



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Gustavo Rivera

## Senator Rivera Introduces Legislation Honoring Dr. Frances Fox Piven for her Life's Work and Academic Contributions

GUSTAVO RIVERA March 14, 2011

| ISSUE: **EDUCATION**

On March 9, 2011, Senator Gustavo Rivera introduced a legislative resolution, numbered S.676, honoring the life's work and academic contributions of Dr. Frances Fox Piven upon the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the publication of *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*. Senator Rivera was joined by Senators Liz Krueger and Bill Perkins in speaking on the floor of the Senate in support of this resolution.

Click here to view video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9fAbou1TpY>.

**Below is a copy of Senator Rivera's floor statement in support of the Resolution Honoring Frances Fox Piven.**

"I came to New York from my home of Puerto Rico in the fall of 1998 to pursue a doctorate at the CUNY Graduate Center, one of the truly great institutions of our state. My very first semester, I found myself in Dr. Piven's Social Movements class, a subject that she has studied, written about, and taken part in throughout her entire career.

It was through that class, and through Dr. Piven's scholarly work and personal biography, that I came to fully understand and appreciate how politics works. Studying under her, I

came to a realization of what democracy really means. And I dare say that I wouldn't be a State Senator today if it weren't for the inspiration given to me by Frances Fox Piven.

Democratic government doesn't work unless it bends to the will of the people. Government doesn't work unless those like myself and my colleagues in the State Senate are prodded by the collective action of the people. Dr. Piven taught me that. If you look at the history of this country, progress has come when ordinary people have stood up and fought for their rights. The abolitionist movement, the women's rights movement, the civil rights movement, anti-war movements, worker's rights movements. And let us include in that list the right to life movement and the Tea Party movement. Whether you agree or disagree with the goals, you cannot ignore the fact that American democracy doesn't work unless people challenge the powerful in both ways big and small.

But as accomplished as she is as a scholar, Dr. Piven is a better mentor to her students. Soon after I took that first class with her, I began my own college teaching career. And ever since, I have aspired to be the type of teacher in the classroom that Dr. Piven is.

I am honored to sponsor this resolution which recognizes a great teacher, a great scholar, a great New Yorker, and a great American, Dr. Frances Fox Piven."

**Below is the text for the legislative resolution S. 676, honoring Dr. Frances Fox Piven upon the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the publication of *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*:**

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body that individuals

who distinguish themselves in their profession and who have dedicated

their lives to improving the lives of others merit the highest

commendation; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern and fully in accord with its

long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to pay

tribute to Dr. Frances Fox Piven, Distinguished Professor of Political

Science and Sociology at the CUNY Graduate Center, upon the occasion of

the 40th Anniversary of the publication of *Regulating the Poor: The*

*Functions of Public Welfare*, her groundbreaking book on social policy in

the United States; and

WHEREAS, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*,

remains a pioneering social analysis of the Great Depression and the

social upheaval of the 1960s, co-authored by Dr. Piven with her late

husband, Richard Cloward; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Piven has dedicated her life to making sure all

Americans have work, food on the table, and above all a voice in our democracy; over the past half century, she has written more than ten books and countless articles exploring the causes of poverty in the United States, the government's role in alleviating economic suffering, and the power of working people to join together to gain a voice in the corridors of power; and

WHEREAS, She has put her principles into action as well, leading efforts to expand voting rights, access to the social safety net, and the ability of all Americans to make their voices heard; and

WHEREAS, Putting her ideals into practice, Dr. Piven, and her husband Richard Cloward, worked to fight for greater access to services for the poor; her efforts were instrumental in enabling needy people to receive federal aid; and

WHEREAS, In the 1980s, Dr. Piven was a leader in the movement to

expand access to the ballot box to traditionally disenfranchised groups, including the poor, African Americans, and immigrants; her movement was a driving force behind the passage of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, also known as the "Motor Voter Act," which requires all social services agencies, including public assistance and disability centers, as well as Departments of Motor Vehicles, to offer voter registration forms to the public; and

WHEREAS, When President Bill Clinton signed the bill into law at a White House ceremony in 1993, Dr. Piven spoke and was honored to receive one of the pens the President used to sign the bill as a testament to her key role in the law's passage; her work expanding access to the ballot box also earned her the National Association of Secretaries of State's Annual Award in 1994; and

WHEREAS, Since 1982, Dr. Piven has taught in the Political Science

and Sociology Departments at The City University of New York Graduate Center and, for the past 45 years, she has served as a mentor to countless New Yorkers who have taken their place as productive educators and scholars in the great State of New York; and

WHEREAS, In keeping with its time-honored traditions, this Legislative Body is proud to honor individuals, such as Dr. Frances Fox Piven, who distinguish themselves in their chosen field of endeavor, dedicating themselves to its enhancement and leading it in new directions; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to honor Dr. Frances Fox Piven upon the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the publication of her important work *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be

transmitted to Dr. Frances Fox Piven.