

## NOTES FOR CHANGE: JULY 15, 2019 NEWSLETTER For Summer 2019

### A SURFEIT OF SUCCESS: LEGISLATIVE SESSION 2019 WRAP-UP

The 2019 session of the New York State Legislature was truly astounding in terms of legislation passed. Several of IINYS priorities finally were met; others made progress. Here is a listing of successes, along with a brief commentary on each. Now is the time for celebration, a little rest and reflection, and beginning to gear up for the 2020 session (it is an election year, of course.) This issue does not cover all legislative activity in Albany, but focuses on Interfaith Impact priorities. Interfaith Impact is proud to have played a part in securing so much progressive legislation. See IINYS Position Papers on these issues at [www.iinys.org](http://www.iinys.org).

**REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE:** The Reproductive Health Act was passed, encoding *Roe v. Wade* into the New York State health code. It has previously been in the criminal code. Go to <https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/empire-state-acts/issues> - Legislative Agenda 2019.

Also passed was the Comprehensive Contraceptive Coverage Act, which made contraceptives much more accessible. For details go to [www.nyclu.org](http://www.nyclu.org) – Issues – Reproductive Rights.

**Unfinished business:** Sexuality education. Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) (A 6512 Nolan/S 4844 Metzger): This act involves inclusion of comprehensive, medically accurate, culturally, age and developmentally appropriate sexuality education (CSE) in publicly funded K-12 schools statewide. Go to [www.nyclu.org](http://www.nyclu.org) - issues – reproductive rights.

See also an IINYS Backgrounder at [www.iinys.org](http://www.iinys.org) “Reproductive Justice – Clergy for Choice.”

**ENVIRONMENT:** At last we had a major victory on environmental legislation, New York State’s version of the Green New Deal. It does not go as far as IINYS and environmental groups had wanted, but it places New York State at the frontier of climate change response. In contrast to previous environmental goals, the CLCPA embeds them in law. The name of the act was changed from Climate and Community Protection Act to Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act. This Act requires the state to cut **60%** of its statewide carbon emissions (from 1990 levels) by **2030** (or a 40% reduction) and **15%** by **2050** (or an 85% reduction) with that remaining 15% from carbon credits. The state is required to produce **70%** of its electricity production from renewable sources by **2030**. Carbon emissions in the electricity sector are to be eliminated by **2040**. A 22 member climate council made of state agency representatives is charged with ensuring it happens. At least **35%** of funds from the state’s clean energy program are to go toward disadvantaged communities which will be identified by the Department of Environmental Conservation. For more information, go to [www.nyrenews.org/what-we-do/](http://www.nyrenews.org/what-we-do/) and “New York just passed the most ambitious climate target in the country” by David Roberts <https://www.vox.com/energy-and-environment/2019/6/20/18691058/new-york-green-new-deal-climate-change-cuomo>.

**Unfinished business:** A Council was established to map a plan to achieve the ambitious objectives. We will have to keep the pressure up to guarantee the 22-member Climate Action Council does its job. (There is also a Climate justice working group from disadvantaged and activist communities.) And we will have to

monitor seemingly constant attempts to build fossil fuel infrastructure. The OFF Fossil Fuels Act, which is much more aggressive than CLCPA, may well be introduced in the 2020 session. For further information, go to [www.foodandwaterwatch.org](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org).

Also see the IINYS Backgrounders on the environment at [www.iinys.org](http://www.iinys.org): “Eco-justice and Earth Care” and “Environmental Justice Climate Change Backgrounder.”

**LET NEW YORK VOTE:** Considerable progress was made to increase voter participation in New York state government to address our current abysmal voting rate. Early voting legislation requires counties opening some polling places nine days prior to an election. Pre-registration of 16 and 17-year-olds and a unified Primary Day were also part of the package passed. The LLC Loophole was partially closed. Now such contributions will be limited to \$5000 and LLCs will need to better disclose who is funding them. For more information, go to [www.letNYvote.org](http://www.letNYvote.org).

