



Interfaith IMPACT
of New York State

NOTES FOR CHANGE

February 2018 Newsletter

EDITORIAL: The Heft of the Religious Left

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

I was fascinated by a recent article from *Think Progress* by Jack Jenkins: “Nobody is laughing at the Religious Left in 2017.” It both disturbed and inspired me. I was uncomfortable because I resist the alignment of progressive religion with any political party. That is why I oppose repeal of the Johnson Amendment, which prohibits the direct participation of religious groups in political campaigns – by fund raising, endorsement of candidates and in general making religious groups mere appendages of political parties. President Trump, who has gained the support of most white Christian evangelicals, has pledged to repeal it.

Democracy is fundamentally a religious principle. It is the capacity of people to participate in shaping their own fate and that of their community. The synchronicity of Trump and the religious right is evident when evangelical leaders give him what I call a “moral mulligan” for words and actions that contravene biblical teachings.

I was inspired because I have long believed liberal religious groups have a vital role in the public square. That role is to be what Martin Luther King, Jr., called the “conscience of the nation.” No matter which party is in power, it is our role to be part of the “loyal opposition,” not as a political balance, but speaking truth to power and acting prophetically.

From my perspective, one of the main features of the religious left is that it does not seek political power, as does the religious right, which tends to see itself as chaplain to conservative political parties and politicians. The religious left keeps its distance from party politics so that it can speak from a prophetic position – as in Amos dropping the plumb line over ancient Israel, or Jesus tipping over the tables of the money-changers in the temple. Second, the religious left is an interesting conglomeration of religious groups – often allying with the Roman Catholic bishops on economic issues or even with elements of the religious right, as in opposing gambling.

As I see it, the main feature of the religious left is that this amorphous community - which helped end the Vietnam War, promote civil rights, advocate for GLBTQ equality, proclaim the need for earth care, and champion women’s reproductive rights - is alive and well and powerful in the public square. It is a great time to use the heft of the religious left. (For back issues of *Notes for Change*, email Rsgilbert@uuma.org).

For Immediate Attention

Let New York Vote: An Affirmation of Democracy: A coalition of “goo goos” (good government groups) has put out a five-point program for expansion of voting in New York. It includes early voting, automatic voter registration, flexibility to change party affiliation, electronic pollbooks and restoration of voting rights to people on parole. 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.

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. However, more works needs to be done to pass the **New York Votes Act (A05312)** which would modernize our voting system by introducing early voting, automatic voter registration, same day registration, consolidated election days, “no excuse” absentee voting, uniform voting hours, and new party enrollment deadlines. IINYS President Dick Gilbert was quoted in the LNYV campaign press release: “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.”

Environmental News: There are two bills to watch – and support: The **Climate and Community Protection Act (CCPA – S.8005/A.10342)** facilitates the transition to 100% clean energy by 2050. The bill passed the Assembly last year. A companion bill is the **Climate and Community Investment Act (CCIA)**, which is being written now. It funds the transition to renewable energy through a corporate polluter fee. A study by Robert Polin estimates that if passed, the two bills would create 145,000 green jobs. IINYS supports the CCPA and is considering the CCIA. (See position paper on our website www.interfaithimpactnys.org.)

Health Care Update: The New York Health Act (A4738/S4840) passed the Assembly for the third straight year and is one sponsor short of edging past the Senate. The plan is funded through progressive taxation. Go to <http://www.nyhcampaign.org> or www.singlepayernewyork.org. Also see the Backgrounder and position paper at www.interfaithimpactnys.org. For a contrary view go to www.empirecenter.org for an article by Bill Hammond, “NY Dems’ lunatic push for single-payer health care.”

Movements start with the telling of untold stories. Share your healthcare story below to help shine light on the need for a healthcare system where coverage is guaranteed and no one is left behind. Take the survey at http://www.nyhcampaign.org/tell_your_story.

Criminal Justice: Reforms in the criminal justice system are in process. This package includes the HALT Act (Humane Alternatives to Solitary Confinement), the elimination of cash bail except in unusual cases, emphasis on alternative means to guarantee the presence of those charged at trial, and new rules of “discovery” (sharing of information by prosecutors with the defense in a timely fashion). All have gained considerable traction in this session of the legislature. Last year’s success in “Raise the Age” legislation (16- and 17- year-olds no longer treated as adults) paved the way. Several reforms are championed by the Governor. For more information go to #FREEnewyork. IINYS is a part of this campaign.

Reproductive Justice Redux: The coalition of groups working for reproductive justice is focusing on three issues this legislative session: **K-12 Comprehensive Sexuality Education** in public schools (a high profile item especially considering the #metoo movement); the **Comprehensive Contraceptive Coverage Act** (providing for wider dissemination of contraceptives); and the **Reproductive Health Act** (which would apply the *Roe v. Wade* decision to New York State and move abortion from the criminal code to the health code). See events in calendar below.

JUSTICE CALENDAR: DATES TO NOTE

Tuesday, February 27: People’s Hearing on Climate Change. New York Renews is having an action in Albany coinciding with the state’s Environmental Conservation Budget Hearing. Contact Dan Sherrell at dan.sherrell@nyrenews.org.

Sunday, March 11: Rochester: A Better Prescription for Health Care in New York State. The Rochester chapter of IINYS has set its annual legislative briefing for Sunday, March 11, 2:00-4:00 pm, at the First Unitarian Church of Rochester, 220 S. Winton Rd. Carol Tegas, Executive Director of Finger Lakes Performing Provider System, will review the current state of health care in the Empire State; Harry Bronson, NYS Assembly member for the 138th district, will assess the political situation of health care in the legislature; and Rohith Palli, from the Rochester Campaign for New York Health, will make the case for single payer, universal health care. For information contact Judy Schwartz Schwartz179@earthlink.net or Rsgilbert@uuma.org.

Tuesday, March 13: PLANNED PARENTHOOD DAY OF ACTION Contact <https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/empire-state-acts/take-action> or call 212-490-9535 for information and how to become involved, or contact The Education Fund of Planned Parenthood Empire State Acts at WWW.PPESActs.org.

Tuesday, March 13: Coalition for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement Advocacy Day Please join CAIC for the March 13, 2018, Advocacy Day in Albany to demand that Governor Cuomo and the NY legislature end the torture of **solitary confinement** by passing the **#HALT Solitary Confinement Act, A3080/S4784**. Go to nycaic.org to sign up and learn more. They would appreciate your signing their petition at: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeQzYu6GEiRI2IPMLuHLxXE6e72fKnrRzCpilmBR3S9rkuGcQ/viewform?c=0&w=1>

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.

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)

OR

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

Name and title: _____

Address - Street: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Congregation/denomination: _____

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

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

Please mail to Treasurer, IINYS, 101 Coniston Dr., Rochester, NY 14610

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Facebook: like our IINYS group (to post your concern) and page for official posts

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