

**AGENDA FOR CHANGE: AN ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER  
ST. LAWRENCE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST DISTRICT  
JUNE 2008**

Dick Gilbert - SLUUD Social Justice Coordinator ([rsgilbert@uuma.org](mailto:rsgilbert@uuma.org))  
(Deadline for Mid-summer issue is July 31)

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**SOCIAL JUSTICE EVENTS CALENDAR**

**June 25-29:** UUA General Assembly - [www.UUA.org](http://www.UUA.org).  
**July 28-August 3:** Leadership Team Institute – [www.uulti.org](http://www.uulti.org)  
**October 4:** "Politics & Liberal Religious Values: Campaign 2008" - St. Lawrence  
District Social Justice Conference in Schenectady (see flyer below)  
**October 11:** NYS Convention of Universalists – Charlie Clements of UUSC keynote  
speaker at UU Fellowship of Poughkeepsie, NY – [www.nyscu.org](http://www.nyscu.org)

**SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL SERVICES**

If you would like to be on the E-mail list for this Newsletter or if you change your address or if you have newsletter items, please contact Dick Gilbert at [Rsgilbert@uuma.org](mailto:Rsgilbert@uuma.org). In addition to the annual social justice conference and the *Agenda for Change* newsletter, the Social Justice Council offers the services of Dick Gilbert to preach, lecture and/or lead social justice workshops or consult on social justice organization and issues. Contact [Rsgilbert@uuma.org](mailto:Rsgilbert@uuma.org) or 585-244-7403.

**SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL NEWS**

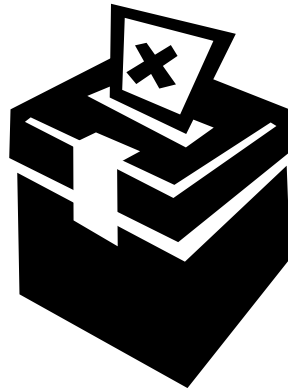
*Agenda for Change* issues are all posted on the new St. Lawrence District website: [www.sld.uua.org](http://www.sld.uua.org). Our current brochure and other social justice information are there as well. There will be a mid-summer issue coming out in August. Deadline for that issue is July 31. Send material to [Rsgilbert@uuma.org](mailto:Rsgilbert@uuma.org).

The Social Justice Council presented a workshop April 26 at the St. Lawrence District Assembly in Owego: ***Democracy as a Religious Principle: UU Values in the 2008 Election***. To access "The Real Rules," a summary of the IRS rules on what churches can and cannot do in the 2008 election, a major topic of discussion, go to [www.uua.org/documents/washingtonoffice/real\\_rules.pdf](http://www.uua.org/documents/washingtonoffice/real_rules.pdf).



**The St. Lawrence Unitarian Universalist District  
Social Justice Council Presents**

## **POLITICS AND LIBERAL RELIGIOUS VALUES CAMPAIGN 2008**



**October 4, 2008—9:30am to 4pm**  
First Unitarian Society of Schenectady

**Theme Speaker – BLAIR HORNER**  
Legislative Director  
New York Public Interest Group

This third annual conference will feature Blair Horner, Legislative Director of the New York Public Interest Research Group. He has held this position for 21 years, interrupted only by a stint in Attorney General Andrew Cuomo's office to create Project Sunlight, an interactive website that allows New Yorkers to learn more about state politics. He has been a driving force behind NYPIRG's successful campaigns to protect consumers, preserve the environment, reduce tobacco use, reform and make government more accountable, improve healthcare quality and provide the public with information on how state government works. See the next page for more on Blair Horner.

In addition to the theme talk there will be a responder panel, a question and answer period and topical workshops. This will be an opportunity for social justice people to consider the implications of their faith in a critical election year. Further information and registration to follow. See our website at [www.sld.uua.org](http://www.sld.uua.org).

### WHO IS BLAIR HORNER?

Excerpts from "Public Lives: Battling Buffoonery in Albany (It's Full-Time Work)"  
By Shaila K. Dewan, *New York Times* July 11, 2002

Blair Horner is the chief lobbyist for the New York Public Interest Research Group, a nonpartisan consumer group. As such, he is the quintessential "goo-goo." That is short for "good government" - and it can apply to an advocate, watchdog, gadfly, or, sometimes, nut case. In the State Capitol, the goo-goos serve an important function: they watch, literally and sometimes late into the night, what the government is doing.

