



Legislative Update

from Assemblymember Ellen Jaffee

SUMMER 2015

Dear Neighbors,

This year the Assembly made history, electing New York State's first African-American Speaker, Carl Heastie (D-Bronx.) As Chair of the Labor Committee, he has been a strong advocate for working families, focusing on increasing the minimum wage, equal pay, and family leave.

The 2015 legislative session was challenging, especially given the proposed education reforms focused on policy and tied to funding that were included in the budget process and the final budget bill. My Assembly colleagues and I fought hard, negotiating revisions to these proposals, winning some concessions as well as additional funding for our public schools.

This newsletter provides in-depth information about the final budget, education, childcare, women's health and more. You can also read about what we accomplished as a community working together to preserve Rockland's rich cultural heritage.

If you would like additional information on topics covered in this newsletter or to sign up for my e-mail newsletter, please visit my Assembly website: <http://assembly.state.ny.us/mem/Ellen-Jaffee>. Phone my office at 845-624-4601 or email me at jaffee@assembly.state.ny.us. I look forward to hearing your thoughts and concerns

Wishing you a happy and safe Labor Day.

Ellen C. Jaffee
NYS Assemblymember, 97th District

Speaking Out on East Ramapo: Assembly Passes Jaffee State Monitor Bill

Oversight of the school board by a state monitor was the primary recommendation made by Fiscal Monitor Hank Greenberg in his report. The bill (A.5355), which I sponsored with Assemblymember Ken Zebrowski, included that strong oversight and

passed the Assembly with bi-partisan support. However, a change to new bill (S.5974) was offered by the Senate that significantly weakened the monitor's role and powers. (Continued top p. 2)



In Albany and Spring Valley, advocates rallied for oversight in East Ramapo urging legislators in both the Assembly and the Senate to pass my bill.

Assembly and Senate Pass Jaffee Edward Hopper Citation of Merit Bill

Named for Nyack's own Edward Hopper, this legislation creates the Citation of Merit which will recognize a distinguished visual artist who is making significant contributions to the advancement of the arts in New York State. Considered the State Visual Artist and awarded an honorarium of \$10,000, the artist will give two public showings within the state, one at the Edward Hopper House

Art Center in Nyack.

Hopper's enormous contribution to art and the course of art history, here in America and around the world, has made the Hopper House a cultural hub for the Rockland County community as well as a tourist destination, bringing visitors and boosting our local economy. The bill (A.2121/S.4235) awaits the Governor's signature.

ASSEMBLYMEMBER ELLEN C. JAFFEE

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Fighting for Teachers, Public School Students, and Equal Opportunities

“As a strong advocate for public education, I believe that all children, no matter their background or income level, from Pre-K through college, are entitled to a quality education. Funding public education is a top priority because everyone benefits. I stand committed to increasing funding for education, improving our schools, and reducing the shameful inequality that exists in school districts across our state, so that all children are given the best possible opportunities to learn, to succeed, to become all they are capable of being.”

East Ramapo (con't)

We did our best to negotiate with Senate leadership, but the newly proposed legislation would appoint a monitor whose powers duplicated those already given to the State Education Department. The Senate leadership also refused to bring its bill to the floor for a vote, failing the public school students of East Ramapo.

Those of us elected to serve in the Legislature are charged with ensuring that the public school students of East Ramapo get the quality education our state constitution guarantees them. After session adjourned, I met with the new Education Commissioner, Mary Ellen Elia, who said, “No question, we will take action.” Over the years in conversations with the Comptroller and his staff, I discussed and reviewed in detail the audits that addressed the poor financial practices in the district. I have now called for a forensic audit. I am more determined than ever to work with the Education Commissioner, the State Education Department, and the Board of Regents to provide a reasonable, long term-solution for East Ramapo that will include strong, real time oversight and re-establish trust in the school board while addressing the unique needs within the district.



I was honored to sponsor Judith Johnson who was elected to fill a vacant position on the NYS Board of Regents representing the 9th Judicial District. She has taken on this new role with grace and gusto, issuing a white paper with six of her colleagues, which stated that they support a delay in implementation of the new APPR regulations, a dramatically reduced role for test scores in teacher evaluations, a review of the APPR system, and a review and revision of the Common Core. She has also been working with key leaders to address the serious issues in the East Ramapo School District.

Education Reforms: More focus on learning rather than testing

Addressing the concerns of parents and teachers, the Assembly passed legislation that will help teachers better prepare students for certain standardized exams. In addition, teachers, principals and Superintendents will no longer be required to enter into confidentiality agreements preventing them from discussing the contents of these exams after the exams have been publicly released. The State Education Department (SED) will:

- release more questions and answers from standardized English language arts and math tests for Grades 3 - 8, giving teachers more information to use in the classroom
- establish a content review committee to ensure those exams are fair and grade level-appropriate

Plans for new teacher evaluations will also take into account certain factors that can affect student performance, including poverty, status as an English language learner, disability and prior academic history.

