



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrew J. Lanza

Senator Andrew Lanza & Assemblyman Lou Tobacco Renew Their Efforts to Protect Staten Island's Residents & Property From Phragmites-Fueled Fires

ANDREW J LANZA March 29, 2011



Lanza Partners With Assemblyman Lou Tobacco to Pass Laws Which Will Force DEC to Take Action & Empower Property Owners

For years now elected officials on Staten Island – both Republican and Democrat - have pled with DEC to protect residents from phragmites -- invasive and combustible weeds that have overrun wetland areas throughout the borough and caused dangerous brush fires year after year. Last October, when the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) dragged their feet throughout yet another brushfire season, Senator Lanza crafted legislation which would *require* the agency to take action.

With Spring and brushfire season fast approaching, Lanza has renewed his efforts to pass this legislation and has partnered with Assemblyman Tobacco (R,I,C-Staten Island) to find new ways to combat volatile brush fires fueled by phragmites.

Lanza and Tobacco have reintroduced legislation (S.4265) which would require DEC to remove to remove

phragmites from infested wetlands in all instances where more than 5 continuous acres of phragmites exist. While

the Senate failed to pass this bill last year, Lanza, now in the majority, is optimistic about passage. The Staten Island

lawmakers also authored legislation (S.4266) which would change the current DEC policy which makes it illegal for

homeowners to remove the vegetation from their property without first obtaining a permit. Under Lanza and

Tobacco's legislation, homeowners would be able to cut and remove phragmites from their private property without a permit.

Lanza asked, "How many life-threatening phragmite fires must Staten Island endure before DEC does something about this? It is absurd that these weeds are being protected while homeowners continually have their property put at risk, and residents and firefighters have their lives endangered. These bills will force DEC to take action and empower private homeowners with the ability to remove this dangerous weed from their properties without waiting on the 'OK' from DEC."

Lanza said, "Senate bill S.4266 just makes sense. Homeowners should not have to ask permission of the DEC to protect their homes and lives."

"Current DEC policies and the weeds' propensity for fueling summer fires has put the lives and property of Staten Islanders in jeopardy while forcing local first responders to risk their safety to battle these often fierce blazes," said Assemblyman Lou Tobacco. "By allowing homeowners to completely remove this hazard from their property and by replanting our wetlands with native vegetation, our legislation will greatly reduce summer fires and protect the lives and property of Staten Island homeowners."

The lawmakers noted that for too long, DEC, which regulates all designated wetlands, seems more concerned with protecting these non-native invasive weeds than they do about enacting policies which protect residents and their property -- despite the department's own admission that phragmites pose a serious fire hazard.

"It is time that DEC stop putting dangerous weeds ahead of the people and property of Staten Island," said Senator Lanza.

“This legislation is a direct response to the DEC’s failed environmental policies on Staten Island,” said Tobacco. “While I am confident that these bills will address this serious issue, it is my hope that the new DEC Commissioner, Joseph Martens will work with Staten Island officials to resolve this matter sooner. It is in the best interest of the department, the environment and Staten Island residents to come up with a responsible solution to this matter sooner rather than later.”

Senator Lanza also urges Staten Islanders to show their support for these bills by signing his online petition at lanza.nysenate.gov.