Few goo-goos have been around as long as Mr. Horner, but he is neither rabid nor wheedling. When reporters are baffled by the machinations of Albany, there's often one answer: "Ask Blair." He doesn't always have the answer, but he can be counted on for what he calls his gallows humor.

With little money at his disposal, he fights buffoonery with the burlesque. When the Legislature proposed a redistricting plan intended to protect incumbents, Mr. Horner called a news conference. At the end, he lifted his arm and dropped the district maps into an empty waste bin with a thud. The message? "Can the plan."

He battles Albany's "three men in a room" style of government by talking to anyone who will listen, from newspaper editorial boards to the Albany Jewish Community Center. He builds coalitions shamelessly, signing up doctors to fight the tobacco industry, and business groups to fight doctors, as he did to close loopholes in state disciplinary procedures.

UNLIKE some paid lobbyists, Mr. Horner cannot command an audience with Albany's three most powerful politicians: the governor, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Joseph L. Bruno, the Republican Senate leader. "I don't know how seriously he's taken by the three parties," says Tom Precious, a reporter for *The Buffalo News* who has been covering Albany for 12 years. "I think they're dismissive, but I think they realize that he has very good entrée into the press corps. That's where his power is."

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St. Lawrence District Social Justice Council addendum:

In February, Blair Horner was appointed by Attorney General Andrew Cuomo as Special Advisor on Policy and Public Integrity, where he developed "Project Sunlight," New York State's first-ever comprehensive Internet database tracking donors, lobbyists, special interests, state contracts, and elected officials, and the links between them. He has also been named one of the "25 most influential New Yorkers in the last 25 years" by *Empire State Reports* magazine.

Blair Horner will be the featured speaker at the St. Lawrence District Social Justice Council Conference (see page 2), October 4 at the First Unitarian Society of Schenectady.

### **IINYS/RJV Advocacy Day: A Report**

Some 40 people from Interfaith Impact of NYS and Reform Jewish Voice attended a legislative briefing and dinner at the First Lutheran Church of Albany, Sunday, May 18, in preparation for Advocacy Day, Monday, May 19. Speakers included Carol Blowers, Vice President of Government Affairs, Family Planning Advocates of New York State; Andrew Coates, MD, Secretary of the Capital District chapter of Physicians for a National Health Program; Ross Levi, Esq., Director of Public Policy and Education for Empire State Pride Agenda; and Demi McGuire, Director of the NYS Episcopal Public Policy Network.

Seventy attended Advocacy Day. After an orientation to faith-based advocacy, Assemblyman Jack McEneny discussed the impact of religious communities on legislators and legislation. Participants then formed teams led by an experienced advocate and met with state legislators and other key policy makers, leaving IINYS and RJV position papers in offices. Appointments had been made in advance by IINYS and RJV. Teams followed their visits with written communications, thanking legislators for their time and reiterating IINYS and RJV positions. Primary issues were: reproductive choice, marriage equality for same gender couples, the Healthy Teens Act and universal health care. Position papers and tips on faith-based advocacy are available on the Interfaith IMPACT of NYS website: [www.interfaithimpactnys.org](http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org) or contact Robb Smith at [robbsmith@nycap.rr.com](mailto:robbsmith@nycap.rr.com). See the discussion of these and other issues for follow-up action – the legislature will adjourn the third week in June.

## **NEW YORK STATE ISSUES**

### **Death Penalty Action Alert**

Please take a moment to get in touch with your State Senator and let them know that you do not want them to vote to reinstate the **death penalty** in New York State. And - if you have a bit more time, please also let Senators Dale Volker and Martin Goldin (sponsors of the bills) know you do not support this legislation. Senate bills S.4632 and S6414 would allow those convicted of first degree murder to be sentenced to death. Since 2004 when the court nullified the capital punishment law, the State Senate has passed a death penalty bill, but the Assembly has not allowed them out of committee. For more information contact Ann Brandon, LWVNYS Specialist, Capital Punishment – [ambrandon2@verizon.net](mailto:ambrandon2@verizon.net) or Demi McGuire, NYS Episcopal Public Policy Network, [nyseppn@aol.com](mailto:nyseppn@aol.com), 518 339-5040

