



THE NEW YORK STATE BLACK, PUERTO RICAN, HISPANIC, AND ASIAN LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS

CAUCUS STATES IT WILL LEAD THE PUSH FOR A PROGRESSIVE AGENDA DURING THE 2013 LEGISLATIVE SESSION IN ALBANY

Sets out gun violence reduction, minimum wage, the dream act, stop and frisk, community schools, healthcare and a New York Neighborhood Initiatives program in place of member items as priorities

Joined by Stuart Appelbaum (RWDSU), Hector Figueroa (SEIU 32BJ), Michael Mulgrew (UFT), community groups, non-profits, labor, clergy and business, Reverend Assemblyman Karim Camara and members of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Caucus stated that they would take the lead on ensuring that this year's legislative session in Albany included a progressive agenda. "The Caucus intends to take the guesswork caused by the Senate leadership uncertainty of whether critical issues facing our communities will be resolved by holding Albany's feet to the fire on issues such as gun violence, minimum wage, education, stop and frisk, the Dream Act, marijuana drug laws, and healthcare." Said Camara, Chair of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Caucus, "And we will fight to restore millions of dollars that went to vital community initiatives in legislative member items under a new and more transparent 'New York Neighborhood Initiatives' program. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been cut from these initiatives for four consecutive years resulting in crippling effects to neighborhoods throughout New York." In addition, the Caucus added the following new ideas and initiatives to the Progressive Agenda: leading a nationwide state legislative effort on affecting gun control and reducing gun violence; the first ever Gun Violence Awareness Month in New York; the expansion of Community Schools to New York's most troubled schools; and the New York Neighborhood Initiatives program. These new ideas and programs will augment the existing agenda that includes the minimum wage, the Dream Act, marijuana drug laws, stop and frisk, healthcare, affordable housing and criminal justice. Camara said that the Caucus will focus on ensuring a progressive New York Agenda in four ways: legislative process; substance; educating the public and through budget discussions.

NEW IDEAS AND INITIATIVES

Camara announced that New York's Caucus will lead a nationwide state legislative effort to focus Congress and Washington on addressing gun control and reducing gun violence. This effort, in conjunction with legislative leaders in Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan and Philadelphia and Washington, DC will target both the random horrific gun violence tragedies such as what transpired at Sandy Hook Elementary School, and the everyday gun violence that plagues communities across the New York and the nation. This coalition will travel to Washington in February to meet with key Congressional and governmental leaders.

Gun Violence Awareness Month

Camara said that Caucus members in both the Senate and the Assembly will introduce a resolution naming the month of June as "Gun Violence Awareness Month" for New York. This resolution, the first of its kind in New York and possibly the nation, will galvanize all of New York to come together

to work towards educating New York about how pernicious gun violence is in New York's communities and to strategize on how we can eliminate it. June is typically the month when gun violence begins to rise each year. Camara said he hoped both houses would pass the resolution during the week where Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday is honored in January.

Community School

The Caucus advocates that the state should adopt the community schools approach for all 750 Focus and Priority schools, where the academic achievement is unacceptably low. Community Schools brings in collateral resources to address issues associated with poverty that in turn impact education. Students and their families will be able to take advantage of a wide array of program – health, dental and vision clinics, meal program, counseling, social services, tutors and enrichment programs. The resources brought into the schools are integrated and provide immediate access for students to the services they need. This allows the school to address the needs of the whole child.

New York Neighborhood Initiatives Program

This program will restore funds that were set aside for legislative member items but have been eliminated from the budget the last four years. This program will support and foster good initiatives at the most local level to improve communities and neighborhoods. The Caucus will create a task force to develop a transparent and effective initiative selection process that restores the role of local elected leader input in this process while ensuring a dynamic and transparent process. In terms of the budget, this is one of the most important issues for the Caucus.

LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

For the first time in New York's history, the Caucus announced its session priorities in advance of Session and the State of the State, signaling the intention of the Caucus to push a Progressive Agenda Day One. "The Caucus believes that the issues outlined today in our People's Budget and Priorities must be a part of the Albany discussion at the outset, and releasing these priorities today gives everyone a sense of how they comport with the priorities of others. As a result New Yorkers will know where there is common ground in Albany and where work needs to be done to establish consensus." said Camara.

The Caucus stated that it will push for early action in the Senate on several key issues: a gun violence package; stop and frisk; minimum wage; and the Dream Act: "If the Senate leadership drags its feet on these critical issues, then we know right away they are not on the side of the people of New York who are desperate for these changes and we will respond accordingly."

SUBSTANCE

The Caucus advocates for substantive change and passage of legislation that supports their key priorities on issues that are most important to communities of color.

One of the Caucus' top priorities this year is ensuring the passage of the Dream Act and Dream Fund legislation. These pieces of legislation provide access for undocumented students of immigrant families to scholarship funds and the Tuition Assistance Program to help offset the rising cost of college tuition.

The Caucus will continue to push for the passage of Assembly Bill 9148, which would increase minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$8.50, and index it to inflation so to keep pace with the rising cost of living. The bill was introduced by Assemblyman Keith Wright and passed unanimously in the State Assembly, though the State Senate refused to bring this bill up for a vote during the 2012 session. The caucus strongly supports this bill; New York State has the greatest gap between rich and poor in the United States, and we believe that this bill moves New Yorkers a step closer to closing this gap and minimizing income and economic inequality.

