

Energy And The Environment Are More Important Now Than Ever

Kevin Parker, New York State Senator

With the infiltration of bus depots in many of our neighborhoods and the construction of dirty, air polluting, power plants in our communities, it should come as no surprise that one in four minority children in parts of New York City like Brooklyn suffer from asthma. Walking the streets of Brooklyn, I hear and see the pain felt by residents at the beginning of the month when they open their electric bills. This past week alone it was announced that another electricity rate increase is almost certain and will leave residents paying an additional \$60 per year on average for electricity. And this is on top of a rate increase that just went into affect. As asthma and electricity rates continue to rise in our neighborhoods, the need to promote a comprehensive energy plan for the metropolitan area becomes clearer and clearer each day.

As the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Energy & Telecommunications, I continue to strongly advocate that reforming New York's energy policy is a crucial component to insuring the health of our families and community. New York City violates federal clean air standards, and as a result the rates for respiratory conditions such as asthma in Central-Brooklyn are quadruple the national average. Despite New York City's second highest-in-the-nation residential and commercial electricity rates, innovative approaches to lowering energy costs for consumers have not been mandated. And my legislation to safely site the power plants throughout the state still awaits approval.

In order to determine an energy and environmental future for Brooklyn that includes clean air, reduced rates of childhood asthma, and affordable, lower utility bills, this debate cannot solely be held in the legislative halls of Albany. Energy and environmental discussions must also be held in every portion of our communities as well.

Environmental issues need to be discussed from the pulpit and in the pews. Education and information needs to flow from tenant association and community board meetings. We need this dialogue in our schools and in our homes. It is only when we embrace the totality of the energy and environmental issues that face us, and recognize that this issue stretches across the spectrum and includes health care, economic and political empowerment concerns, will it take its rightful place at the top of a new progressive urban agenda.

Helping raise the consciousness, my office has partnered with the NAACP Brooklyn Branch, Medgar Evers College, SHARE, and the American Democracy Project to co-host a Community Forum focusing on Brooklyn's health, energy and environment. On May 17th at Medgar Evers College, we convened distinguished leaders from the medical, environmental, academic and civil rights fields to outline a proper urban environmental agenda to set us on the proper course.

In every block of our community, a mantle of energy and environmental leadership awaits to be seized. Elevating our urban environmental agenda onto the national stage will be a challenge. It is a challenge that is welcome and one that we will, and must, overcome.

State Senator Kevin S. Parker represents the 21st Senatorial District in Brooklyn. He is the Ranking Democrat on the Senate Committee on Energy & Telecommunications.