**Unfinished business:** Automatic Voter Registration, voting rights for parolees and a few other issues were not included in enacted legislation. These issues have been introduced, debated, but not yet passed. These will no doubt be on the 2020 agenda. The same can be said for public funding of campaigns. See the Backgrounders on Democracy, Redistricting and Campaign Finance Reform at [www.iinys.org](http://www.iinys.org).

**CRIMINAL JUSTICE:** Here we have a mixed bag. Significant bail reform was passed, reducing cash bail for most non-violent offenses. Reforms also included speeding up trials and helping parolees find jobs. For more information go to <https://www.facebook.com/NYCAIC>.

**Unfinished business.** HALT (reduction of solitary confinement use) was not addressed by the Legislature despite vigorous advocacy. However, the Governor has pledged to reduce its usage through executive order. While his action is welcome, it is not as enduring as encoding new practices in law. Another governor could undo what Cuomo might do. HALT legislation will be a high priority in 2020.

**FARMWORKER RIGHTS:** A major breakthrough was achieved for New York State’s farmworkers. The Farm Laborers Fair Labor Practices Act was passed, giving laborers the right to unionize and overtime pay as well as a guaranteed one day off per week. However, the final bill placed restrictions on strikes, labor stoppages and slowdowns as “unfair labor practices.” Also, overtime pay begins only after 60 hours of work, not 40. For more details go to [www.ruralmigrantministry.org](http://www.ruralmigrantministry.org).

Also, a major victory was achieved in passage of the very controversial Green Light Bill opening the way for undocumented farmworkers to acquire driver’s licenses, the Driver’s License Access and Privacy Act. Go to [www.greenlightnewyork.org](http://www.greenlightnewyork.org).

**Unfinished business:** There has been much push back on the Green Light legislation and activists will need to monitor local officials to be sure it is properly administered. The same close observation will be required in relation to the Farmworkers “Bill of Rights,” especially regarding the above-mentioned limitations.

**IMMIGRATION:** The state DREAM Act made the immigrants brought into the country illegally, eligible for college tuition aid (including TAP and the Excelsior Scholarships) from New York if they attended high school in New York.

**LGBTQ RIGHTS:** GENDA legislation passed early in the session, adding gender identity and expression to New York’s anti-discrimination laws. Besides this, so-called “conversion therapy” was prohibited, as well as “gay panic” defense. The latter had allowed defendants to try to claim a physical attack on a person was induced because they were surprised by a person’s gender or sexual orientation. For more information

go to [www.nyclu.org](http://www.nyclu.org) - Issues – LGBT rights. Also see the IINYS Backgrounder on GLBTQ Rights at [www.iinys.org](http://www.iinys.org).

**Unfinished business:** On this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stonewall, this was a welcome result. However, keen observation that these laws are respected will be required by advocates.



**IINYS Advocacy Day, Albany, May 6, 2019, on Million Dollar Staircase  
L to R: Rev. Sam Trumbore, Dick Dana, John Keevert, Rev. Dick Gilbert**

**HEALTH CARE:** While at the beginning of the session prospects for New York Health single-payer health care seemed bright, this legislation did not come to a vote in either chamber. There were, however, for the first time, hearings on this bill. Debate was furious, mainly around the transition process and methods of funding. See editorial below. For more information, go to [www.nyhcampaign.org](http://www.nyhcampaign.org). A December 12, 2018 article discusses the Act in detail (<https://citylimits.org/2018/12/12/the-obstacles-facing-single-payer-in-new-york-are-also-why-some-want-it/>). Though it is dated, it provides a comprehensive and still-relevant view of continuing issues.

**Unfinished business:** While 94.3% of New Yorkers already have health insurance, many are under- or poorly-insured. A major overhaul of New York State’s health insurance system is required. The IINYS Board will prioritize discussion and action on health care in the next session.

