



PO Box 7163
NYS Capitol Bldg.
Albany, NY 12224
info@interfaithimpactnys.org
www.interfaithimpactnys.org

NOTES FOR CHANGE - March 2018 Newsletter

EDITORIAL: From an Isolation Cell

The Rev. Dr. Richard S. Gilbert, IINYS President

(IINYS board members John Keevert and Dick Gilbert attended a Rochester press conference supporting HALT legislation on solitary confinement. In the church sanctuary was a life-size model of an isolation cell. Participants took turns briefly experiencing what it might be like).

I was in Attica in 1971 after the uprising and I have visited an inmate in Dannemora Prison several times. These are maximum security prisons, and they are formidable and bleak places. The county jails I have visited are likewise intimidating. I can only speculate on what living in a solitary confinement cell would be like. This replica (model of solitary confinement cell) can only suggest the inhumanity of such punishment.

I hope we have moved beyond the prison as merely a penitentiary, and see it as a place of accountability and restoration. I pray we will abandon our efforts to punish people into rehabilitation and will move into a philosophy and practice of restoration.

Years ago I spent two weeks studying and visiting in the much more enlightened Dutch criminal justice system. There is no comparison. It is time for New York to move out of the dark ages and move toward a criminal justice system that treats human beings as people of inherent worth and dignity. A society is judged in part by how it treats the "least of these," the poor, the oppressed and the imprisoned.

As people of faith, we recognize both a need for justice and prison safety as well as a balancing need for compassion and concern for human dignity. We strongly support the Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement (CAIC) and its advocacy of the Humane Alternatives to Long Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act (A.3080/S.4784). This proposed legislation has been cleared by the Assembly Corrections Committee. We urge its passage.

NEWS OF INTERFAITH IMPACT

Rochester IINYS hosted its annual legislative briefing at the First Unitarian Church Sunday, March 11. A three-person panel examined the **health care situation** in New York State. **Carol Tegas, Executive Director of Finger Lakes Performing Provider System**, noted how her

organization helps coordinate services among many providers in Western New York. There is a gradual shift from pay for service to a model where providers are paid to keep people well. **Assembly member Harry Bronson** updated prospects in the legislature for passage of universal coverage-single payer health care. This year may be difficult for passage, but it lays the groundwork for passage in the next session. **Rohith Palli, from the Campaign for New York Health** noted the study by University of Massachusetts Professor and Chair, Department of Economics, Gerald Friedman. Friedman concluded that 200,000 new jobs would be created as the health care costs for business would be replaced by a payroll assessment according to income, and a progressively graduated assessment on non-payroll taxable personal income (e.g., capital gains, dividends and interest). Although taxes go up a bit, the overall cost will be less for 985 of New Yorkers since there would be no premiums or deductibles.

Health Care Update: The New York Health Act (A4738/S4840) was reported out of the Assembly Health Committee March 13. Go to <http://www.nyhcampaign.org> or www.singlepayernewyork.org. Read these words from Assembly sponsor Dick Gottfried at: <https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/2014/12/08/universal-healthcare-newyork-proposal/20096259/>. See IINYS Backgrounder and position paper at www.interfaithimpactnys.org. **Share your healthcare story** and take the survey at http://www.nyhcampaign.org/tell_your_story.

Planned Parenthood Empire State Acts sponsored its annual lobbying day in Albany March 13. IINYS Executive Director Robb Smith and President Dick Gilbert were active participants. PPESA presented a four-point legislative agenda: (1) Improving Access to Contraception through the Comprehensive Contraception Coverage Act, which requires insurers to cover all forms of contraception without cost-sharing; (2) Decriminalizing Abortion by moving regulation of abortion from the criminal code to the public health and education laws; (3) Preventing Maternal Mortality through a Review Board to identify causes of maternal mortality and recommend prevention strategies; (4) Advancing Comprehensive Sex Education through a “Be Aware-Be Informed Program of K-12 sexuality education to be required by the State Education Commissioner. (During one legislative visit a senatorial staffer requested information about the *Our Whole Lives (OWL)* program developed by the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ - information has been sent to that office). A final “ask” of PPESA was an addition of \$750,000 to be added to the Family Planning Grant in the proposed state budget.

Action: contact the Governor, your Assembly member and your senator and urge enactment of these proposals. For information go to www.PPESacts.org. Also visit the IINYS website www.interfaithimpactnys.org to view our backgrounder on reproductive justice: “Reproductive Justice – Clergy for Choice.”

FOR IMMEDIATE ATTENTION

Legislative Update: On March 14 the two house of the Legislature adopted separate budget resolutions laying out their plans for the State budget. You can find overviews of these plans at nyassembly.gov and nysenate.gov. Conference committees have begun to work towards agreement on a budget before the April 1 start of the new fiscal year.

Let New York Vote: An Affirmation of Democracy: The Governor has included \$7 million in his supplemental budget request for early voting. Thanks to the work of the Let New York Vote campaign, of which IINYS is a member, a first step toward enriching democracy has been taken. **ACTION: Contact your state senator and ask him/her to support the inclusion of \$7 million in the budget for this expansion of voting. The Assembly has already included it in its One-House budget.** The funding will go mainly to expanded early voting. **Urge your representatives to support the New York Votes Act (A05312).** For details, go to www.LetNYvote.org. For the IINYS position paper on “Enhancing Democracy as a Religious Principle,” and a Backgrounder on campaign finance reform, go to www.interfaithimpactnys.org.

