

# A People's Report

From the Office of Assemblymember Sarahana Shrestha



THE PORT EWEN FIRE DEPARTMENT RECEIVED A STATE-FUNDED \$40,000 GRANT OUR OFFICE HELPED SECURE TO HELP REPLACE A BROKEN COMPRESSOR.

**“The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I’m from the Government, and I’m here to help.”**

—RONALD REAGAN

Dear neighbor,  
Democracy is often a messy process, and the word “government” alone is enough to terrify many. But did you know that groundbreaking technologies like the **internet** and the **GPS** were developed in the public sector? And that if it wasn’t for the federal government taking up **Public Power**, much of rural America may still be without electricity? Here’s to rebuilding our democracy to make it work for the people. We hope you enjoy this issue of our newsletter!

SARAHANA SHRESTHA  
ASSEMBLYMEMBER, DISTRICT 103

### Questions for our office?

Call **845-338-9610** or email **district103@nyassembly.gov**

### Grants across the district

Emergency services often operate with tight constraints on resources. This year we helped award \$40,000 to the **Ulster County Emergency Operations Center**, \$40,000 to the **Port Ewen Fire Department**, \$15,000 to the **Olive First Aid Unit**, and \$125,000 to the **Tivoli Firehouse**.

**READ ABOUT OTHER GRANTS ON PAGE 4.**



ASSEMBLYMEMBER SHRESTHA VISITED THE TIVOLI FIREHOUSE, RECIPIENT OF A \$125,000 CAPITAL GRANT TO EXPAND ITS FACILITY

### Bills passed

#### Flexible EMS Medicaid Reimbursement (A9102C):

EMS agencies can get reimbursed for Medicaid patients only if they’re transported to a general hospital—even under circumstances where on-site care or alternate destinations such as mental health facilities would be more appropriate. This bill enables first responders to make the right decision by authorizing Medicaid reimbursement for on-site care or alternate destinations. **▲ Needs to be signed by the Governor.**

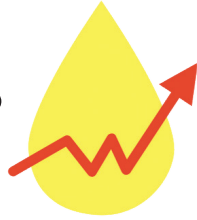
#### Homeowner Protection Program (A07636C):

The Homeowner Protection Program (HOPP) provides free legal services and counseling to New Yorkers facing foreclosures, but the program depends on receiving annual funding in the state budget. Last year and this year it received **\$40 million** each. This bill codifies the program so that annual funding is guaranteed. **▲ Needs to be signed by the Governor.**

**READ ABOUT MORE BILLS PASSED ON PAGE 3.**

✔ Bill Passed (A04141A)

## Ban Copays on Insulin



The inventors of insulin believed it was unethical to profit from a discovery that would save lives—it's why they sold the patent for only \$1 in 1923<sup>1</sup>. Despite this, insulin became one of the most price-gouged drugs, and many states have started to cap insulin copays. In New York, it is currently capped at **\$100 per month**—but not for long!

**Starting January 1, 2025, the law we passed through this year's budget will ban insulin copays in state-regulated plans, i.e. plans the state has authority to regulate.**

### What is a state-regulated plan?

Some types of health benefit plans cannot be regulated by the state, including those that are subject to federal ERISA preemption. The best way to find out if you're on a state-regulated plan is to ask your employer, or your health insurance company.

### Are there other similar efforts?

The Assembly also proposed to eliminate copays on **Epipens**, but that did not survive the three-way budget negotiations. We hope to see this pass next.



**2.1 million** New Yorkers have diabetes and 30% of type two diabetics are insulin dependent. In 2016 the average person with **Type 1 diabetes** spent **\$5,705** annually on insulin!

1. <https://pnhp.org/news/why-insulin-is-overpriced/>

✔ Bill Passed (A8806, Part HH)

## Good Cause Eviction

Upstate municipalities can now opt-into **Good Cause Eviction**, passed in this year's budget. By default it only applies to landlords who have a portfolio size of more than 10 units, but I successfully fought to allow localities to adjust that number to reflect local conditions. The **City of Kingston** has opted-in to cover buildings that have more than one unit and are not owner-occupied. The law exempts all buildings built in 2009 or later.