See the Backgrounder on Healthcare at [www.iinys.org](http://www.iinys.org) - Backgrounders  
See also the IINYS Position Paper at [www.iinys.org](http://www.iinys.org) - Positions

### **Editorial by Richard S. Gilbert - HEALTH CARE AS A HUMAN RIGHT**

There are two distinctly different ethical perspectives in debate over health care delivery, each with a theological assumption. The free market approach argues from a strongly individualistic point of view, promoting less government and more private competition. “Subsidizing” another person is discouraged. One must simply be responsible for him or herself with modest charity for those who cannot afford it. This

individualism was on steroids in the U.S. House of Representatives – and then the Senate – in the 2017 debate over the effort to repeal the Affordable Care Act (“Obamacare”).

Interfaith Impact advocates a universal coverage system in which all would contribute and all would benefit. Its theological foundation is solidarity. We are, of course, individuals, but also members of one community and should contribute to the good of the whole, even if it is not to our personal benefit. After all, we pay taxes for public schools which our children do not necessarily attend. It is one of our contributions to the community. Our understanding of ethics leads us to work for the common good – or, more theologically put – the Beloved Community.

We speak for the “interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.” Anyone who thinks they were self-made forgets how dependent they are on the community. Wealthy business executives, for example, ship goods to market on roads built by the taxpayer; citizens paid for the education of their workers; police and fire protection are supported by all of us. The “invincible young” who don’t think they need health insurance and don’t want to subsidize “old geezers,” not only are vulnerable, but one day will be “old geezers” themselves and will need health care help. As Maya Angelou put it: “No one can make it out here alone.” We are interdependent.

That solidarity is exemplified in this narrative from our neighbors across the border. "When a Canadian man was handed an invoice showing the cost of his care after he was discharged from the hospital it was a news event covered throughout Canada. The 'bill' for \$2,269 – covering a two-day stay in a Toronto hospital for investigation of an irregular heart beat – was stamped "Do not remit. Paid on your behalf by the Citizens of Canada." New York can and should do likewise.

#### BEATITUDES FOR JUSTICE BUILDERS (excerpts) – The Rev. Lindi Ramsden

(Editor’s note: I have used this reading by my Unitarian Universalist ministerial colleague Lindi Ramsden, and so it is reprinted here by popular demand).

LEADER: Blessed are you who can question your own assumptions and listen with an open mind;

PEOPLE: you will receive new insights beyond your imagining.

LEADER: Blessed are you who suffer the attacks of others to stand up for what is right;

PEOPLE: you are not alone, for your courage will inspire others to rise.

LEADER: Blessed are you who build friendships as well as justice;

PEOPLE: you will strengthen the foundation of your community.

LEADER: Blessed are you who do not demonize your opponents;

PEOPLE: your eyes will be open.

LEADER: Blessed are you who work in coalition rather than in principled isolation;

PEOPLE: you will be effective.

LEADER: Blessed are you who will not let the perfect be the enemy of the good;

PEOPLE: you will see progress in your lifetime.

LEADER: Blessed are you who take delight in people;

PEOPLE: you will not be bored in meetings.

LEADER: Blessed are you who play as well as work;

PEOPLE: you will generate enthusiasm and draw the powers of the impish to your cause.

LEADER: Blessed are you with an active spiritual life;

PEOPLE: you will find perspective in times of loss

and will rise without cynicism to meet the challenges of a new day.

LEADER: Blessed are you who live from a place of gratitude;

PEOPLE: you will know the meaning of Life.

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- Become a member of IINYS and support it financially. To support either our 501C4 action arm, **IINYS, Inc.** or our tax deductible 501C3, **IINYS Foundation, Inc.**, go to <http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org/Donations.html>.
- Respond to our action alerts by contacting your elected officials and letting us know where they stand or if they want more information.
- Become an ambassador for IINYS in your congregation, receiving and distributing IINYS materials & encouraging congregational participation.
- Urge your minister/rabbi to address issues from the pulpit and in adult education

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**NOTES FOR CHANGE** newsletter is published the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month except during the summer months. This issue covers June, July and August and summarizes some of the critical actions in Albany this year. Action Alerts, Background Papers and Webinars will be announced. We thank the New York State Convention of Universalists and the Gilbert Spirit Fund of the First Unitarian Church of Rochester for their support.