

# Saving Energy Can Save You Money

BY ASSEMBLYMEMBER  
CATHERINE NOLAN

Queens residents should know that there are simple actions homeowners can take to save energy and utility costs, and that there are government incentives, such as tax breaks and financial assistance, for making energy-efficient changes to their homes.

High home heating costs take a toll on working families and seniors on fixed incomes whenever the bitter cold months roll in, but the burden this winter is even heavier. Economic instability, fluctuating oil prices and the harsh winter weather are reasons why every person should make energy-efficient improvements in their homes."

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the typical family spends over \$1,600 a year on home utility bills – a large portion of which is wasted energy, such as from drafty windows or poor insulation.

While weatherizing and buying new energy-efficient appliances may be costly now, the cost will eventually be paid for in energy savings. For those that need help financing these home-improvements look at:

The federally-funded Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), which performs energy-efficiency measures such as insulating, weather-stripping and replacing appliances for lower-

income homeowners and renters. For more information and income-eligibility contact the Local Division of Housing and Community Renewal Office.

Assistance Home Performance with ENERGY STAR, which reduces energy costs for low-and moderate-income households by providing energy efficiency improvements to those who might not be eligible for WAP. Eligible homeowners and renters receive subsidies up to 50 percent of the project cost, for no more than \$5,000. Go to [www.getenergysmart.org/LowIncome/HomeOwners.aspx](http://www.getenergysmart.org/LowIncome/HomeOwners.aspx) for more information or call the New York State Energy and Research Development Authority at 1-866-NYSERDA.

Check out federal tax breaks for energy-saving household improvements, prominently found at [www.energy.gov/taxbreaks.htm](http://www.energy.gov/taxbreaks.htm), and state tax breaks spelled out at <http://www.tax.state.ny.us>.

Meanwhile, everyone can lower heating costs, which typically account for 45 percent of utility bills by:

- Weatherizing their home – caulk and weather-strip doors and windows that leak air, or tightly tape clear plastic film to the inside of window frames
- Keeping curtains open in the daylight and closed at night
- Properly insulating the attic, ceilings, floors, crawl spaces and heating ducts, especially if the home was built

before 1980

- Checking for open fireplace dampers
- Installing exterior or interior storm windows, which can cut heat loss in half
- Cleaning or replacing furnace filters once a month
- Making sure floor and wall vents aren't blocked by furniture or rugs
- Turning down the thermostat to 60 degrees while asleep or out, and keeping it comfortably low when home.

Homeowners can also reduce energy consumption by:

- Buying ENERGY STAR appliances – which typically exceed federal energy standards by at least 15 percent – to save money and reduce carbon pollution
- Taking shorter showers and installing low-flow faucets and showerheads
- Installing heat traps on the water heater pipes and insulating the water heater, or buying a more efficient one if it's seven years or older
- Using a power strip for appliances and shutting them off when they're not in use. Televisions, computers and kitchen appliances will continue to draw power when they're turned off. Unplugging them will save 75 percent of their energy.

*Catherine Nolan represents the 37th Assembly District in Queens.*



**Assemblymember Catherine Nolan**

# Times Are Changing In Albany

BY STATE SENATOR  
GEORGE ONORATO

The late financier J.P. Morgan once said that "the first step towards getting somewhere is to decide that you're not going to stay where you are."

In light of the fact that Democrats are now in the majority in the New York State Senate for the first time in 43 years, and given the efforts we are now undertaking to reform the operating rules of the Senate, it's clear that Senate Democrats are taking those first steps to get away from where we have been and to create a more transparent and accountable state government for the people of New York State.

Just days into the 2009 legislative session, Senate Democrats proposed and adopted a series of rules reforms to improve the operations of the Senate and provide more openness in deliberations.

These included actions to reverse old rules that limited the ability of senators to call for immediate action on bills being held in Senate commit-

tees, that squelched debate on legislation, and that denied the public an opportunity to see where their representatives stood on such efforts to bring bills to the Senate floor for a vote.

In addition, we adopted new rules to permit all senators, regardless of party affiliation, the opportunity to co-sponsor legislation, and to bolster committee review of bills affecting more than one issue area.

We will also seek to increase the use of technology to make the democratic process and legislative deliberations more accessible to all New Yorkers.

But above all, the Senate Democratic Conference proposed and adopted these rules changes in a very important context: that they are just the very beginning of reforms to help obliterate our state government's reputation as the most dysfunctional in the nation.

For the first time ever, the Senate rules will expire in one year, at the end of 2009, to allow for more reforms. In addition, for the first time, a bipartisan Temporary Senate

Committee on Rules and Administration Reform was established to hold public hearings, take testimony and devise new ways to improve the way the Senate does the people's business. This nine-member committee includes both Democratic and Republican senators – led by co-chairs of both political parties – and is expected to report back to the Senate with its preliminary findings in April.

As one who has long sought institutional changes in the Senate – and in state government as a whole – that would more fully involve individual lawmakers and the public in vital budget and policy decisions affecting all of our lives, I am looking forward to taking additional steps to achieve these goals.

With a tip of the hat to J.P. Morgan, we are definitely going to "get somewhere" in terms of government reform because we owe it to the people of New York State not to stay where we have been.

*State Senator George Onorato represents the 12th District in Queens.*



**State Senator George Onorato**