Especially in the wake of the recent gun violence, the Caucus will advocate for the passage of gun violence legislation. In June of 2012, the Assembly passed A.1157-b, a bill requiring semiautomatic pistols manufactured or delivered to any licensed dealer in New York State be equipped to microstamp ammunition. This would aid law enforcement in ballistic investigations, and keep our streets, playgrounds, and places of business safer for everyone. The bill was stalled in the State Senate, but the Caucus is committed to pursuing the legislation again this session. Additionally, we will advocate to further limit the amount of guns New Yorkers can buy at one time, and push for stronger federal legislation

Standardization of marijuana offenses is another of the Caucus's top priorities. Currently the law allows individuals to have up to 7/8ths of an ounce of marijuana on their personal possession before it is considered a misdemeanor. However, once any amount of marijuana is in public sight, it becomes a misdemeanor. The application becomes dubious when law enforcement officials coerce individuals to empty their pockets, in which all contents become visible. Most marijuana users are not violent criminals and the majority of the arrests are made under Stop and Frisk, not during the commencement of a crime. Most individuals impacted by the current practice are minority youth-a group that simply cannot afford to lose the aforementioned opportunities.

Stop and frisk is another important issue to communities of color who often experience unnecessary police stops and interrogation. The Caucus will push to end the practice in New York.

The Caucus advocates a number of ideas to help those experiencing housing instability, including: (i) protecting and restoring the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program; (ii) securing permanent funding for the National Housing Trust Fund; (iii) maximizing the Community Development Financial Intuition program. Caucus members have proposed legislation to protect against vacancy decontrol in which rent stabilized units are removed from regulation.

As mentioned previously, the Caucus advocates that the state should adopt the community schools approach for all 750 Focus and Priority schools, where the academic achievement is unacceptably low. Community Schools brings in collateral resources to address issues associated with poverty that in turn impact education. Students and their families will be able to take advantage of a wide array of program – health, dental and vision clinics, meal program, counseling, social services, tutors and enrichment programs. The resources brought into the schools are integrated and provide immediate access for students to the services they need. This allows the school to address the needs of the whole child.

Caucus members across the state are committed to a substantive and progressive agenda for New York's 2013 legislation session.

"Good schools, safe streets, a decent minimum wage and the opportunity for hard-working immigrants to realize the American Dream—these are core values of our democracy," said State Senator Jose Peralta. "And they will be our guiding principles in efforts during the new legislative session to ensure resources are distributed equitably, and opportunity is available universally, across all communities, statewide."

"The Caucus has a long established history of playing a vital role in supporting progressive policies that enhance the quality of life for all New Yorkers and I look forward to strengthening that partnership in the upcoming year," Assemblywoman Vanessa L. Gibson (D-Bronx, 77th AD) said. "Working together we can move the statewide public policy agenda on issues of crucial importance such as ending the scourge of gun violence in our communities and enhancing economic justice throughout the Empire State."

EDUCATING NEW YORK

"We will leave no stone unturned to ensure that every day New Yorkers and their clergy, labor and business leaders, community groups and non-profits are kept apprised weekly of what is transpiring in Albany regarding the issues they care about. They will know who supports the issues they care about and who opposes them; who is helping and who is an obstruction. And we will not pull punches, the stakes are simply too high. We will have leadership conference calls, town hall meetings, email updates and social media bulletin," said Camara.

THE BUDGET

Caucus members understand the importance of an on time budget, and also believe strongly that a final budget must include the priorities of their constituents. It will be another year of difficult decisions and shared sacrifice, but the Caucus will oppose a budget that neither shares sacrifice nor assists those New Yorkers most in need.

CAUCUS ALLIES HAIL CAUCUS PROGRESSIVE AGENDA

"32BJ is proud to stand with members of the Black, Puerto Rican, Latino and Asian Caucus to call for swift passage of bills critical to move our state and economy forward, including an increase in the minimum wage; responsible gun-control legislation; public financing of elections; and wage standards for contracted service workers at public utilities and in New York City's public schools," said Hector Figueroa, President of 32BJ of the Service Employees International Union.

"The community schools concept is an enlightened and research-based approach to improving academic outcomes for students and strengthening our neighborhoods," said United Federation of Teachers President Michael Mulgrew. "Schools that embrace this smart concept can use parent and community engagement to bring in programs and services based on their needs, and turn their school buildings into community 'hubs' that benefit everyone."

"The New York State Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Caucus legislative and budgetary agenda for 2013 appropriately calls on the state's leadership to invest resources in programs and policy initiatives that expand our economy while also addressing long-standing concerns about chronic unemployment in our urban communities, the decline of the middle class and preserving access to education and economic mobility for all members of our society," said David R. Jones,

President and CEO of the Community Service Society. "Budgetary constraints notwithstanding, now is the time to invest in both the our infrastructure needs as well as the human capital that drives our economy. We look forward to working with the Caucus on key components of its agenda, including raising the state's minimum wage, helping more New Yorkers earn their GED, removing barriers for the formerly incarcerated and increasing diversity at CUNY senior colleges."

"The Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies appreciates its long partnership with the Caucus in advancing policies that best serve New York's most vulnerable residents. We support the Caucus' comprehensive approach to the budget and look forward to working with the Caucus and other members of the Legislature to ensure an agenda that best meets the needs of economically and socially challenged New Yorkers." Jennifer Jones Austin, CEO/Executive Director