

Change of Leadership Change in Outcome

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2019 Albany Legislative Session Summary

If you think elections don't matter, think again. The 2018 elections brought about such significant change in Albany that legislation sitting stagnant for years finally saw the light of day. With new faces at the Capitol, and a switch in leadership, the Senate majority was able to pass an abundance of bills that have been squandering for years — and some for decades. Even the Assembly turned into the "house of reason" when scrutinizing bills that had been passed repeatedly just to make sure they were perfected.

With Democrats taking control of the Senate for the first time since 2010 after a dominating performance at the polls last year that knocked Republicans out of power and gave them full control of state government, bills were sure to move through their respective committees faster than ever — and they did.

The change was immediately evident, with the governor and lawmakers approving a series of progressive-minded measures right out of the gate, including gun-control bills, abortion protections, and voting reforms. That success continued through the end of the legislative term when lawmakers passed bills to decriminalize marijuana and allow undocumented immigrants to apply for driver's licenses.

If anyone questions why it's so important for labor to be involved in politics, why our political action fund is so vital, or why we need such a presence at the City Council, in Albany, and in Washington, this year's successful passage of so many bills is proof enough.

While there was definite tension during the budgetary process earlier this year because the Assembly wanted to exclude all non-budgetary items from the discussions and pass them as regular bills, the budget was still on time and included fewer policy issues than in the past. As the legislative session drew to a close on June 21, more was accomplished with less bickering than in recent history. Most legislation passed as stand-alone bills rather than unrelated bills being lumped together as the infamous

"omnibus bill" that typically closes out a legislative session. That meant every issue received a full hearing and an independent vote — atypical from legislative sessions of this decade. All of the equality bills that Local 1180 was supporting and advocating for passed in the final days, as did the hospital bill that was important legislation for the MLC. This bill is designed to protect union members and the public from surprise medical bills from emergency room visits when the hospital is out of an insurance company's network. If there is an exorbitant hospital bill, the consumer or the insurance company can submit a complaint to an independent dispute resolution process that will determine what charge is reasonable. This is an added protection for our members if the hospital happens to be out of network.

In the Senate, all but one of the newly elected senators — including those Local 1180 endorsed from Long Island and the Hudson Valley — voted for every Local 1180 bill. Additionally, almost every Senator in the union's traditional area of the five boroughs voted for all our bills.

In the Assembly, all representatives in Local 1180's traditional area voted favorably for the equality bills, and most from the five boroughs voted for the MLC-backed hospital bill.

This was a monumental year in which labor and Local 1180 demonstrated the success of getting progressive and pro-labor issues passed. Whether the governor signs all of them remains to be seen. Many issues Local 1180 worked on do not necessarily impact our members directly as workers, but will as citizens.

Going forward, Local 1180 will be looking for ways to more deeply engage the membership in the legislative process as it not only lends extra hands to an overwhelming and fast-moving process, but also helps the rank-and-file better understand the process, its importance, and value. In the end, it was a very successful year for New Yorkers, labor, and particularly Local 1180. ■

The BIG Issues

What Passed

- Farmworkers bill
- Rent regulations
- Election reform
- Congestion pricing
- Driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants
- Criminal justice reform
- Sexual harassment reform
- Statute of limitations for rape
- Climate protection
- Marijuana decriminalization
- E-scooters
- Abolish religious exemption for vaccinations
- Disclosure of Trump's taxes
- MWBE

What Didn't Pass

- Legalize recreational marijuana
- Decriminalize sex work
- Single payer health care
- Limit solitary confinement
- Era constitutional amendment
- Gestational surrogacy
- Mobile sports betting

UNION Issues

What Passed

- Call center bill
- Parity of unemployment benefits during a strike
- Protecting privacy of public workers
- Fair elections commission
- Extend design-build
- Farmworkers bill
- Unemployment parity for striking workers
- Wage theft enforcement
- Elevator safety and licensing
- Workplace violence at schools
- Carwash minimum wage
- Injunctive relief for public employees
- Labor and non-competitive parity
- Various disability and retirement enhancements
- Firefighter cancer lookback
- Cost analysis before contracting out
- Employee protection at Indian Point decommission
- MWBE

What Didn't Pass

- FIOS buildout
- Peace Officer status for 1182
- Grad student fee waiver
- Safe staffing
- Certain prevailing wages

Issues Important to Local 1180

What Passed

- Salary history ban
- Equal pay for substantially similar work – public sector
- Equal pay for substantially similar work – private sector
- Private right of action for wage discrimination – public sector
- Funding for SLU in the budget
- Independent dispute process for out-of-network hospital charges

What Didn't Pass

- Minimum wage for people with disabilities
- Hearing officer and paid suspension

To read about the bills that passed, log onto the Union's website at www.cwa1180.org and click on the News page.