

BY YAAKOV MILSTEIN

I believe that this program is an issue that both sides of the political aisle can agree upon from both an economical and environmental point of view.

This is a perfect example of interest groups taking advantage of the little citizen while breaking a system that works for all.

INNOVATIVE ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROGRAMS THAT ADDRESS REAL ISSUES

On every energy bill there is a small charge called System Benefits Charge (SBC), also known as the Energy Efficiency and Renewability charge. This very small .003 levy goes to support consumer education and subsidize energy efficiency programs.

The story behind these programs is innovative. It reflects out-of-the-box thinking that is helping to grow our local economy (by creating jobs on Long Island & Queens), while also helping save energy and money for NY homeowners that otherwise would not be able to afford important energy efficiency upgrades to their homes.

Many homeowners don't even realize how easy it is to lower their energy bills. They don't even know what residential energy efficiency means. But it can be summed up like this: if you add up all the small cracks and penetrations in most homes, it probably amounts to a hole the size of a basketball. And yet, people don't know.

Overseeing the SBC across the state is NYSERDA (the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority). They leverage high energy payments to engage homeowners in the comprehensive energy audit. The energy audit involves diagnostic testing to analyze how your home uses energy. Understanding that each house represents a number of systems (heating/cooling/lighting etc) that all work together to provide a healthy and comfortable environment. The energy audit provides a comprehensive look at where energy is being wasted, and the Energy Auditor knows that most homes can finance energy efficiency Improvements that provide more monthly savings then the monthly payments required to finance these improvements. This typically includes new advanced equipment as well as basic improvements like air sealing (all those cracks), and adding insulation.

Each homeowner can get between \$3,000 -\$12,000 in grants and subsidies, as well as a subsidized low interest loans up to \$25,000. These loans are unsecured (no lien on the home) and built into the energy bill so as not to affect future loans. NYSERDA only approves the project if the estimated savings are projected to be more than the monthly payments - so the energy savings essentially pay for the work.

Many homeowners also have small repairs that need to be taken care of in their homes (water leaks etc.). This program allows them to be dealt with while the contractor is in the home. So it is a real win-win for everyone.

THESE PROGRAMS ARE AT RISK FOR MANY NY HOMEOWNERS AS ELIGIBILITIES ARE CHANGING SEPTEMBER 1ST .

When a home is modified with air sealing, insulation, and high-efficiency heating / cooling systems, the insulation keeps the home comfortable year-round. This can also save the average homeowner about 35% of their energy costs. But there is still a bigger problem when homes are neglected. Often it is not only smaller problems in the home that can be easily fixed if detected early on (like leaks and moisture build up) – it is also about the quality of air in the home. A lot of homes were built before the turn of the century and don't have the right amount of air flow, which can mean they have what we call “strong stack effect.” When heat and moisture in the home rises, it creates a pressure underneath the attic which forces conditioned air out through the cracks in the attic floor, creating a suction in the lower part of the house that pulls in more unconditioned air. Too much suction can also pull fumes into the home that should be vented out. Many older homes also have carbon monoxide coming from their heating systems or the kitchen ovens. If these systems are not working properly, then very likely there is what we call “back-draft spillage.” This is when the fumes are not going up the chimney properly, but instead are coming back in to the home. These issues can affect the quality of the air in the home, that often result in ongoing health issues.

The end result is a variety of inventive programs that are overseen by NYSERDA across the state, and LIPA on Long Island and part of queens. With no capital investment - and just a small charge on your electric bill - we have fantastic energy efficiency programs that continue to help thousands NY homeowners . These programs are especially critical to low income communities and the elderly, and we certainly hope that public support of these programs will ensure that they continue.

Yaakov Milstein is the executive VP of J Synergy Energy Solutions. J Synergy is on the front lines of the energy efficiency and tech marketplace and is helping drive the legislation, working with many local politicians

