

News from STATE SENATOR

Liz Krueger

New York State Senate, 26th District

COMMUNITY BULLETIN – July 2007

Message from Liz . . .

The legislative session is officially over, though the lack of progress on a number of issues means we will be back for more in the very near future. Here is a brief review of the action (and inaction) of the last weeks of session.

The end of the session this year was much less eventful than usual, in large part due to the ongoing and increasingly public battle between Governor Spitzer and Majority Leader Bruno, which has resulted in something of a stalemate in terms of passing legislation. While we passed hundreds of bills in the last weeks of session, few of them dealt with the major issues on the legislative agenda. This was particularly disappointing given that up until these last weeks, this session had been a fairly successful one, with significant legislation passing on ethics and budget reform, workers compensation reform, and preventing human trafficking. Much of this legislation had been bottled up for years.

Unfortunately, these earlier successes did not continue into the session's final days. Among the issues left unaddressed were: campaign finance reform; judicial pay raises; reform of the government contracting process; new standards for food and healthcare at public schools; the bigger, better bottle bill; and PlanNYC2030 implementation legislation.

One of the only major agreements reached in the last week of session was the passage of a renewal of the 421-a affordable housing program, which I could not support. As I noted in earlier bulletins (which can be found under "newsletter" on www.lizkrueger.com), this program has been rife with abuse, and in the past, most of the tax breaks have gone for luxury development instead of affordable housing. In the end, the bill the legislature passed created a whole new set of special deals for developers, and missed the opportunity to truly reform the 421-A program by not passing one of the many better proposals, including my own legislation (S6064). The bill that did pass has not yet been sent to the governor for his signature, but I am hopeful that once he receives it, he will veto the bill unless further reforms are not implemented in subsequent legislation.

For me, the high point of the final week of session did not happen in the Senate. I walked over to the Assembly chambers one evening to watch their debate on the same-sex marriage bill. What happened in the Assembly that night was an example of what our legislative process should be – a heartfelt, substantive debate on a major issue impacting our state. I was extremely pleased by the final result – passage of legislation that would legalize same sex marriage – but I was also very gratified by the process. For the most part, the debate was respectful and extremely moving, as individual members spoke of what this legislation meant to them. In addition to the moving speeches by the gay and lesbian members of the Assembly, some of the most powerful speeches came from four upstate Republicans, who spoke in favor of the legislation based on their personal beliefs about fairness and equality, and showed a level of

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courage that might hurt some of them in future elections. I wish we could have such a debate on the floor of the Senate, even though the vote probably wouldn't go the way I would like. But Joe Bruno won't let that debate happen. He refuses to bring the same sex marriage legislation to the floor of the Senate for a debate and vote.

We obviously have a lot of unfinished business to deal with, and the current conflictual climate in Albany makes it hard to see how we will break the logjam on these issues. Perhaps by the time we return to session in mid-July, the heat will begin to dissipate, and we can get down to the work we need to be doing.

**State Senator Liz Krueger and
The Manhattan Chamber of Commerce
Present**

**“Everything Women Business Owners Need to
Know About the MWBE Program in NYS
But Were Afraid to Ask!”**

*Special Address by
Lieutenant Governor David Paterson*

Date: Thursday, July 19th
Time: 8:30-10:00 am
Place: Club 101
Park Avenue @ 40th Street

Space is limited – REGISTRATION REQUIRED
**To register go to www.manhattancc.org and search “events” for “MWBE”,
or call my office at 212-490-9535 or the Chamber at 212-473-7805**

Community Spotlight

Summer Meals For Kids:

Many public schools and other locations are open the entire summer to serve Breakfast and Lunch to children under the age of 19. All children under the age of 19 are eligible for free meals regardless of income, citizenship status, residency or enrollment in public school. Children do not need to attend summer school to participate in the program and there is no application, registration, documentation, ID, or fee required. Breakfast is served 8:00am - 9:15am, and lunch is served 11:00am - 1:15pm. Locations on the East Side and Midtown where meals are being served are: John Jay Pool at 77th St. York Ave., Washington Irving HS at 40 Irving Place, Recreation Center at 348 E. 54th St., Straus Houses 344 East 28th St, 1st Floor, For more information and locations, call 311.

Help “Green Up” New York City Streets – Request Trees For Your Street:

Did you know that any property owner may request a street tree. All street tree requests are taken through individual community board offices. Applications are available by calling 311 or via internet at: www.nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park/trees_greenstreets/street_tree_info.html

Trees are planted on a first-come, first-serve basis. As the availability of trees, number of requests, and length of planting season is different each planting season, not all requests can be filled immediately. There may be up to a one year wait before a request can be fulfilled. Please be aware that obstacles like underground utilities, low wires, building entrances, and light posts may prevent a new tree from being planted. If you wish to plant sooner, you may do so at your own expense by planting your own street tree, but you must first fill out a permit application. The tree planting season runs roughly from March 15 to May 15 and from October 15 to December 15. If you have further questions or need additional information, please call the Street Tree Planting Office at (718) 760-6794.

