

Covenant for Justice

2007 End-of-the-Year Update

Covenant for Justice, the Interfaith Impact of NYS newsletter, is published with the assistance of grants from the NYS Convention of Universalists, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and donations from IINYS members.

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If you would like to become more involved in the year-round development of issues and strategies, consider joining the IINYS Legislative Action Committee. For more information, e-mail Robb@interfaithimpactnys.org or call Robb Smith at 518-441-3231.

Advocacy Day 2008

Mark your calendar now! Our Interfaith Impact of NYS annual advocacy day will be in Albany on April 28, 2008. We will again be joined by Reform Jewish Voice of New York State.

Campaign to Raise the Welfare Grant

Since August, IINYS representatives have been meeting with Gov. Spitzer's staff, including the Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare and NYS Budget Director Paul Frances (subsequently promoted to Director of State Operations), advocating for an increase in the basic welfare grant, which has not been increased since 1990. The Governor responded to advocacy by IINYS and other organizations by raising the food stamp allowance, but much more is needed. How long could you survive on the basic public assistance grant? Try the Welfare Grant Challenge on www.interfaithimpactnys.org.

Universal Health Care: New York Health Plus Proposal

The New York Health Plus proposal announced by Assemblyman Richard Gottfried at a Dec. 5, 2007 press conference is a powerful concept, well thought out and backed by thorough research. It

recognizes the realities and magnitude of the historic change needed. It will take persistence, courage and political will to arrive at a system that is truly comprehensive, equitable, and sustainable, but this report shows that it can be accomplished. IINYS is strongly recommending it to Gov. Eliot Spitzer for consideration as his administration develops a universal health care proposal for release next year.

Funding Comprehensive Sexuality Education

In September, NYS State Health Commissioner Richard Daines announced that New York had not reapplied for funds under the federal Abstinence Only Program, because it is based on ideology rather than on sound scientific-based evidence. The Healthy Teens Act (A2856/S1342) will provide the money New York needs for comprehensive sexuality education. The Act passed overwhelmingly in the Assembly this year, but remains stalled in the Senate finance committee.

Human Embryonic Stem Cell (hESC) Research Still Needed

Scientists recently announced a new way to reprogram the skin cells of mice into multipurpose stem cells without harming embryos. It's an exciting new line of research, but it's based on earlier human embryonic stem cell research, and at this early stage, scientists do not know if these skin cells hold the same promise as hESC. Human embryonic stem cell research continues to be a vital area of investigation.

Church-State Separation

Governor Spitzer has proposed a State income tax deduction for religious school tuition. IINYS strongly opposes this back-door funding of religious instruction.

The Governor has also introduced the Freedom of Religious Expression Act (A9098/Gov.'s Program Bill No. 36), which could give some religious practices a special exemption from State laws. The bill is worrisome to religious organizations from across the political spectrum and is strongly opposed from both the left and right. IINYS has not taken a position, but we have indicated to the Governor's staff our concerns around requiring the government to judge religious practices and the unpredictable effects this law could have on long-established church-state relations.

Marriage Equality

Marriage Equality for same-gender couples, the Dignity for All Students Act, and the Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act will all be active in the Senate during the coming legislative session. IINYS will keep you up to date as these issues develop.

Environment

The IINYS Legislative Action Committee is developing position papers to support the Bottle Bill, which would require a deposit on plastic water bottles, and other environmental legislation.

Criminal Justice

IINYS Executive Director Robb Smith provided oral and written testimony to the NYS Commission on Sentencing Reform. He advocated for reform of the Rockefeller era drug laws. That testimony is available at <http://www.interfaithimpactnys>.

“Conscience in Public Life” Forum in NYC

In November, Interfaith Impact of NYS, with help from Pride in the Pulpit, Reform Jewish Voice of NYS and the Faith in Action Committee of the 4th Universalist church in New York City, presented an outstanding forum on “Conscience in Public Life.”

Speakers included Assemblyman Richard Gottfried; Assemblyman Daniel O’Donnell; Assemblywoman Linda Rosenthal; Rev. Deb Morra, from Pride in the Pulpit; and Ethan Felson, Associate Executive Director, Council for Jewish Public Affairs. Pictures and information from this forum will be on our expanded IINYS web-site, which is under construction.

Giving Opportunities

If you’re thinking about making a year-end gift to Interfaith Impact, now is the time. There are two ways to give: you can support the direct advocacy and grass-roots organizing done by Interfaith Impact of NYS, Inc., which is vital but not tax deductible, or you can make a tax-deductible contribution to the Interfaith Impact of NYS Foundation, Inc., which educates members and the public on civic participation from progressive and liberal religious points of view.

Special Tax Law Opportunity Ends December 31: IRA holders can make a gift directly from their IRA to a charity without having to recognize the payment as income. Starting at age 70.5, anyone with an IRA must withdraw a certain amount every year - called the Mandatory Required Distribution (MRD) - and pay income taxes on that withdrawal. Through December 31, 2007, you can make gifts from your IRA of any amount (up to \$100,000) without recognizing the income and thus avoiding the tax. This will count toward your MRD, allowing you to help Interfaith Impact of NYS and save on taxes. (Note: these contributions are not tax deductible.)

Yes, I want to help make our shared progressive and liberal religious values heard in the NYS Legislature and Executive Chamber. I want to donate to:

Interfaith Impact of NYS for issue advocacy (not tax deductible)

Interfaith Impact of NYS Foundation for education (tax deductible)

Amount: \$15; \$25; \$50; \$100; \$250; \$500; Other \$

Name:

Address:

E-mail: ; Phone:

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

THANK YOU!!!

To all of you who supported Interfaith Impact of NYS during the past year with your donations.

THANK YOU!!!

To all of you who met with legislators, wrote letters, and made phone calls to keep the voice of progressive and religious values on the table during policy debates, **THANK YOU!!!**

Your donations make the voice of progressive and liberal-religious values heard in New York State and help put them at the table when public policy is being made.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS AND A WONDERFUL NEW YEAR!

Interfaith Impact of New York State: advocating from progressive and liberal religious points of view for compassion, reason and justice in New York State public policies.



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