



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas K. Duane

## Reporting on the End of the Legislative Session

THOMAS K. DUANE June 28, 2012

June 21 marked the official end of the 2012 Legislative Session in Albany -- and my last Session as a New York State Senator. It was a bittersweet moment for me. Together, we have accomplished much during my fourteen years in Albany. Last year's Legislative Session ended with the historic Marriage Equality vote which caused shockwaves around the world. This year's was much more subdued in comparison. While I am deeply disappointed that crucial pieces of legislation did not pass in the Senate, there were some key bills that did pass and will impact the lives of countless New Yorkers.

Here is a brief summary of key pieces of legislation that passed about which I am particularly gratified:

I am pleased to announce the passage of legislation, introduced by New York State Senator Daniel Squadron and New York State Assembly Speaker Silver, which will create a permitting system for intercity buses in New York City. I and many of my constituents provided input on this legislation, which will grant New York City the authority to regulate the industry and to designate pick-up and drop-off locations. This will eliminate the current double and triple parking by operators such as Bolt Bus and Megabus, and reduce the chronic blockage of our sidewalks and intersections which force pedestrians to walk in the streets.

One of my proudest moments in the State Senate was the passage of my comprehensive anti-bullying bill, The *Dignity for All Students Act (DASA)* in 2010. This year the Senate and Assembly passed legislation which will add an additional education and reporting component to help prevent cyber-bullying. I am pleased that the legislature decided to amplify the scope of *DASA* instead of creating stiff criminal penalties *after* an incident of cyber-bullying occurs -- which does nothing to thwart the root causes of bullying and harassment.

New York State has an obligation and a duty to protect its most vulnerable citizens. In light of the longstanding problems and mistreatment of developmentally disabled persons in the State's system of care, I was pleased to vote for legislation which creates a new state agency called the "Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Rights and Needs." The new agency will serve as a central clearinghouse to oversee and investigate incidents of abuse and insure that the terrible problems of the past are not repeated.

After negotiations appeared stalled, the Senate and Assembly decided to pass Governor Andrew Cuomo's teacher evaluation proposal which would allow parents and legal guardians the right to view teacher evaluations. The bill also provides for limited disclosure for those in the general public -- but without the names of teachers. I voted for this measure because I believe it strikes a reasonable balance. Mayor Bloomberg, who believed the evaluations should be fully available to anyone, stalled the bill and eventually tried, unsuccessfully, to kill it in the State Senate. Governor Cuomo has already signed the legislation into law.

Not all the news from the end of the Session was good, however. I am distressed that on the

final day of Session, Governor Cuomo refused to allow a vote on a package of housing legislation that included renewal of New York City's property tax abatement for hundreds of thousands of condominium and co-op owners. I have long been aware that homeowners in co-ops and condos pay more than their fair share of property taxes and I have consistently acted to mitigate this inequity. The Legislature and Governor Cuomo must return to Albany before the end of the year to address this serious issue.

It is also unconscionable that the Legislature and the Governor did not work together to strengthen tenant rights and protect our ever shrinking affordable housing stock. As I have long said, we must be passionate in our fight for Campaign Finance Reform since it is the only way we will be able to fight the power of the landlords who spend millions filling the campaign coffers of the Senate Republicans.

Further, the Senate Republicans refused to consider (or even debate) many important pieces of legislation such as raising the minimum wage, creating a permanent ban on hydrofracking, protecting women's health and their right to choose with the *Reproductive Health Act*, enacting the *Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act (GENDA)*, decriminalizing possession of small amounts of marijuana, insuring undocumented students get the chance for an education with the *DREAM Act* and making our streets safer by mandating the micro-stamping of bullets. Again, I remain firmly committed to these issues and will fight for these crucial pieces of legislation before my tenure in the State Senate ends on January 1.

This is just a brief summary of the major bills that did or did not pass during the final weeks of the Legislative Session. Over the course of June, hundreds of bills were passed in the State Senate. Some of these bills will become law, while others, not considered by the Assembly, will more than likely die for the remainder of the year. 2012 is also unique in that many major pieces of legislation such as Legislative Redistricting, Tier VI pension reform, a

major expansion of the State's DNA Database, the framework for the teachers' evaluation system and the start of the Casino gambling process were all passed in March during the Budget season. Because I have previously reported on these regrettable items, I will not repeat my criticisms here.

If you have any questions or concerns concerning the 2012 Legislative Session, please do not hesitate to contact my office.