Income Limit for Senior Citizens Rent Increase Exemption Increases to \$27,000:

Effective July 1st, the income eligibility for the Senior Citizens Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) Program has increased by \$1,000, to \$27,000. NYC tenants over the age of 62 living in rent controlled or rent stabilized housing may qualify for this program. SCRIE helps residents with limited means to remain in affordable housing by providing exemptions from rent increases. To qualify, you must be 62 years of age or older, live in a rent-regulated apartment or hotel, have an annual household income of \$27,000 or less, and your rent must represent more than one-third of your total household income. Applications for SCRIE are available by calling 311 or via internet at: www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/html/scrie/tenant_howtoapply.shtml

“Speakers in the Schools” Program Offers Lecturers to Schools:

The New York Council for the Humanities’ “Speakers in the Schools” program offers free lectures by leading scholars on a wide variety of humanities subjects for public and private high school students. This program is made possible through funding by the New York State Legislature. Speakers for a variety of disciplines are available at no charge, and you can search for lectures by subject area on the website, www.nyhumanities.org

Here are a few examples of what you can find on www.lizkrueger.com

...and how to find it!

Featured Items: Under Featured Items you can always find the most recent information, including press releases, links to radio interviews, and articles of interest to my constituents. Among the items currently found under Featured Items is "Albany Wrap Up," a link to my recent appearance on the Brian Lehrer Show.

Animal Rights: Would you like information on some of my efforts, as well as contact information some leading animal rights organizations? Visit my homepage and click on the "issues" bar located on the left hand toolbar. Under "Issues and Policies" you will see "Animal Cruelty and Protection."

Liz in the News: Want to stay up to date on what I am doing? Every time a newspaper or radio station covers my work, I include it in the media section of my website. Visit my homepage and click on the "Press & Media" icon on the right side of the screen, and then click on "Liz in the News."

Community Resources: Would you like the contact information for one of the East Side's Community Boards, websites with voter participation links, and links to some of New York's leading policy, health and wellness, and housing organizations? Visit my homepage and click on "Community Resources" on the left hand toolbar. If you are looking for a partial list of New York's volunteer opportunities, simply scroll down to the bottom of the Community Resources page and click on "Volunteer Opportunities."

If you know of other resources, or have ideas to include, email me at liz@lizkrueger.com

Spotlight on Policy

Reducing the Waste Stream: Styrofoam

Earlier this month, I introduced (S6402), the **Food Service Waste Reduction Act**. The bill is designed to lead to a statewide phase-out of polystyrene products (Styrofoam) in the food service industry. The purpose of this bill is to help New York clean up our waste stream and become a more environmentally sustainable state. We have a real problem with creating far more damaging waste than we should. If we have the ability to create affordable alternatives we should make that leap.

The bill would allow the food service industry one year to find environmentally-friendly alternatives to the Styrofoam products currently in use. It applies to restaurants, as well as food-service providers and vendors, such as supermarkets.

Polystyrene is a liquid hydrocarbon that is commercially manufactured from petroleum, a quickly disappearing commodity. Each year Americans throw away 25 billion Styrofoam cups, or 1,369 tons of Styrofoam products every day. A single Styrofoam cup can take up to 500-years to fully disintegrate.

Styrofoam is a notorious pollutant that is very difficult to recycle due to its light weight and low scrap value. It is generally not accepted in curbside programs, is seldom able to be reused, takes up a considerable amount of space in landfills, and takes a very long time to fully decompose. Due to the physical properties of polystyrene, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) states "that such material can have serious impacts on human health, wildlife, and the aquatic environment" because the product breaks down and can clog waterways, or be mistaken for food by wildlife.

One of Styrofoam's components, styrene, is a known hazardous substance suspected to be a carcinogen and neurotoxin, which release toxins when heated. Many people do not realize that when they re-heat food in a Styrofoam product using a microwave, toxins are released into their food.

The Act includes an "affordability" clause, which recognizes that not every Styrofoam product currently has an environmentally-friendly alternative, and even in some cases where there is such an alternative, the much higher cost would place undue economic hardship on various businesses. Under my bill the state Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) will annually adopt a list of suitable, affordable alternative products that are compostable or recyclable; these alternatives must be within 15% of the cost of non-compostable or non-recyclable products currently in use.

Similar bills have already been enacted in the cities of Oakland, San Francisco, Berkeley, Portland, and about 100 other municipalities across the country. New York could be the first state to enact this legislation.

Not only have many municipalities enacted various versions of this law, but some of the nation's largest food-service providers have already moved in this direction as well. It is critical the New York City find ways to reduce the amount of waste we produce, if we want our city and state to be livable in the future.

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