

News from STATE SENATOR

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New York State Senate, 26th District

COMMUNITY BULLETIN – June 2007

Message from Liz . . .

While this session has seen a number of key successes in resolving long delayed issues, including Workers Compensation Reform and a Human Trafficking law, one area where legislative dysfunction has continued is in addressing the environment. Despite the support from a majority of the members of the State Senate for the environmental Super Bills, Republican Majority Leader Joe Bruno continues to block consideration of these bills and allow a full vote on the floor of the Senate. This is yet another example of why we need reform of the legislative process. Under the current system, the Majority Leader has unilateral control over what legislation comes to the floor, and has allowed these environmental bills to languish in the Environmental Conservation committee -- most for numerous legislative sessions.

The Super Bills are **The Community Preservation Act (S.3836)**, **The Wetlands Bill (S.3835)**, **The Bigger Better Bottle Bill (S.3434)**, **The Climate Change Solutions Act (S.5347)** and **The Climate Change Fund Act (S.5371)**.

Experts and advocates have made strong, sound, and convincing arguments for why each of these pieces of legislation should be passed; the Assembly has repeatedly supported the Super Bills year after year; and yet, one man, Senator Joe Bruno, is stonewalling efforts to protect our State's environment. I know from the hundreds of constituent letters I get on these issues that the public has mobilized behind these bills. We are in the final days of the legislative session, which ends on June 21st, and thus are once again near the end of our opportunity to debate and vote on these important environmental bills.

The Super Bills include the following:

- The Community Preservation Act: gives cities and towns the power to voluntarily create a dedicated fund to protect natural areas and historic architecture;
- The Wetlands Bill: lowers the threshold for state authority in protecting wetlands from 12.4 acres, to 1 acre;
- The Bigger Better Bottle Bill: expands our bottle law and creates new funding for environmental protection;
- The Climate Change Solutions Act: seeks to reduce greenhouse emissions and implement more energy-efficient programs through programs funded by the sale of pollution credits; and
- The Climate Change Solutions Fund: collects the proceeds from the auction of emissions allowances, specifically those associated with the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative.

These Super Bills are the standard by which this session will be judged in regards to the environment. Not passing them, or weakening them to the point where they no longer fully meet their objectives, will reflect very poorly on the Senate and will underscore a real failure of leadership by Senator Bruno.

In an effort to show the breadth of support for these bills, I, along with most of my Senate Democratic colleagues, have filed official requests (buckslips) to be cosponsors, but for some of these bills those requests have been ignored. This points to another key reform I have been pushing, which would remove the power of the Majority Leader or sponsors of legislation, to deny minority members the ability to cosponsor legislation. Senator Bruno blocks cosponsorship, in part, to weaken the appearance of support for pieces of legislation that he knows should be passed.

If passed, the Super Bills will go a long way towards protecting the environment and increasing recycling, preventing litter, making communities safer and cleaner, reducing waste disposal costs for municipalities and tax-payers, and creating new jobs in the recycling and retail industries. With just a few days left in the session, there is no more time for delay. Senator Bruno needs to allow these bills to come to the floor, where they should all pass if the Republicans who have signed on as cosponsors join the Democrats and simply vote for their own bills.

Community Spotlight

Women-Owned Business Event POSTPONED:

I organized with the Manhattan Chamber of Commerce and Lt. Governor David Paterson, an event about New York State's Women-Owned Business program. The event was scheduled for this Friday, June 15th. However, due to the passing of former Senate Majority Leader Warren Anderson, the event has been postponed to a July date, as yet undetermined, in order for the Lt. Governor to attend memorial services. I will announce the new date in July's Community Bulletin.

Opportunity to Comment on Marine Transfer Station at East 91st Street:

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) has declared the permit applications for the Marine Transfer Station complete, and is now accepting public comment on the draft permits. I have long opposed this project because of its inappropriateness for a heavily residential community, and will be submitting joint comments with my fellow East Side elected officials opposing the issuance of permits for the reopening of the Marine Transfer Station. I urge all concerned community members to make their voices heard on this important issue. Comments should be submitted by July 2, 2007 to John F. Cryan, NYSDEC 47-20 21st Street, Long Island City NY 11101-5407. If you have questions regarding the comment process, Mr. Cryan can be reached at (718) 482-4997. In addition, NYSDEC is likely to hold a public hearing before making a final decision on permitting. I have made it clear to NYSDEC officials the importance of a full public process on this issue, and will be reiterating this position in my comments.

Report on Albany Public Forum on Creating a True Affordable Housing Trust

Fund:

On May 30th, I convened the second of four public forums I am conducting around the state on the preservation and development of affordable housing. This public forum focused on the creation and implementation of a true New York State Housing Trust Fund—a fund to support the preservation and production of affordable housing that has dedicated ongoing sources of revenue and is not dependent on the unpredictable annual appropriation process. Thirty-eight states, along with more than 350 cities and counties around the country have already established such funds, which have helped fund the creation and preservation of hundreds of thousands of affordable homes. The forum was a valuable opportunity for interested parties

and the public to learn about the process of creating state and local trust funds, and to obtain input from the many interested stakeholders involved in affordable housing policy and development.