### What are the Good Cause protections?

A covered tenant will have the **right to stay and renew their lease** unless one of the following conditions has been met: (1) failure to pay owed rent (2) violation of lease (3) landlord needs the unit for personal use (4) tenant doesn't agree to the allowed rent increase, which is 10% or Consumer Price Index + 5%, whichever is lower (5) nuisance or violation of the law (6) denying access for repairs or necessary improvements (7) owner intends to demolish the building, or take it off the market.

**Email us to learn more: [district103@nyassembly.gov](mailto:district103@nyassembly.gov)**



✔ Bill Passed (A03351B)

## The Climate Change Superfund Act

The legislature passed the **Climate Change Superfund Act**, which taxes the top most-polluting companies on their past emissions and generates **\$75 billion** for the state's climate adaptation measures. The bill requires the largest fossil fuel companies to cumulatively pay **\$3 billion a year** over 25 years, with each company paying a share proportional to its overall past emissions.

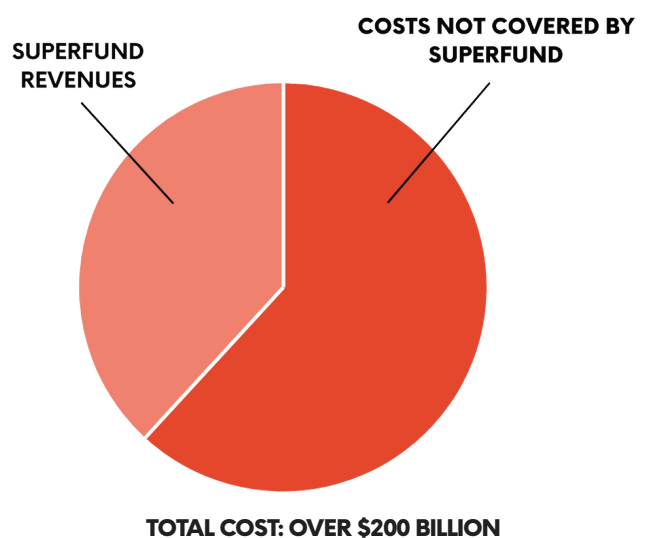
⚠ **Needs to be signed by the Governor.**

### How much will climate adaptation cost without the Superfund?

The total cost for the state's climate adaptation is estimated to be more than **\$200 billion**, of which the Superfund revenue will cover almost 38%. In the absence of this revenue, the additional cost on New Yorkers is about \$4,000 per person over 25 years.

### Won't the fossil fuel companies pass the cost to consumers?

No. **The Superfund Act** taxes a fixed cost on the past actions of a small number of companies, where each company owes a different amount. If a company tried to recover the tax through increased prices, it wouldn't be able to compete with other companies that are paying less or nothing in the tax.



### What is the impact of the bill on the fossil fuel industry?

The tax applies to companies that emitted over **1 billion metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub>** between 2000 and 2018—about 30-40 of them, including ExxonMobil, Chevron, Saudi Aramco, Shell, and BP. The largest eight of these companies collectively earned a profit of **\$389 billion** in 2022, of which the **\$3 billion** annual fee is only 0.77%.

🔗 **Bill Introduced (A10332)**

# The Hudson Valley Power Authority Act

This year I introduced a bill to replace **Central Hudson** with a publicly-owned and democratically controlled energy utility, the **Hudson Valley Power Authority (HVPA)**. The primary goal of this new state authority is to be in the service of its ratepayers by providing low rates, reliable service, easy to understand bills, clean energy, community benefits, labor protections, and environmental justice.

## How would the HVPA function?

**Central Hudson** would be acquired from the Canadian holding company, **Fortis**, and be run as an independent state-owned public benefit corporation—all the powers of a corporation but without shareholders and a profit motive. It would be governed by a representative **Board of Trustees**, overseen by an **Observatory**, and operated by the same workers who operate it today, including those who come to fix power outages.

## What is an Observatory?

An **Observatory** is an increasingly popular model for accountability—an autonomous civil society organization designed to improve community participation, transparency, and benefit-sharing.

Its **Governing Board** will include elected county representatives, labor representatives chosen by the local union, and members from one or more academic institutions that are partners to the **Observatory**.

