



Legislative Update

from Assemblymember Ellen Jaffee

SPRING 2016

Dear Neighbors,

The Assembly Majority has continually led the way on investing in education, increasing access to quality affordable child care, raising the minimum wage, paid family leave, economic justice, and women's full equality.

The 2016 Assembly's Families First budget presented a comprehensive set of proposals to provide equal economic opportunities for all New Yorkers, create jobs, and strengthen the State's vital infrastructure. This includes a plan to lift up struggling families by enacting a \$15 minimum wage and 12 weeks of paid family leave. The full Legislature must work together to get the job of good government done, enhancing the economic well-being, and quality of life for everyone in Rockland County and across the state.

This newsletter provides more in-depth information about my legislative priorities and what we have accomplished as a community working together.

If you would like additional information on topics in this newsletter, or to sign up for my e-news, 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.

Best wishes,

Ellen C. Jaffee
NYS Assemblymember, 97th District

Welcoming Speaker Heastie

The Assembly made history last year, electing New York State's first African-American Speaker, Carl Heastie (D-Bronx.) I had the distinct pleasure of welcoming the Speaker to my district on a beautiful fall day. We visited the Tappan Zee Bridge viewing platform in Memorial Park, Nyack Center, the Suffern Squires Gate Community, West Street Child Care Learning Center, and Spring Valley High School, where we were joined by Assemblyman Zebrowski, East Ramapo Monitor, Dennis Walcott; NYS Regent, Judith Johnson; School Board President, Yehuda Weissmandl and Principal, Karen Pinel. It was a terrific opportunity to

tour our diverse community, discuss issues of concern, share what we have accomplished with Capitol Project Funding, and state the need for future funding of additional Capital Projects, included in the state budget, that is so critical to improving our quality of life.



Visiting East Ramapo and Nyack Center.

PSC Rejects Suez Desalination Proposal Rockland Moves Ahead with Conservation Planning

Rockland won a major victory for ratepayers and our environment with the defeat of a massive desalination project proposed for the Hudson River. In December 2015, the Public Service Commission (PSC) rejected the desalination proposal from Suez Water NY (formerly United Water) that would have drawn Rockland's

drinking water from the Hudson. The PSC decision ordered the company to move ahead with far less costly and less harmful water supply sources.

In response to the PSC Order, on February 26, Suez filed a new case, which includes a water conservation plan, a proposal for water

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ASSEMBLYMEMBER ELLEN C. JAFFEE

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Assemblymember Ellen Jaffee: Supporting Fairness and

“The number of students in our classrooms, the quality of our curriculum, programs, and support services, must be held to the highest standards. If we do not provide adequate funding for our public education system, from pre-K through college, we compromise our children’s future and the future of New York State. In our competitive global economy, we must provide each and every student with an equal, high-quality education that will prepare them for good jobs and successful careers.”

East Ramapo Monitor’s Report

I want to thank the Monitors, Dennis M. Walcott, Dr. John W. Sipple, and Monica George-Fields, for presenting a comprehensive plan with 19 specific recommendations that address the serious issues impacting the East Ramapo School District. As Dr. Sipple noted, the issues facing the District are not about individuals, they are institutional and require streamlining District operations to increase efficiency and transparency. The Monitor’s recommendations include the need for oversight by a monitor, just as Hank Greenberg called for in his report. Clearly, the State needs to provide dollars to the District but we must also ensure responsible oversight. I am currently working with my colleagues to ensure these recommendations become a reality.

Meeting with East Ramapo full-day kindergarten advocates (l to r) Romel Alvarez, Amelia White, and Tammy Goss.



Legislation for Full-Day Kindergarten

As a co-sponsor of (A.8692), I strongly support a fully-funded, full-day kindergarten program for the 9 remaining school districts in NYS, including East Ramapo and North Rockland, with half-day programs. Our young learners in these districts lose the equivalent of 90 days of school. This legislation would provide school districts increased funding to transition to a full-day program and reflects the importance of early childhood education, as well as the need for programs that include additional time for play-centered learning.

