



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Senator Young Vows to Stop Farm Labor Bill in Its Tracks

CATHARINE YOUNG January 21, 2010

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ALBANY - Senator Cathy Young (R,I,C) has vowed to fight the farm labor bill that advanced through the Senate Labor Committee yesterday because "it would destroy our farms and kill Upstate's economy," she said.

Sen. Young has signed a letter to Senate Democrat Leader John Sampson, requesting the legislation to be referred to the Senate Agriculture Committee, since that committee should have jurisdiction over farming issues.

"They are trying to avoid having it sent to the Ag Committee. That's plain wrong. Under the new Senate reforms that we fought for last summer, a committee can ask to have

particular bills sent to them for review. We need a full airing about this bill's impact. We'll see if the New York City-controlled Senate Majority follows the rules," she said.

Sen. Young said this issue is a matter of life or death for the state's farming industry.

"Not only would this legislation put farms out of business for good, we could lose thousands of jobs at our 21,745 processing plants statewide, and shut the doors of small businesses such as farm equipment dealers, feed suppliers and hardwares.

"We depend on these jobs. For example, our regions' biggest companies like Cliffstar, Fieldbrook Farms, Friendship Dairies, Empire Cheese, and Carriage House employ thousands of people. These food processors use farm products that are produced locally," she said.

"Farming pumps several billion dollars into New York's economy every year. Those dollars roll over at least three times. It's hard to believe, but during this time of recession, massive job losses and the state's budget crisis, New York City politicians and special interest groups are pushing this legislation that's a disaster for our state's largest industry. Upstate will never recover.

"Agriculture is unique. That's why the federal government exempted agricultural workers from the National Labor Relations and Taft-Hartley Acts. Now, Albany is trying to force through the most restrictive farm labor laws in the country. It's ridiculous, because our farms already are heavily-regulated and inspected by the feds and the state.," Sen. Young said.

"Actually, this bill doesn't help farm workers at all, because when the farms go out of business, they will lose their jobs," she added.

"Right now, farm laborers receive benefits that other workers do not get, such as free housing, utilities, transportation, and child care. According to Farm Credit, for every \$100 of production sold, New York farmers paid \$13.82 to farm workers, compared to the national average of \$8.88. That means that our state's agriculture already is spending about 56 percent more on labor than the rest of the country.

"Farmers would be forced to pay overtime after 55 hours, making New York State's overtime law the most oppressive in the country. California has overtime that begins after 60 hours, but they have huge farms and a year-round growing season. We can't compete.

"Wisconsin, another dairy state, had an overtime law that they repealed in 2003 because it was driving farms out of business," she said.

"Imagine farm workers being able to strike in the middle of harvest time. The crops would rot in the fields, cows wouldn't get milked, and the farmers would never recover financially.

"The bill's sponsors say that the collective bargaining piece only would affect four percent of our farms, but that is not true. It would hurt the little guys who milk around 100 cows, which is the average size of a dairy farm in New York. Unfortunately, the people pushing this legislation have done absolutely no analysis and have no facts about its impact, and they refuse to listen to the agriculture community," Sen. Young said.

"It's crazy, but this legislation also would force farmers to pay higher unemployment insurance costs for seasonal workers who never work long enough to even qualify for unemployment benefits.

"When you add New York's suffocating tax burden and regulations to the consequences of this bill, it spells disaster," she added.

"It couldn't come at a worse time for farmers. The dairy industry is suffering severely because of extraordinarily low milk prices, and all of the commodities have been hit by the recession and a couple of years of bad weather. For example, our grape crop in Chautauqua County suffered big losses because of hard freezes and hailstorms," Sen. Young said.

"Last year, in many cases, farm workers made more than the farmers themselves, who lost money.

"In fact, things are so bad that the New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health, and Cornell University's NY FarmNet assistance hotline told me they are alarmed at the skyrocketing number of farmer bankruptcies, divorces, utility company shutoffs, mental

breakdowns and suicides. It's heartbreaking," she said.

"We should be focusing on strengthening our farming industry and turning our economy around, instead of putting in place destructive laws," she said.

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