## Who will pay for it?

**HVPA** can issue low-interest bonds to purchase **Central Hudson** without costing taxpayers. Ratepayers will pay for the services just as we do now, except the rates will be lower because (1) utilities depend on debt-financing, and state authorities can finance debt at lower costs, and (2) the profit motive is removed. The first thing **HVPA** would do is refinance **Central Hudson's** current debt at a lower interest rate—currently it has over a billion dollars in long-term debt, which is normal for utilities!



## Why pursue Public Power?

The fight for **Public Power** is not new to New York or the United States. In 1931, the state legislature created the **New York Power Authority (NYPA)** as a counterweight to private utilities like **ConEd**. And without the federal government stepping in to create publicly-owned or cooperative utilities, most of rural America may still be without power. Today, cities like **Los Angeles** and **Austin** get their energy from publicly-owned utilities.

The conflict between profit and public interest have always lied at the root of the multiple crises facing for-profit utilities, and **Central Hudson** is no exception.

⚠️ **Missed our online town hall? Watch the recording:**  
<https://vimeo.com/952347205>

## Are Energy Utilities Natural Monopolies?

Natural monopolies refer to industries that have such large fixed costs that a single company will offer the lowest prices rather than multiple competing companies. Energy distribution utilities like **Central Hudson** have long been understood to be natural monopolies.

Regardless of the debate on economies of scale, there is another reason why competing companies in energy distribution are not the norm: it would make little sense for various companies to each have their own infrastructure of cables, wires, poles, and gas pipes in the same area. Multiple copies of such an infrastructure would be costly and cumbersome.

**But if the energy distribution sector is suited to be a natural monopoly, then why should that monopoly be given to for-profit financial holding companies?**

### When energy utilities competed...

On January 1, 1907, in Ontario, Canada, all of its nineteen municipalities overwhelmingly voted to contract with a new publicly-owned utility<sup>1</sup>. A year later, thirteen of them voted on a second referendum to construct a municipal-owned local distribution system, **even if a private one already existed**.

1. Howard Hampton and Bill Reno, *Public Power: The Fight for Publicly Owned Electricity* (Insomniac Press, 2003)

# Grants across the District

**Contd. from Page 1:** Every year our office gets the opportunity to help secure state-funded grants for projects in our Assembly district. Some are smaller grants for operational costs, others are bigger capital grants.

## **Town of Rosendale - \$125,000**

**Project awarded:** Update playground equipment at the Rosendale Community Center.



- Hudson River Sloop Clearwater** - \$35,000
- Saugerties Central School District** - \$30,000
- Opus 40** - \$25,000
- Upstate Films** - \$25,000
- Red Hook Public Library** - \$15,000
- Town of Ulster Public Library** - \$15,000
- Helping Hands Food Pantry** - \$10,000



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## **A People's Report: Issue 3**

A new law to **ban insulin copays**, hard-won protections against unjust evictions, a bill to make **Central Hudson** community-owned, a way to get **\$75 billion** for climate adaptation without costing taxpayers, flexible **Medicaid reimbursement** for EMS agencies, and more!



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<https://bit.ly/103updates>

### **📣 Central Hudson Update**

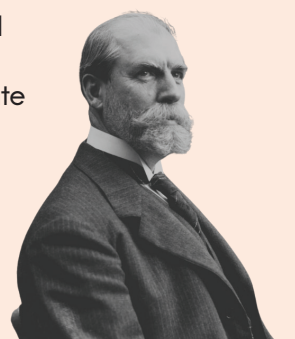
## **The PSC approved rate increases of 15.1% and 14.3% for electricity and gas respectively and Central Hudson has filed for further increases**

In 1907, New York's Governor **Charles Evans Hughes** argued that the state's hydro power "should be preserved and held for the benefit of the people and should not be surrendered to private interests."

The demand for energy to be publicly-owned was a popular demand at the time, and to quell such demands, a business magnate came up with a compromise:

energy utilities would be allowed to remain private, but the state would get the authority to regulate them. A century later, that compromise has failed to deliver

**LEARN ABOUT THE FIGHT FOR PUBLIC POWER ON PAGE 3.**



## **Woodstock Library - \$165,000**

**Project awarded:** Shelving at the new Woodstock library, which is under construction at 10 Dixon Avenue



## **YMCA Kingston - \$300,000**

**Project awarded:** Expand elevator access to the third floor so that seniors and others with mobility challenges can easily access the amenities there.

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