Revisions of the Teacher-Evaluation Law (APPR)

I am a co-sponsor of a bill (A.7303A/Nolan) that would extend the deadline for the adoption of a new APPR system until November 15, 2016. The extension would allow schools sufficient time to carefully consider input from educators, administrators, and other stakeholders in order to properly implement a new evaluation system. This bill would also de-couple school aid and the implementation of the new APPR system. Unfortunately, the bill did not have a Senate sponsor, leaving our schools in the difficult position of implementing a new APPR system by the November deadline or risk losing their state funding. To help our schools, my colleagues and I voiced our concerns to the Regents, who were able to create a four month “hardship waiver.” The waivers will be renewable for four-month periods. This is significant since the first waiver would not require implementation of a new APPR system until the 2016-17 school year. Also, there will be no cap on the number of school districts that may be granted hardship extensions.

Did you know? The State Education Department has hired a new firm that will utilize teacher input to develop math and English tests in Grades 3-8. This will help ensure that exams are fair, grade-level appropriate and a good measure of student performance.

Education in the Budget: *Investing in Pre-K, Public Schools, and Public Higher Education:*

The final budget the Assembly negotiated helped restore much-needed funding for our public schools and public higher education system.

- Increases Pre-K funding for 3- and 4-year-olds
- \$1.6 billion increase in education aid, including \$1.3 billion in direct formula aid to schools
- \$19 million increase to support grants, including aid for libraries and teacher centers
- Implements the Assembly’s Higher Education Road to Success to ease barriers to college
- Increases support for SUNY Community Colleges like RCC, including a 20 percent increase to opportunity programs at SUNY
- Increases library aid from \$5M to \$91.6M, and eliminates the MTA library tax because libraries are education

Rejecting the Education Investment Tax Credit/Parental Choice in Education Act

I strongly opposed this legislation. If it had passed, it would have diverted hundreds of millions of dollars in state funding and given huge tax breaks to the wealthiest New Yorkers who made donations to support private schools. While I respect the right of parents to choose the school they feel is most appropriate for their child, I have consistently opposed this legislation. To read more about why I voted “no” you can visit my Assembly website and click on News Room then Press Releases.

Highlights from the 2015 Legislative Session

Eyes and Ears of the People

I am grateful to Speaker Heastie for giving me the opportunity to lead the Standing Committee on Oversight, Analysis and Investigation. The Committee's mission includes strengthening state accountability and efficiency, while protecting the disadvantaged and underserved; ensuring that state agencies and programs function effectively; and reviewing whether state laws are being followed. On October 1st, I will be holding a round table in Rockland County to look at Early Intervention programs and data.

Safe, Reliable Child Care for Working Families

I am also pleased to announce my appointment to the Assembly Child Care Workgroup reconvened by Speaker Heastie to address the child care crisis facing New York's working families, particularly working mothers.

Assembly Passes Reproductive Health Act

The bill (A.6221/Glick) that I co-sponsored would protect access to women's reproductive health services and codifies into state law the reproductive rights women have had under federal law since the passage of Roe v. Wade in 1973. This is the third time the bill has passed the Assembly. The Senate has pushed back against calls to bring its bill (S.4432/Stewart-Cousins) to the Senate floor for a vote.



I sponsored a resolution proclaiming the second week of May Women's Lung Health Week and met with American Lung Association advocates and Tappan Zee High School students to help lead the fight against lung cancer, the number one cancer killer of women. To learn more and join the movement visit: www.lungforce.org.

Boss Bill Banning Employer Discrimination Passes Assembly, Senate Votes No

The Boss Bill, (A.1142-A/S.2709-A), which I sponsored, would ban employers from discriminating against employees on the basis of their personal reproductive health decisions. Sen. Liz Krueger, the bill's Senate sponsor said, "I congratulate Assembly Member Jaffee and her colleagues on the bill's passage." The bill did not pass the Senate for the second time.

Jaffee Bill Gives Tax Exemption for Residential and Commercial Geothermal Installations

My bill (A.25508) will provide a state sales tax exemption for residential and commercial GHP installations, which provide ultra-efficient heating, cooling and hot water for buildings by using the near constant temperature of the ground as a heat source in the winter and as a heat sink in the summer, reducing the need for carbon-based energy sources. Eliminating the sales and use tax for both the purchase and installation of geothermal systems makes them more affordable for New Yorkers. Investing in renewable energy is a smart investment — in our children's future and the future of our increasingly fragile planet. This bill awaits the Governor's signature.