Mark Your Calendar: Hillburn School Historic Site Dedication

Please join us on **Sunday, May 15 at 2:00 p.m.** as we celebrate the listing of the Hillburn School on both the National and State Register of Historic Places. The dedication ceremony will commemorate the brave women, men, and students of Hillburn, NY who stood up in 1943 to fight with Thurgood Marshall for the integration of the Main and Brook Schools. Listing in the registers provides recognition of our national, state, and local heritage and assistance in preserving it.

Opposing the Education Investment Incentives Act (A.2551)

I have consistently opposed this legislation since it was first introduced in the 2015 Executive Budget. It would divert hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars from the General Fund that supports public schools and services and give huge tax breaks to the wealthiest New Yorkers who make donations to private schools. While I respect the right of parents to choose the school they feel is most appropriate for their child, the tax credit would become nothing more than a voucher system. To read more about why I voted “no” in 2015, you can visit my Assembly website and click on News Room, then Press Releases.

Revising Common Core Standards

Last fall, a Common Core Taskforce was created in response to the overwhelming number of educators, parents, and professionals who were concerned about the rushed implementation of Common Core, the number of tests students are required to take, the grade levels being tested, and how much time is spent preparing for and taking these tests. I share these concerns. The Taskforce recommended revising the State’s learning standards. It is crucial that during this revision process we engage parents, students, educators, and the community to ensure New York creates the most effective standards for assessing and encouraging student learning.

Education in 2016 Budget *Investing in Public Schools, Investing in our Future*

The Assembly Education Proposal reflects an investment of an additional \$1.2 billion over the Executive Proposal. The State estimated \$5.4 billion surplus should be invested in our public schools so that every school has the resources it needs to support teachers and give students the education they deserve. That’s why I have called for:

- \$2.4 billion in education funding for the 2016-17 school year
- Fully eliminating the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA)
- Increasing the Foundation Aid formula
- Modifying the near 0 percent tax cap
- Funding our Teacher Centers



Reading to 3rd graders at Margetts Elementary School in Chestnut Ridge.

and Equal Opportunities, Working to Make a Difference

Raise the Minimum Wage in NY State

With income inequality increasing, low-wage workers are struggling to make ends meet. The Assembly majority has long led the fight for fair wages; we support increasing the minimum wage to \$15. Women represent nearly two-thirds of minimum wage workers and twenty-two percent of minimum wage workers are women of color. Increasing the minimum wage will help families provide for their children, close the gender wage gap, and reduce poverty. The more money that hardworking people take home in their paychecks, the more money they have to spend in their own communities, supporting small businesses, and boosting our local economies.

Assembly Passes Paid Family Leave

I was proud to stand with Congresswoman Nita Lowey, Assemblyman Ken Zebrowski, and the Rockland community at a rally for Paid Family Leave. Caring for a newborn, an aging parent, or a seriously ill family member can cause tremendous stress on the family without the financial worry that unpaid leave can produce. The Assembly has passed legislation (A-3870-A) that would provide New York's working families with 12 weeks of job-protected leave funded through a small employee contribution. It's time for the Senate to act.



Early Intervention Roundtable

Early Intervention Programs are essential for infants and young children to address developmental delays and disabilities at a critical time in their young lives. In 2013, the NYS Early Intervention Program (EI) transitioned to using third-party "fiscal agents" in the collection of payments for EI services. Early Intervention Providers across the state have contacted me regarding the challenges they are facing with this new system. As Chair of the Assembly Standing Committee on Oversight, Analysis and Investigation (OAI), it was my goal to identify precisely where problems in the system might exist, how the providers are impacted, and what the Assembly can do to respond to these serious issues.



Access to Quality Child Care for Working Families

Quality child care creates family and workplace stability. As a member of the Assembly Workgroup on Child Care, I participated in a roundtable discussion regarding the establishment of the market rate in our state and the rate of subsidy reimbursement that is necessary to provide quality child care for low-income working families. Both federal and New York State law require that child care subsidies are available to eligible families.

STAR Update

I strongly oppose the Governor's budget proposals that would alter the STAR property tax relief program, converting STAR from a property tax deduction to an income tax credit, and freezing the STAR exemption benefit on basic and enhanced STAR.

STAR is a crucial investment that helps older adults and middle class families shoulder the burden of school property taxes. As we enter into budget negotiations, I will fight to protect property tax payers, as the Assembly majority successfully did last year.

