



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Terrence Murphy

Step Up to the Mic & Be Heard: Senator Murphy & Byrne Host Public Forum with Con Edison & NYSEG on the Hot Seat

TERRENCE MURPHY April 23, 2018

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Somers, NY - Live wires, laughably inaccurate robo calls, ancient infrastructure, endangered seniors and acts of heroism were hot topics at a public forum hosted by Senator Terrence Murphy and Assemblyman Kevin Byrne. The forum, held at John F. Kennedy High School in Somers, gave residents the opportunity to speak directly with representatives from Con Edison and NYSEG about their slow response to last month's devastating winter storms.

"Residents in the 40th Senate District have been demanding answers from their utility companies ever since the first storm on March 2," said Senator Murphy. "I chaired a hearing in Albany with the CEOs of the major utilities who told us where they thought things went off the track. Many useful ideas came from that meeting, such as embedding a local resident familiar with the area with an overhead crew, which will make it easier and faster for the crew to find areas in need of repair. Now, it's time the people footing the bills have their say. No more emails, no more music on hold waiting for customer service. Step up to the mic and let your voice be heard."



Assemblyman Kevin Byrne said, "It's hard to communicate when you don't have any access to the internet or any power at all. Senator Murphy and I spent a great deal of time driving

from site to site trying to extend the lines of communication for crews who were battling high winds, sleet, and snow. These were catastrophic storms, but we know Con Edison and NYSEG can do a much better job. Coupled with results from the PSC's investigation, the suggestions, criticisms and information we gather from residents can be instrumental in helping us get the power on more quickly in the future."

Somers Town Supervisor Rick Morrissey and North Salem Town Supervisor Warren Lucas, whose towns were devastated by the storms, were also on the dais, asking earnest questions on behalf of their constituents, many of whom spent over a week in the dark.

"Ninety percent of the town was without power. We had to close 50 roads. We were virtually on our own for three days," stated Somers Town Supervisor Rick Morrissey. "There were very dangerous situations we could not anticipate or control, like a propane truck getting trapped between live wires. I'm proud of the people of Somers. Neighbors checked on each other. Instead of trying to stick it out under adverse conditions, they took advantage of the shelters we had set up. We learned from these storms. When had our highway crews, NYSEG, make safe crews and tree companies all ready by 9 a.m. when the third storm was announced."



North Salem Town Supervisor Warren Lucas said, "We are dealing with an industry that has to be pushed to invest in maintenance and the upgrade of their distribution systems with new technology. The blame lies at the feet of the Public Service Commission and the utility companies for the problems we are having. Stronger class poles, stronger wiring to withstand tree impacts without breaking, automatic switches and sectionalizers that can reroute power to homes, intelligent meters that can deliver information to the homeowner and utility company about your electrical status. We need a 21st Century distribution system where outages are minimized and those that occur can be restored in hours instead of days, instead of thousands of people losing their power, maybe a few hundred. We need our utility companies to invest and put money into their distribution systems. We need the PSC to direct that."

Empowered by the opportunity to air their grievances, the residents' questions and statements reflected their frustration with the utility's lack of communication and a myriad of other problems they faced during the storm.



One senior who lives in Heritage Hills in Somers castigated Con Edison for having no viable plan to replace their aging infrastructure and for failing to keep residents informed during the storms. He noted, "We have more senior citizens in Heritage Hills than all of Westchester and you left us without power for seven days. That's not fair."

A resident of Somers commented that despite NYSEG's claims of having over 800 crews in Westchester, it was days before she saw even one tuck, and none of the crews seemed to know where they supposed to be working. She added that even before the storms, she and her neighbors were losing power a dozen times a year.

Perhaps the most poignant speaker of the night was a woman from Somers who related her mother's gut-wrenching experiences in a nursing home that was without power for four days. Patients, she said, had to be helped to the bathroom; they were mostly bed-ridden because of the cold, and they ate cold meals by candlelight. Her mother contracted pneumonia and nearly died. "Hospitals and senior living facilities need to be turned on quickly."

Not all of the speakers were critical of the utilities' efforts. A resident of Brewster, whose job was to oversee the town's water system, said, "A lot of people put their lives on the line during those storms. Don't underestimate the good things both companies did. We were all working 24 hours a day under unbelievably bad conditions."



Senator Murphy added it was encouraging to see people come together to help each other during the storms, and that the dedication of the emergency crews was exceptional. "There were crews from all over the country. They even came down from Quebec. They were fearless and refused to fail. One crew promised they wouldn't leave a neighborhood until they had power. Five hours later, they did."

President and CEO Carl Taylor, Cindy Chadwick, Manager, Public Affairs and Trish Nilsen, Director of Emergency Preparedness, represented NYSEG. Steven Parisi, General Manager of System Operations and Jane Solnick, Manager, Public Affairs fielded questions for Con Edison. Among the other elected officials who came looking for answers for their residents were Carmel Town Supervisor Ken Schmitt, Somers Town Councilman Anthony Cirieco and

Somers Town Councilman William Faulkner.