Desal Update: Calling for Public Hearing, Telling the PSC No Surcharge

Rockland won a remarkable victory when the Public Service Commission decided against United Water's (UWNY) proposed desalination plant. In 2014, (PSC) also denied a request by (UWNY) to impose a surcharge on Rockland County ratepayers of almost \$60 million to cover its planning costs—even though it never even broke ground on the proposal. Unfortunately, the PSC's decision left the door open for (UWNY) to come back and seek to recoup up to \$45 million for a failed project, but our grassroots efforts continue. Like so many of you who signed the Rockland Water Coalition's petition, I wrote a letter to the PSC Commissioner requesting a public hearing on the surcharge.

Ellen Jaffee Fights for Working Families in 2015 State Budget

Investing in Families and Children

High-quality, affordable child care is a top priority. The final budget makes smart investments in child care and early childhood education, as well as in vital programs and services to support families and our most vulnerable.

- Increases funding to improve our child care system and ensure every family has access to child care
- Expands eligibility for child care assistance to working families with incomes up to 275 percent of the federal poverty level, allowing more parents to stay employed while their children are cared for
- Funds the Kinship Caregiver Program to help caregivers access health, education, financial, and legal services for children in their care
- Funds the Displaced Homemaker Program to provide counseling and job training to homemakers helping them become economically independent
- Increases funding for Non-Residential Domestic Violence Services to assist domestic violence victims

Investing in Economic Development and Job Creation

The final budget builds on the progress we've made to strengthen New York's economy and keep the momentum going.

- Funding for the Veterans Entrepreneurial Assistance Program to provide veterans the training they need to start a new business
- Additional funding for the Minority- and Women-Owned Business Development and Lending Program
- Additional funding for the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to strengthen small-businesses in our community

Investing in Quality, Affordable Health Care

Thanks to the federal Affordable Care Act (ACA), 2 million New Yorkers now have health insurance through the state's health care exchange. To ensure even more New Yorkers can afford health care, the final budget implements the Basic Health Program, which would be available under the ACA.

- Expands affordable health insurance to approximately 438,000 New Yorkers
- Provides insurance to people whose incomes are between 133 and 200 percent of the federal poverty level and are therefore not eligible for Medicaid
- Restores \$78.9 million to Medicaid, and \$10.7 million to preserve spousal refusal, which protects couples from losing their life savings in the event that a spouse requires long-term care
- Makes a strong commitment to vital public health programs



Toni Morrison Society Bench by the Road Project

I was proud to recognize on the Assembly floor, the Nyack Bench By The Road Commemoration Committee who were dedicated to creating a permanent memorial to honor the presence and contributions of African Americans to Nyack and to the surrounding Rockland community. The Nyack Bench will honor Cynthia Hesdra, a former slave, entrepreneur and abolitionist who lived in Nyack.

Tax Relief for Middle-Class Families and Seniors

Property tax rebate checks will put money back in the pockets of Rockland homeowners

- Rebates will be in addition to homeowners' School Tax Relief (STAR) benefits and are contingent upon schools and municipalities staying within the 2 percent property tax cap, which has saved taxpayers over \$7 billion and will be extended for another four years
- Senior citizens in the enhanced (STAR) program will receive the property tax rebates, which will increase to 34 percent of their current savings over the next four years.
- After the first year, the program will operate like my "circuit breaker" legislation (A.7673) that creates an income-based tax "circuit breaker" that lowers homeowners' tax bills while protecting quality education. The new rebates will be based on a household's annual income for families earning up to \$275,000.
- A program created last year will send a second rebate check in 2016 to residents whose school district and municipality take steps to reduce costs and adhere to the 2 percent tax cap.

Hillburn School Listed on State Register of Historic Places

In June the New York State Board for Historic Preservation voted to list the Hillburn School on the State Register of Historic Places. Hillburn's Main School, one of the last formally segregated schools in New York State, is significant as the focus of the prominent 1943 school desegregation battle fought by the late Supreme Court Justice, Thurgood Marshall. About seven years ago, brothers of the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity and members of the NAACP met with me to discuss their many efforts around the recognition of Thurgood Marshall and the significance of the Main School. I am continuing our work to have the school listed on the National Register as well. Listing in the registers provides recognition of our national, state, and local heritage and assistance in preserving it.



Rockland Seniors Take Action

Meeting with Diana Adele Pomeroy, (l-r) President of the NY State Wide Senior Action Council, Inc.'s Rockland County Chapter, Anna Stellwag, Treasurer and Acting Vice-President, and member Marsha Gordon. If you have questions about your rights as a health care consumer in a hospital, nursing home or through home care, you can call StateWide's Helpline: 800-333-4374.



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I enjoyed shopping at the Spring Valley Farmers Market, where I held Community Office Hours.



Haitian Unity Day Parade

It was wonderful to be at the parade in Spring Valley with my Director of Constituent and Support Services, Rose Leandre, who was the Grand Marshal. The annual gathering celebrates Haitian culture in Rockland County.

Please don't hesitate to contact my office if Rose can assist you in any way.

COMMUNITY OFFICE HOURS Keep an eye on Facebook and Twitter for Ellen in your neighborhood!