

# Capitol Watch: Legislature pushes to pass progressive measures before wrapping up

[CAPITOL WATCH](#), [GOVERNMENT](#), [LATEST NEWS](#), [NEWS](#) JUNE 18, 2019 BY [VAUGHN GOLDEN](#)  
ALBANY, N.Y. — The New York State Legislature is done for the year on Wednesday and legislators are pushing to pass progressive measures like driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants before time runs out. Last week they narrowly passed a bill to ban religious vaccine exemptions and sweeping new changes to rent and tenant laws. At the end of the month, Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand will appear on the presidential debate stage.

Here's a recap of how your local representatives have been voting the last week.

## **Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton (125th Assembly District) & Sen. Tom O'Mara (58th Senate District)**

### **Religious Vaccination Exemptions Banned**

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Both houses of the Legislature passed a contentious bill to end religious exemptions from vaccination requirements. The measure, authored by Bronx Democrat Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz, narrowly made it out of the Assembly health committee via a 14-12 vote. It then went to the floor where it passed on a razor's edge 77-53, only one vote away from failing. Assemblywoman Barabara Lifton voted in favor of the measure.

It was then on to the Senate where the measure passed less contentiously, 36-26. Sen. Tom O'Mara voted against the bill. He hasn't responded to a request for comment about the issue for several weeks.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed the bill immediately after it passed through the Senate.

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## **Rent and Tenant Bills**

The Assembly also passed a sweeping set of new requirements to control rent increases and strengthen tenant protections in New York City and certain upstate cities, potentially including Ithaca. Most of the package of rent bills pertain to apartment dwellings with more than six units that were built between 1947 and 1974 and newer affordable housing designated units. The City of Ithaca would then need to opt into a similar program. The bill package does lay out additional

protections for all tenants, making it harder for landlords to evict occupants, setting a 30-day advanced warning if rent is going to increase, and limiting security deposits to only one month's rent.

The bill passed through the Senate [36-26 and was signed by the governor soon after](#). O'Mara voted nay on the legislation. Lifton voted in favor.

## **Driver's Licenses for Undocumented Immigrants**

*(Update 6/18) -- Updated to reflect that the New York State Senate passed the bill.*

The New York Senate passed the "Green Light Bill" on Monday night, and the Assembly passed it last week. The bill will allow undocumented immigrants [to apply for a driver's license](#).

The measure has been one of the most controversial of the late-session push, with [moderate Democrats in vulnerable suburban districts hesitant to signal their support](#). Republicans, like O'Mara, have been vehemently outspoken in their opposition for the idea, saying that it's unfair to allow undocumented immigrants the right to drive. Supporters say it would make it safer because the same individuals would be able to purchase insurance and would have to pass a driver safety course. Lifton is a co-sponsor.

"These are people who have been in our country for many years. They are working hard to pick the crops that we eat and doing the hard work in the kitchens of our food establishments, among other jobs that few others want, and they need to be able to drive safely with a license and insurance," Lifton said in a statement to The Ithaca Voice last week. "We are all safer when the workers who live in our

state can get around legally. This isn't as big a problem in New York City, which has a subway and an extensive bus system, but it's a very big problem for working people in Upstate New York to be without legal transportation. We have to stop playing political games with the hard-working immigrants in our state. It is shameful."

## **Legislature Pay Raise and Outside Income**

Legislators came into the session this year having received a \$30,500 pay raise to \$110,000 -- the first in two decades. However, the special commission set up to decide the details of the pay raise came under scrutiny from legislators when it also decided that lawmakers couldn't collect income outside of their state salary.

Assembly Democrats used the chamber's legal counsel to challenge that part of the ruling in court. O'Mara got the court's permission to use money from his campaign account to fight it separately.

Last week a judge ruled in the case, citing that it was beyond the pay commission's authority to rule on the outside income aspect of its reports. However, the ruling wasn't exactly clear in what it nullified from the pay commission. The New York State Attorney General's office is asking for clarification, but there's a possibility that two additional pay increases totaling \$20,000 scheduled for the next two years could also be in jeopardy.

## **Rep. Tom Reed (23rd Congressional District)**

The House was up all hours of the night last week after Rep. Chip Roy (R-Texas) made procedural moves to require members to vote on dozens of relatively uncontroversial amendments to a group of

spending bills. He was trying to force the chamber to fund border security requests from the Trump administration following its declaration of a national emergency on the issue. Rep. Tom Reed was [one of a few dozen Republicans who voted against](#) one of Roy's first moves to try and adjourn the House on Wednesday afternoon. Debate over the funding bills continues this week.

Comedian Jon Stewart also gathered some headlines as he climbed the hill to testify in support an effort to plug budgetary shortfalls in a fund to support 9/11 first responders. The visit spurred lawmakers on the Judiciary Committee, which has been bitterly divided over its interactions with the White House over the Russia investigation, to quickly vote to send the legislation to the House floor.

"The Judiciary Committee deserves credit for putting politics aside and teeing up a vote on the House floor so all our 9/11 first responders we care deeply about will never have to worry again if the benefits they earned as a result of the injuries they suffered as a result of their sacrifice will be lost," Reed said in a press release last week.

The bill hasn't yet been scheduled for a vote on the floor.

## **U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand & U.S. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer**

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand left Washington early on Thursday and missed two votes. The week prior she missed two days, a total of 13 votes. She's missed 15 percent of the votes [so far this session](#).

On Wednesday, after ABC aired its interview with President Trump where he said he'd consider taking political dirt from a foreign country,

Ranking Member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Sen. Mark Warner (R-VA) took to the Senate floor. He tried to get senators to vote on a bill that would make such an act clearly illegal. He was shut down by Tennessee Republican Sen. Marsha Blackburn.