### **Reproductive Health and Privacy Protection Act**

Former Governor Spitzer introduced this bill S.6045a (Stewart-Cousins) which would provide Roe v. Wade type protections for women seeking abortions in New York State. Given the precarious balance of the U.S. Supreme Court and the danger that *Roe v. Wade* could be overturned, it is important to provide reproductive freedom for NYS

women. The Reproductive Health and Privacy Protection Act will protect the right to elect or forgo contraception and abortion in NYS. The Act would move current statutes (passed in 1970) from the criminal code to the public health code. Under present NYS law a woman is allowed a third-trimester abortion only if her **life** is in danger. The RHPPA would add **health** to the law. Religious freedom for individuals and religious hospitals is guaranteed. (Editor's note: As one who participated in the Clergy Consultation Service on Problem Pregnancies (aka CCS on Abortion), I have a personal interest in this legislation. The pre-1970 atmosphere for abortion counseling was chilling, to say the least. We cannot afford to return to those days.)

For further information contact - Family Planning Advocates

17 Elk Street - Albany, NY 12207

Phone: 518-436-8408 – FAX 518-436-0004 – [www.fpaofnys.org](http://www.fpaofnys.org)

### **Marriage Equality: A Progress Report and Call for Action**

With the May decision of the California Supreme Court essentially legalizing marriage equality for same-gender couples and the statement by Governor David Paterson, a Roman Catholic, requiring state agencies to recognize such marriages performed legally elsewhere, the pressure mounts for legislative action. Paterson noted a February ruling (Martinez) in a Rochester Appellate Division of State Supreme Court in which judges determined there is no legal impediment in NY to recognize marriage equality for same-sex couples. At the same time religious and social conservatives, including the NYS Catholic Conference and New Yorkers for Constitutional Freedoms, a Christian evangelical group, are mounting an all-out campaign to prevent this from happening. Lawsuits are likely. In 2006 the state's highest court, the Court of Appeals, ruled that the State Constitution does not require the state to allow same-sex couples to marry, but neither does it prohibit such marriages. Last year, the Assembly passed a bill to legalize same-sex marriage, but the Senate still hasn't taken up the bill; it is unlikely to do so this year unless pressure mounts. In California, gay couples will be able to wed beginning June 17. Same-sex marriages are allowed in Massachusetts, Canada, South Africa, Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands. See the *New York Times* of May 30, "Fighting Same-Sex Policy Seems to Be Uphill Battle" and "How Governor Set His Stance on Gay Rights," for analysis, history and rationale for the governor's decision.

According to the New York City Bar Association and the Empire State Pride Agenda, more than 1,300 aspects of NYS law either deny rights to gay couples or make their lives more complicated. (*NYTimes* 5/30/08 editorial).

A suggested letter to the governor from True Majority.org: "Dear Governor: I support full marriage equality for all Americans regardless of sexual orientation. I am also committed to fighting against any constitutional amendment which would write hatred and discrimination against gays and lesbians into any federal or state constitution. I stand untied with Americans from all walks of life in supporting full equality for all."

See the UUA website ([www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org)) and go to social justice statements for texts of the 1996 Statement of Conscience on marriage equality and the 2002 Action of Immediate Witness commending legalization of same-sex marriage by the Province of Quebec.

### **GENDA Passes Assembly 102-33**

Genda, the Gender Expression Non-discrimination Act, has been passed overwhelmingly by the State Assembly. GENDA would amend the state's human rights law to include anti-discrimination protections based on gender identity and expression. The law is especially aimed at discrimination against transgendered people. This is the first time the Act has reached the Assembly floor for a vote. GENDA has the support of Governor Paterson, and has been introduced into the State Senate with 17 co-sponsors and 27 supporters. The Senate has 62 members.

### **BBBB "Bigger Better Bottle Bill" – Act Now!**

The Bigger Better Bottle Bill (BBBB) has sponsors in the Assembly (A.8044) and Senate (S.5850). The original bottle bill has achieved a return rate of 70%, three to four times that of non-deposit containers. According to the NYS League of Women Voters (LWV), expanding bottle deposits will capture an additional 2.5 billion containers for recycling. Manufacturing and transporting plastic bottles adds CO<sub>2</sub> to the atmosphere, contributing to global warming. According to the NY Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) survey, 70% of registered voters favor a BBBB, and 86% favor returning unclaimed deposits to the state for environmental programs. To take action go to <http://capwiz.com/lwvny/issues/alert/?alertid=11031006&PROCESS=Take+Action>.

