in your spam folder, please add [info@interfaithimpactnys.org](mailto:info@interfaithimpactnys.org) to your address book.

If you would like to discuss issues, ask questions, and connect with other IINYS members, we have started a blog at [www.interfaithimpact.wordpress.com](http://www.interfaithimpact.wordpress.com), and there is a bulletin board on the Interfaith Impact web site (<http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org/cgi-bin/forum/Blah.pl>). You can also go the Interfaith Impact page on [Facebook](#).

For a complete list of bills that IINYS supports, go to [www.interfaithimpactnys.org](http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org).

## News from the Interfaith Impact of NYS Foundation, Inc.

The IINYS Foundation is organizing regional Conscience in Public Life forums across the state to encourage civic participation by people from progressive faith traditions. If you are interested in helping to host a forum, please contact Robb Smith, [robb@interfaithimpactnys.org](mailto:robb@interfaithimpactnys.org) or call 518-441-3231. Thanks to grants from the UUA Fund for Social Responsibility and from the Deblinger Foundation, these forums will continue into next year.

Forums will be recorded on video and selected clips made available. Information will be posted on [www.interfaithimpactnys.org](http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org) and [www.interfaithimpactnys.wordpress.com](http://www.interfaithimpactnys.wordpress.com).

## 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. Please make your contribution to Interfaith Impact now. You can fill out the coupon below and mail it with your check or donate on-line by going to [www.interfaithimpactnys.org](http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org) and clicking on the "Support Us" button in the left-hand column.



**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)**

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**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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