



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ruben Diaz

## What You Should Know

RUBEN DIAZ April 9, 2012

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#### **Religious Freedom for All**

You should know that like many New Yorkers and many Americans, I celebrate Cardinal Timothy Dolan's efforts to defend religious freedom - especially when there are attempts being made to eliminate the role of religion in politics and public life.

I totally agree with Cardinal Dolan's response to a question posed to him yesterday on Face the Nation when he was asked if he thought there was too much religion in politics: "I think politics, just like business, just like education, just like art, just like culture, only benefits when religion, when morals, when faith has a place there ... the public square in the United States is always enriched whenever people approach it, when they're inspired by their deepest held convictions."

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This "separation of church and state" is meant to prevent the government from imposing faith on its people – not for the people to be denied their faith in order to participate in government.

It is a shame to hear a drum beat from within the Democratic Party to push for people of faith to remove themselves or their ideals from politics. The Democratic Party's history is rich with efforts for social justice and at those roots we can find the work and prayer of many religious leaders and people of faith.

Sad to say, we are at a time when religious leaders – especially Democrats - are condemned and criticized when we attempt to push for conservative viewpoints on social issues like gay marriage and abortion. Although no one criticizes us – thanks be to God - when we raise our voices against the death penalty, mobilize people to fight for the rights of the workers and for the less fortunate members of our society, we must continue to build upon our efforts to prevent people of faith from being silenced in politics.

You should know that all of my political and community involvement has come from observing some of the leaders from the Afro-American churches such as Rev. Jesse Jackson and Rev. Al Sharpton. They have taught us how extremely important it is for people of prayer to become involved in the struggles for social change. I should also mention the members of Church Women United as they continue to bring Christian women together in prayer, advocacy and action for peace with justice in the world.

In that great spirit of interfaith unity, I share the challenge expressed by Cardinal Dolan that despite the darkness and tragedy and sadness that we witness daily in our world, my greatest challenge is also "to preach the good news and try to show that the light and life and promise of the Gospel always trumps the bad news that we hear all the time."

I am certain that religious leaders like Reverend Sharpton and Reverend Jackson and people of faith from Church Women United share this challenge, too. As such, I look forward to working with them all to keep our deepest held convictions very much alive in politics.

I am Senator Rev. Rubén Díaz, and this is what you should know.