

Mayor's Column
January 16, 2018

In last week's column, I highlighted some of the 500 plus laws passed in the last session of the New York State Legislature and signed into law by Governor Cuomo.

I thought it further useful to research what was passed in other states in 2017 as they often share a commonality of purpose or act as a forecast as to what may affect New Yorkers going forward.

Nationally, the themes centered very specific societal issues; opioid addiction both stricter laws and medical assistance, human trafficking, the legalization of marijuana, epi-pen usage in public facilities and gun control. Literally dozens of state enacted legislation pertaining to all of the above subjects. In addition the minimum wage was raised in 14 states, and soda taxes are clearly gaining traction.

Staying close to home, New Jersey and Connecticut covered most of the above topics but the New Jersey Legislature focused on reducing the tax burden as it competes with New York for one of the most expensive places to live. To that end, sales tax was lowered to 6.875 from 7%; the amount of retirement income excluded from state income taxes will increase fivefold and the estate tax exemption now rises to \$2million.

Connecticut added two potentially ground breaking pieces of legislation that I believe will be copied in other states going forward: Employers are now not allowed to ask a job applicant if they have prior arrests or convictions on an initial job application; Most insurance policies will be required to cover 3D and more advanced mammogram procedures.

Our neighbors in Vermont are trying to come to terms with their particularly acute opioid epidemic by passing some very strict drug laws. As example, anyone convicted of selling fentanyl can now receive a prison term of 20 years and a million dollar fine.

A Vermont law that I think should be nationwide is the requirement that anyone seeking public office or a high level government staff position must disclose all business ownerships and sources of income above \$5,000. In addition, officeholders may not become lobbyists immediately upon leaving office.

In a portend of things to come, the Utah Legislature added a 4.7% sales tax on all Amazon purchases since they are losing \$200million plus every year in this revenue stream. In the same vein, California now grants lower level felons the right to vote and no one under the age of 18 can be charged with prostitution.

I would be remiss if I did not mention other new California initiatives as their legislature was the most prolife passing almost 900 new laws.

- Victims cannot ever consent to sex while unconscious or incapacitated by drugs, alcohol or medication.
- All single user toilets must be gender neutral
- Terminally ill patients can choose to end their lives using experimental drugs not receiving full FDA approval. Health plans may cover their costs and physicians who recommend them are exempt from any disciplinary actions.
- Parents must be notified by any sports league if their child's head was hit and all coaches and sports administrators must receive concussion training and abide by new protocols when assessing head injuries
- The term Redskins cannot be used by any public school sports team or as a mascot.
- Gun magazines of more than ten bullets are now strictly banned

Illinois, in the first of its kind, enacted a law requiring cosmetologists to undergo training to recognize physical signs of sexual and domestic violence.

Finally, every year, the states do not disappoint and enact law which are esoteric, fun, a little zany or just plain head scratchers.

- In California, barbershops and hair salons may serve free beer and wine to customers up until 10 pm (I couldn't find a prohibition on start time!?)
- North Carolina did not overturn the ban on restricting bingo games to five hours
- Golf carts may now be driven in Ohio on all roads with a speed limit up to 35 mph. This law would permit them on every street in Bronxville!
- In Utah, marriage is against the law between cousins only if you are younger than 65 years old.
- Oregon has banned the use of sky lanterns, but not fireworks, due to the potential for fire.
- In one of the last states in the Union, Pennsylvania now allows one to buy a six pack of beer, but not a case, in a grocery store instead of the State Run Package Store.

In an effort to be more green?? California now allows burials only 3.5 feet deep vs the traditional five feet requirement.

And I end with my favorite, from California – In an effort to reduce the amount of gas from cows, Senate Bill #1383 approved a system of tubes and attached back packs to filter and capture the gas – a dreadful visual indeed!!