



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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New York's Budget & A Hectic Legislative Session

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The State Senate recently wrapped up a busy legislative session that saw the passage of hundreds of bills that could impact how New Yorkers live. Among the most significant is the adoption, albeit late, of a record-setting \$229 billion budget and legislation dealing with criminal justice, elections, and the rights of grieving families.

While I support full funding for education, increased support for mental health services, resources to maintain our roads and bridges, a hold on SUNY tuition, and funding for vital state services, I am concerned that overall spending is up \$8-billion over last year and has increased 35-percent over the past 5 years. The budget will add to future deficits and is out of touch with the financial challenges facing taxpayers.

The new spending plan also includes a ban on natural gas hookups in most new buildings starting in 2026. However, the budget does not provide details on how the increased demand for electricity will impact the existing power grid or how consumers will deal with increased utility and housing costs. Without greater analysis, this one size fits all plan is unrealistic, unaffordable and unreliable. Thankfully, many of the more restrictive recommendations initially proposed, including a ban on the purchase of natural gas appliances for existing homes, were eliminated from the final budget. Many constituents expressed opposition to those proposals.

Unfortunately, the budget did not help tackle inflation, provide tax cuts for middle class earners, or help struggling families and businesses. The budget process also lacked transparency and open deliberation. For these reasons, I voted against it.

Efforts to correct so-called reforms to our criminal justice system also fell short in both the budget and the traditional legislative process. Language changes to cashless bail laws still do not allow judges to consider the “dangerousness” of an individual when determining bail, which I believe is imperative for public safety. The legislature also adopted a so-called Clean Slate bill that enables many convicted felons to conceal their criminal backgrounds. I believe the legislation goes too far and opposed it.

In the final hours of session, the legislature approved significant election law changes, including moving most local elections in New York to even-numbered years starting in 2026. It would apply to elections at the county, town and village level. The action was taken with little to no input from local officials and I voted no on this bill.

I was pleased to see the Grieving Families Act win legislative approval again this year. The bill, which was vetoed by the governor last year, would allow the families of victims of violent crime and other wrongful deaths to seek financial damages.

In the end, this year’s legislative session did not do enough to help hard-working, law-abiding residents. I will continue to fight for fiscal responsibility in state government and policies to ensure public safety, and advocate for programs to make New York a better place to live, work and raise a family.