Statewide Seniors

I met with Diane Adele Pomeroy, President of NY StateWide Senior Action Council, Rockland (left) and Vivian DeGroot to discuss the Governor's proposed budget, its impact on seniors, and the work we must continue doing together.



I won't stop until New York State's women have full equality, including equal pay for equal work and access to reproductive health services that women have had under federal law since the passage of Roe v. Wade in 1973.

Close Indian Point Power Plant

I remain concerned about the alarming increase in radioactive water that recently leaked into the groundwater from three wells at the Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant. My primary concern is the impact this tritium-contaminated water may have on public health and safety and on our environment. The recent release of radioactive water is not the first or the first time Entergy's operation and maintenance have failed. This failure only underscores the fact that Indian Point cannot continue to operate as it has since 2007 when the re-licensing case began. I will continue to express my vocal opposition to the re-licensing of this aging and dangerous power plant at the NRC Government to Government meeting, and I urge you to speak out at the NRC public hearing on June 8.



HALT Solitary Confinement in New York State. I stood with advocates to urge passage of the (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act (A.4401) that I co-sponsored. In New York's prisons and jails, thousands are held in cells the size of an elevator for 22 to 24 hours a day, the majority for non-violent rule violations. People of color are sent to solitary in disproportionate numbers. The HALT Act would end solitary confinement in the state and create more humane and effective alternatives.

Raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility

I strongly support raising the age of criminal responsibility to 18. New York is one of only two states in the nation that prosecutes all youth as adults when they turn 16, failing to recognize what research and science have confirmed—children 16 or 17 who are placed in the adult criminal justice system and prosecuted as adults are more likely to commit future crimes.

Eighty percent of children sentenced to adult incarceration are black and Latino. Youth incarcerated in adult facilities are more likely to suffer physical and emotional abuse. Raising the age of criminal responsibility will improve both outcomes for these children and public safety.

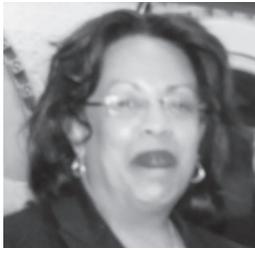
Economic Development and Job Creation

I have initiated meetings and dialogue on a number of issues to increase economic development and job creation opportunities in our district including:

- Improving funding for childcare facilities to support higher wages and employee retention;
- Meeting with Cejjes Institute to explore financial literacy and small business development programs;
- Focusing on MWBE opportunities for Rockland's small businesses.

Leading by Example

Recently, we lost four key figures in our community: Dr. Willie Bryant, Patricia Simmons, Brenda Atkins, Dr. Susan Gordon, and Dieula "Erla" Lemoine. Their lives were characterized by community activism, public service, and a deep commitment to social, political, and economic justice. I am honored and humbled to have worked closely with them. They will be greatly missed but they will always be remembered for their vision, dedication, and exceptional leadership. On behalf of the many people whose lives they touched and the community they served, I salute them.



Clockwise from top left: Dieula "Erla" Lemoine, Brenda Atkins, Pat Simmons, Dr. Susan Gordon, and Dr. Bryant.

PSC Rejects Suez Desalination Proposal *(from page 1)*

rates to encourage water conservation, and a plan for repair of leaks. The Suez case also includes a request to collect \$54 million spent for its failed desalination project. The PSC has, unfortunately, already approved \$38 million of this surcharge. I am troubled by the impact of this surcharge and additional rate increases on ratepayers.

I will continue advocating for fair and affordable water rates and to be sure that the company's plan is strong enough to lay the right groundwork for far less expensive alternatives to desalination.

I strongly support the work of the Rockland County Task Force on Water Resources Management. You will be hearing more about the Task Force this spring, as it moves ahead with its work to encourage residents and businesses to be mindful of our precious water resources, with water conservation and efficiency.



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No TZ Bridge Toll Increases in 2016

I have adamantly opposed doubling or tripling bridge tolls. During a budget meeting in Albany, NYS Thruway Authority officials announced that tolls on the Tappan Zee Bridge would not increase in 2016 and that a special seven-member advisory panel would recommend by the middle of next year, whether to raise tolls for the New NY Bridge. I will continue working with my colleagues to ensure toll increases are minimal and affordable.

COMMUNITY OFFICE HOURS

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