



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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I hate to say “I told you so” -- an Op-Ed by Senator Steve Saland

STEPHEN M. SALAND August 12, 2009

| ISSUE: **FINANCE**

The Poughkeepsie Journal editorialized on the state’s shortfall on August 5th noting “they should have seen this coming”. Well, I did, as did my Republican colleagues. Each of us who cast a no vote and spoke out on this egregious assault on our wallets saw this coming.

Belatedly, our Governor seems to have been clued in to the fiscal mess he, in conjunction with his New York City leadership partners, helped create.

In response to the State’s current year \$2.1 billion budget shortfall, the Governor recently released a statement noting the shortfall would have to be addressed without raising taxes and fees.

Should we all applaud?

As the saying goes “you can’t get blood from a stone”; our Governor is *finally* recognizing that New York taxpayers are tapped out.

During this year’s budget fiasco, I vehemently opposed the 2009-10 Budget declaring the State was not doing enough to rein in spending and argued that it was foolish and counterproductive to raise taxes and fees during a recession. Despite my protests and those of my Republican colleagues, every Senate Democrat voted to increase taxes and fees in excess of \$8 billion. Every Senate Democrat banded together to raise spending at unsustainable levels. No, that isn’t a partisan statement, but merely a reflection of the facts as documented by the roll call vote. It would have taken just one Senate Democrat to say no to this tax and spend budget and perhaps today we would not be grappling with \$2.1 billion shortfall.

They didn’t stop there. Within a matter of weeks of passing a horrendous budget that obviously exceeded our anticipated revenues, they shoved down our throats the MTA bail-out plan that will cost the taxpayers and business owners in the 12-county MTA region more than \$2 billion in new taxes and fees annually. It was especially painful to Dutchess County, which derives, at best, a modest benefit from the MTA.

Where was the Governor’s concern for taxpayers when he supported a bloated budget that stripped property tax payers of the STAR rebate checks and an MTA bail-out that not only levied a tax on virtually every employer in Dutchess County but compounded the pain by raising license and registration fees on motorists who rarely if ever use mass transit?

I warned this would happen when the State was controlled by three men in a room who were all of the same party and were all from New York City. There is no check and balance so we have witnessed an unprecedented spending frenzy – during what may be the worst recession since the Great Depression. As a loud and vocal critic during the budget debate, I cautioned and chastised the Senate Democrat Majority on their reckless budget:

“Tax and spend in a good economy is perhaps imprudent or unwise. Tax and spend in a severe recession and a horrendous economy is sheer lunacy.”

It's abundantly apparent the State's leadership is not interested in easing your taxes but rather, they have piled on to your burden. In a matter of months in power, the Democrat-led Senate and Assembly have jeopardized our fragile economy with damaging policy decisions.

Unemployment rates continue to soar. Businesses have dramatically cut back and are fighting to keep their doors open. People unable to pay their property taxes have lost their homes.

Hopefully, the Governor now recognizes that lip service is not enough, perhaps he is *now* realizing that raising taxes and fees is irresponsible. The Governor should be taking his stance a step further. We need leadership that will reverse the damage done this year.

If the Governor really wants to stimulate the economy, he can start by putting money back in the pockets of taxpayers. Reinstate the STAR rebate checks; remove the excessive tax and fee increases in this year's budget. He must also tackle the spending side of the equation, but not in a fashion that imposes the burden on local governments, and in turn, property taxpayers.

I hope the Governor is true to his word and does not cave to the tax and spend practices he and the Democrat-led Senate and Assembly have proven to favor.

It's wrong to ask more of the taxpayers. We need responsible government and smart leadership that recognize the need for belt-tightening in a fiscal crisis.

It's time leadership listened to those of us who warned that they were making a bad situation worse. I don't like saying I told you so and I really wish I didn't have to say it now.