



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Marisol Alcántara

Statement from Senator Marisol Alcántara on New York Health Act

MARISOL ALCANTARA April 11, 2017

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After several weeks of back-and-forth negotiations on the New York State Budget, which extended a week past the budget deadline, it appeared that all parties had finally agreed to a deal. Governor Andrew Cuomo, Speaker Carl Heastie, Majority Leader John Flanagan, and Independent Democratic Conference leader Jeff Klein had come to the Senate with a budget that all four had agreed on, and that the governor would sign. This deal had taken more than two weeks of nonstop work from myself and from my staff to accomplish. Previous deals during this budget season had failed at the last minute due to concerns from one faction or another. A particular point of contention was that Speaker Heastie and Leader Klein had made a commitment not to vote on any budget that did not Raise the Age of criminal responsibility.

After several false starts, we finally had a budget that was not perfect, but was acceptable. Raise the Age was in it, the governors Excelsior Program was in it, a historic investment in water infrastructure was in it, and in an accomplishment that is dear to my heart, complete funding for immigrant legal services was in it.

Senators were called back to vote at 7:00 PM on Saturday, April 8th to pass the final revenue bill that would mark the completion of the 2017 New York State Budget. The governor guaranteed he would sign it, and all legislative leaders pledged the support of their

conferences.

At this point, members of the mainline Democratic conference stood up to speak about ways in which the budget fell short and offer hostile amendments to highlight these issues. This is their right, and I share many of their frustrations with the ways in which Republican control of the Senate leads to less than ideal results for New Yorkers.

However, as I have previously repeatedly said, there are only 30 Democrats compared to 32 Republicans in the New York State Senate, and I would rather take part in the conversation with the leaders of the Senate than sit on the sidelines. Without the IDC, Raise the Age would never have been in this year's budget. Because of the IDC, 30,000 16 and 17 year olds will no longer be living at Rikers by 2018. Those children could not wait two years for new elections to be helped. I was elected to get results this session, and Raise the Age is a key example of those results.

During this airing of grievances, my esteemed colleague, Senator Gustavo Rivera from the Bronx, offered an amendment that would place single-payer healthcare into the state budget for this year. As the public knows, I have been vocal in support of this policy, holding several town halls and events to build support, and advocating for IDC members to sign on as cosponsors.

However, I abstained from voting to insert this amendment into the budget. The reason for this is that after several weeks of negotiations, I knew that adding another item (especially such a transformative one) onto the agenda would jeopardize the larger deal, which would in turn jeopardize important accomplishments like Raise the Age and others.

I did not want to take the risk that the amendment would become attached to the bill, then the Republican majority would vote against it. This would mean that the entire final revenue

bill, which included Raise the Age, would not pass, and that New Yorkers would lose out on the very real progress this budget represents.

I am committed to seeking the passage of the New York Health Act through the Senate. The strategy to accomplish this result is not to tack it onto an already-negotiated budget bill at the last minute, but to secure the support of the governor, pass it through the Health Committee, and vote on it on the Senate Floor, with the confidence that the governor will sign it. Senator Rivera intended to bring attention to this bill, which I applaud him for, but nobody in that chamber, including him, thought that this was a real opportunity to pass single-payer healthcare for New Yorkers. That opportunity will come, and when it does, I will be ready to lend my voice and my support.