### **Healthy Teens Act**

One in four teenage girls has a sexually transmitted infection. Six in 10 high school seniors are sexually active. The Healthy Teens Act (A.2856/S.1342) establishes a competitive grant program through the NYS Department of Health for the specific purpose of awarding grants to school districts, boards of cooperative educational services (BOCES), school-based health centers and community-based organizations for age-appropriate sex education programs. A federal evaluation of abstinence-only programs found that they were not effective in delaying sexual activity among participants. But, \$13 million was spent on abstinence-only programs in NYS in 2006. The state no longer accepts money for such programs. New York currently has no designated funding for comprehensive sex education in our schools.

The Healthy Teens Act has been passed by the Assembly for four years in a row with strong bi-partisan support. The bill was recently reported out of the State Senate Health Committee. Now it must also be voted on in the Senate Finance Committee. For further information go to NARAL Pro-Choice New York: [can@prochoiceamerica.org](mailto:can@prochoiceamerica.org). Contact your senator to urge support of this legislation.

**For updates on other state issues go to the Interfaith Impact of NYS website: [www.interfaithimpactnys.org](http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org).**

## NATIONAL ISSUES

### UUA Washington Office for Advocacy Newsletters

The May 23 (*Memorial Day*), May 29 (*Working for Economic Justice*) and June 6 (*Support Effective Climate Change Legislation*) issues are attached in pdf. You are encouraged to sign up for these regular newsletters.

### Unitarian Universalists for a Just Economic Community (UUJEC)

UUJEC is an advocacy group coming up on its 20th anniversary. The May 29 UUA Newsletter listed above contains articles on that anniversary, an Earth Community Dialog, an article by Bill McKibben: "The World above 350 ppm CO<sub>2</sub>: A Last Chance for Civilization," an essay on "Women Are Exploited in Mexico," and a listing of UUJEC GA 2008 events. For further information go to <http://www.uujec.org> or reply to [uujec@jaywg.com](mailto:uujec@jaywg.com). Issue attached in pdf.

### Council on Human Priorities

For information on national issues: Council on Human Needs at [www.chn.org](http://www.chn.org).

### EDITORIAL: THE "PROGRESS" IN PROGRESSIVE - Richard. Gilbert

(Opinions stated here are strictly those of the editor)

New York State is in deep economic trouble as it faces ever-rising indebtedness. Unlike the federal government, the state budget must by law be balanced. In the face of this, former Governor Spitzer appointed a commission with the assignment to study the property tax and possibly/probably place a cap on it. This cap is a wrong-headed move, as it may well curb needed education expenses in the same way that California has done – with negative consequences.

What escapes New Yorkers is that the property tax, along with the sales and other taxes, are regressive. Used primarily to fund public education, they drain money disproportionately from taxpayers – the poorest and the wealthiest Americans have an almost identical tax rate for *all* taxes – as a percentage of income. (See *New York Times* writer David Cay Johnston's *Perfectly Legal* and *Free Lunch*) A modification of the property tax cap is the circuit-breaker, which would limit property taxes for low and middle income people. See John Keevert's essay on this at <http://www.metrojustice.org/newsletters/newsletter>.

Totally overlooked is a much more fair solution: creating a truly progressive income tax. Now, the top bracket is set at \$42,000, meaning that people who earn \$42,000 pay the same income tax rate as those who earn \$420,000 or \$4,200,000. On the moral principle that "Good fortune obligates," (Albert Schweitzer), the more affluent ought to do more to help sustain the community. Taxation ought to be based on ability to pay. Now there is a daring and radical ethical principle – but I'm glad I'm not running for office on it. Some will dare call it treason. I dare call it patriotic, ethical and necessary. We make "progress" with a truly progressive income tax. "Taxes," said Oliver Wendell Holmes, "are the price we pay for civilization." Too many Americans are unwilling to pay the price.

## UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE CORNER

### UUSC Schedule of Events at General Assembly 2008

Wednesday, June 25

12:00 - 04:00 pm: UUSC/UUA sponsored GA Justice Training Event, "Countdown 2008: An Activist Training to Responsibly End the War." Lunch will be provided, but space is limited. To register, contact Michele Rudy at [gacountdown2008@uusc.org](mailto:gacountdown2008@uusc.org).

Thursday, June 26

11:00 – 12:15 pm: UUSC Speaker: Nguyen Weeks, "Bring the War Home"

01:30 – 02:45 pm: UUSC Speaker: Martha Thompson, "Crisis Planning"

03:15 – 06:15 pm: UUSC Speaker: Shelley Moskowitz, Super Session I – "Organizing: Advocacy and Voter Mobilization: Faithful Democracy 2008"

Friday, June 27

11:00 – 12:15 pm: UUSC Workshop: "Who Pays the Price for the Iraq War?" Participate in a powerful discussion with the first combat veteran to publicly refuse to return to Iraq, the co-founder of Military Families Speak Out, and a leading Iraqi-American human-rights activist. Moderated by Tom Andrews, former U.S. congressman. Speakers: Tom Andrews, Nancy Lessin, Dr. Dahlia Wasfi, and Camilo Mejía

12:15 – 01:15 pm: UUSC JustWorks Youth Pizza Party

01:30 – 02:45 pm: UUSC Speaker: Martha Thompson, "Gulf Coast Recovery and Advocacy"

03:15 – 04:30 pm: UUSC Workshop: "Collateral Damage: Families Devastated by the Iraq War." Hear from the spokesperson for military families, a physician who returned to Iraq to witness her family's devastation, and a leading Iraqi-American human-rights advocate. Moderated by William Schulz, former UUA president. Speakers: Nancy Lessin, Rev. Dr. William F. Schulz, Andy Shallal, and Dr. Dahlia Wasfi

05:00 – 06:30 pm: UUSC Annual Meeting. Order tickets in advance by calling Laurie Brunner at 617-301-4344. Tickets are \$20 and seating is limited. Tickets also at UUSC booth and at the door, subject to availability.

Saturday, June 28

08:30 – 02:30 pm: UUSC JustWorks Fair and Skill-Share Service Project: Non-Military Opportunities for Youth. Lunch will be provided. RSVP to [justworks@uusc.org](mailto:justworks@uusc.org) or sign up at the UUSC booth.

01:30 – 04:30 pm: UUSC Speaker: Shelley Moskowitz, Super Session II: "Organizing, Advocacy, and Voter Mobilization: Faithful Democracy 2008"

05:00 – 06:15 pm: UUSC Workshop: "Join Patriots and Veterans Saying "No to War!" A Vietnam War combat medic and the first combat veteran to publicly refuse to return to Iraq discuss the war in Iraq. Speakers: Camilo Mejía, and Wayne Smith.

06:00 – 10:00 pm: UUSC Youth Coffee House

Go to [www.uusc.org](http://www.uusc.org) for details of these GA 2008 events, and to learn how the UUSC is responding to assist the people of Myanmar recover from Cyclone Nargis and how to donate to the UUSC/UUA Cyclone Nargis Relief Fund.

JOIN INTERFAITH IMPACT NOW!  
Individual and Congregational Memberships Welcome

Interfaith Impact of New York State is a UUA-UUSC partner organization. The St. Lawrence District is an official member and UUs are active on the Board. Robb Smith of our Albany congregation is Executive Director - robb@interfaithimpactnys.org. We encourage individual Unitarian Universalists in New York State to join. We also encourage you to invite your congregation or social action group join as an organizational member. For your convenience a membership form is below. Phone: (518) 463-5652 - E-mail: [interfaithimpactnys@verizon.net](mailto:interfaithimpactnys@verizon.net) Background information on state issues at [www.interfaithimpactnys.org](http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org)

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please print or type:

Name and Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ FAX: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation:  Protestant  Unitarian Universalist  Reform Synagogue  Other

Membership Dues Enclosed: Individual  \$10  \$20  \$30  \$40  Other \$\_\_\_\_\_

Congregation/organizations  \$50  \$200  \$300  Other (amount) \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to: Interfaith IMPACT of New York State  
and mail to: IINYS, 646 State Street, Albany, NY 12203

Your Assembly Member \_\_\_\_\_ Your State Senator \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your support