Few problems facing our state are more critical than New York's severe shortage of safe, decent, and affordable homes. According to the 2000 census, 40.5% of renters and 31.2% of homeowners statewide are burdened by high housing costs. All across the state, seniors on fixed incomes are being squeezed out of their homes and young adults are unable to afford to remain in the communities in which they grew up. It is incumbent upon state government to develop a comprehensive state-wide plan to address the affordable housing crisis facing our state. We must ensure that we maximize the efficiency and benefits of current programs, and create new housing preservation and development programs. An essential part of this plan should be the creation of a true state housing trust fund.

Numerous excellent proposals were made by a wide range of government officials and many of New York State's most knowledgeable housing advocates, affordable housing developers and community organizations. In the coming months, I will be working with my colleagues in the Legislature and the Spitzer administration to implement many of the ideas presented. You can find all the testimony presented by clicking on "Housing Hearing #2" under "Featured Items" on my website, <http://www.lizkrueger.com>

Report on Arts Conference on Contemporary Marketing and Audience Development:

Last month, I joined Senator José M. Serrano and The Museum of Modern Art in hosting a conference for the arts community on Contemporary Marketing and Audience Development. Over 150 members of the New York City Arts community participated in the two panel discussions: Reaching Younger Audiences and Working Together: Arts and Business.

Dick Schwartz, Chair of the New York State Council on the Arts, shared the good news about increased funding that was available through New York State. The Keynote Speaker, Diane Ragsdale from the Andrew Mellon Foundation presented unique and controversial comments about the changing art scene and the impact on younger audiences. Her remarks were well received and included many suggestions to increase involvement of young people in the cultural opportunities offered in New York City.

A PDF file of her keynote speech can be found as "2007 Arts Roundtable" under the "Featured Items" section of www.lizkrueger.com

Other panelists included: David Snead, New York Philharmonic; Lisa Schubert, Rubin Museum of Art; Carol Fineberg, New York State Alliance for Art Education; Elena Park, MET Opera; Jennifer Lax, NYC Department of Small Business Services; Luis Castro, Time Warner; and Will Weiss, Arts and Business Council of New York. Since being elected, I have hosted 6 Arts Roundtables that have attracted leaders from both large and small arts organizations in NYC. This conference was extremely successful and attracted nearly 200 people from dozens of arts institutions.

Picture the Homeless Releases Report on Vacant Property:

Picture the Homeless and Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer recently released an interesting report on abandoned buildings in New York City, available online as a PDF file at http://www.picturethehomeless.org/files/pdf/Homeless_People_Count.pdf

Rehabilitating abandoned housing and vacant lots is a critical part of any strategy to address New York City's housing needs. One way to encourage such rehabilitation would be for the

City to modify the tax rates for vacant properties, which currently are so low that they create no incentive for property owners to develop abandoned sites.

St. George's Society Offers Assistance to United Kingdom & Commonwealth Natives:

The St. George's Society is a small private nonprofit organization, founded in 1770, and currently operating on the East Side of Manhattan. The Society continues to provide charitable assistance to individuals born in the UK or the Commonwealth, who are generally seniors 60 and over, or disabled and unable to meet living expenses on their incomes alone.

They offer a stipend program, which involves Social Work assessment and follow-up and a beneficiary Committee approving any grants. In addition there is a burial program; emergency assistance; and the Society is expanding to develop a scholarship program. For more information on the programs at the Society call them at 212-682-6110, or visit their website at www.stgeorgessociety.org

Spotlight on Policy

Human Trafficking

Earlier this month, Governor Spitzer signed the Human Trafficking Law, the strongest state anti-trafficking legislation in the country. This bill, which passed the Senate in late May, has long been pushed by advocates, and includes all the major provisions recommended by the New York State Anti-Trafficking Coalition in its model legislation. Its passage represents a major accomplishment for this legislative session

Under the new anti-trafficking legislation sex trafficking is a Class B felony, which could entail up to 25 years in prison, and labor trafficking is a Class D felony, which could lead to jail time of up to 7 years. The new law provides for a range of comprehensive services for trafficking survivors such as health care, emergency housing, job training, and services related to immigration protection, among several others. The new law also increases the penalties on patronizing prostitution, which went from a B to an A misdemeanor, and clarifies the existing New York law on sex tourism.

The US State Department estimates that 14,500 to 17,500 people are trafficked into the country every year, and many of them into New York. A prominent port of entry, transit and destination for trafficking victims, New York's strict enforcement of this new law could create a significant impact, reducing human trafficking nationally. Because local law enforcement is more likely to have interaction with trafficking perpetrators than the FBI, it is critical that states enact laws to empower police and district attorneys to act against these crimes.

The New York State Anti-Trafficking Coalition has been advocating for a strong law against human trafficking in New York for the past three years, and Governor Spitzer made passage of this legislation a high priority for his first year in office. I am extremely pleased that the legislature has finally responded to this pressure and passed this critical legislation.