ACTION - CALL THIS WEEK! Tell your State Senator and Gov. Cuomo NY Wants Early Voting - Senate Switchboard: [518-455-2800](tel:518-455-2800) - Gov. Cuomo: [518-474-1041](tel:518-474-1041) - Here's the message: "New York needs early voting. Governor Cuomo and the State Assembly put \$7 million for it in their budgets. Now we need the State Senate to do the same. All eligible voters should have the freedom to vote at a convenient time without worrying about putting their job or their personal responsibilities at risk. I'm your constituent, and I urge you to fight to keep the money in the final budget. Thank you."

Getting pushback? If you happen to reach a Senator or staffer who gives you pushback that \$7 million is not enough to implement early voting, here are some responses: (1) The funding allocation allows for county flexibility. \$7 million should be more than enough to get counties started and get them over the hump of implementing Early Voting; (2) Early Voting won't happen until 2019 elections so if additional funding is needed it can be addressed in next year's budget, too; (3) Over time, early voting funding is cost neutral. \$7 million in a \$168 billion budget is the least we can allocate for our democracy.

“Democracy is a participatory sport. To maintain a level playing field in the political realm it is imperative we broaden the base of participation. Early voting is one step in that direction and should be given financial support in this year's state budget.... Democracy is fundamentally a religious principle. It is the capacity of people to participate in shaping their own fate and that of their community. Voting is both a symbol and a sacrament....” IINYS President Dick Gilbert

Environmental News: There are two bills to watch – and support: The **Climate and Community Protection Act (A8270B)** facilitates the transition to clean 100% clean energy by 2050. CCPA was part of the Assembly budget plan. There are two Senate bills S7971 and S6617A. A companion bill is the **Climate and Community Investment Act (CCIA)** which funds the transition to renewable energy through a corporate polluter fee. IINYS supports the CCPA and is considering the CCIA. (See position paper on our website www.interfaithimpactnys.org.) There is growing sentiment for divestment of state pension funds from the fossil fuel industry. Comptroller DiNapoli's position has been that he can do more on climate change through constructive engagement as a stockholder. His approach is described in the Environmental, Social and Governance Report of the NYS Common Retirement Fund: <http://www.osc.state.ny.us/reports/esg-report-mar2017.pdf> Here's a short summary of divestment vs. constructive engagement from the League of Conservation Voters: <http://nylc.org/news/great-divestment-debate/>. The Governor and

Comptroller have agreed on a "Decarbonization Advisory Panel." Press release here:
<http://www.osc.state.ny.us/press/releases/mar18/030618.htm>

Testimony on the Department of Environmental Conservation Budget Hearing in Hearing Rm B 2/27/18 from Interfaith Impact of New York State presented by Paula Shaw for the Board of Interfaith Impact of New York State

Honorable New York Senators and Assembly Members:

“As members of religious organizations that value the health and welfare of our fellow beings, as well as the health of the environment which sustains us physically and spiritually, the members of Interfaith Impact of New York State call on the NY Assembly and the NY Senate to fund the DEC in New York’s 2018 – 2019 budget sufficiently to develop a climate action plan, a climate justice working group and sufficient funding to be on track to achieve statewide greenhouse gas emissions reductions in our energy sector of 50% by 2030 by drastically reducing the use of fossil fuels. These measures would improve our economy by creating jobs and reducing damaging storm events. They would also improve our health and safety, saving the enormous health costs of exposure to fossil fuel emissions. It is time to show leadership and take a value intensive, long range view on this issue, instead of an impulsive, money driven policy or we will find ourselves and our environment in an ever-increasing climate crisis. Thank you for your attention on this serious matter.”

JUSTICE CALENDAR: DATES TO NOTE

Monday, May 7: Interfaith Impact Advocacy Day in Albany (Hold the date). The IINYS Board has set Monday, May 7, as the date for the annual advocacy day in Albany to connect with legislators and staff members on issues of importance to progressive people of faith. Watch this space and the IINYS website (www.interfaithimpactnys.org) for details.

June 5, 2018: CLERGY FOR CHOICE DAY IN ALBANY Contact Rabbi Dennis Ross at Dennis.Ross@ppesacts.org.

Our thanks to the New York State Convention of Universalists for their generosity.

WE INVITE YOU TO

___ become a member of IINYS and support it financially (<http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org/Donations.html>)-either our 501C4 action arm, **IINYS, Inc** or our tax deductible 501C3, **IINYS Foundation, Inc**, see below.

___ 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

DONATE NOW

Interfaith Impact of NYS depends on the donation of friends and members to maintain a year-round presence in Albany. Please, consider a generous donation now.

Go to <http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org/Donations.html> or include check and form below.



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):

Interfaith Impact of NYS, Inc. to support direct issue advocacy (501C4), not tax deductible)

Interfaith Impact of NYS Foundation, Inc. issue education and civic participation (501C3), tax deductible)

Name and title: _____

Address - Street: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

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Suggested donation: ___ \$25, ___ \$50, ___ \$100, ___ \$200, ___ \$500, ___ other _____

Amount enclosed: \$___ (check made out to IINYS, Inc or IINYS Foundation).

Please mail to Treasurer, Interfaith Impact of NYS, 101 Coniston Dr., Rochester, NY 14610

Interfaith Impact of NYS. P.O. Box 7163 Capitol Building, Albany, NY 12224
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