



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Darrel J. Aubertine

Ag Committee Votes Up Mandate Relief, Down Farm Labor Act

DARREL J. AUBERTINE April 20, 2010

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Aubertine: Today's votes are votes in support of farmers, farm workers and consumers in NY

ALBANY (April 20, 2010)— The Senate Agriculture Committee today voted to reduce taxes, fees and mandates for farmers and against a bill that would add new regulations and labor expenses. Sen. Darrel J. Aubertine as chair of the committee said today's votes show a commitment to New York's number one industry.

“Today’s votes were in support of our agriculture industry, the farmers, the farm workers and the consumers who enjoy locally grown, high quality and fresh New York produce,” Sen. Aubertine said. “Our farms are a critical piece of our economy, our stability, our security and our future. Protecting the bottom line for our farms is the best way to ensure that we have a safe, stable food supply that is produced responsibly here in New York.”

The committee reported out the much needed Farmer Tax, Fee and Mandate Relief Act (S.6947A) to the Senate Finance Committee and voted down the hotly debated Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act (S.2247). The meeting was held at 9:30 a.m. in Hearing Room B of the Legislative Office Building.

The Farmer Tax, Fee and Mandate Relief Act, sponsored by Sen. Aubertine, will alleviate some of the costs and regulations that limit profitability and burden farmers. This bill will help farmers ensure their land is recognized as part of an agricultural district, obtain tax credits for farm investments, exempt farm wineries from sales tax reporting requirements, ease corporation filing fees for farmers, ease payroll tax and vehicle supplemental registration fees within the Metropolitan Transit Authority service region, and reduce permit fees with the Department of Environmental Conservation.

“This bill will help farmers to raise their bottom line and increase the profitability of our farms,” Sen. Aubertine said. “Farmers are struggling in a system where they cannot set the price for their milk, fruits and vegetables to cover their costs, so the best way for us at the state level to help our farmers is to reduce costs. This bill addresses several different issues which will help our farms stay in business.”

The Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act would have imposed new regulations and mandates on farms large and small, with or without full-time employees, as well as add new costs such as additional overtime expenses. Sen. Aubertine visited farms and met with agricultural interests across the state last fall to discuss agriculture issues, including this legislation, and held a public hearing in Watertown that included discussion on the issue. The Senate Agriculture Committee held a public hearing on March 1 exclusively on this legislation to gather input from supporters and critics of the bill.

“This bill would have a dramatic negative impact on consumers, farm workers, and farmers in New York State,” Sen. Aubertine said. “We have taken every step to ensure that there has been a full, open and healthy discussion on this legislation before we vote on it. In this situation, we are seeing the process work. What must come out of this discussion is legislation that helps farmers, farm workers and consumers alike. I am of the opinion that this legislation does not accomplish that goal, and the vote today was a vote in support of farm workers, consumers and farmers alike.”

The bill was voted down 6-1 with two votes to move the bill without recommendation.

“We need to do everything we can to support agriculture and our Upstate economy,” said Sen. Catharine M. Young, Ranking Minority Member of the committee. “Our farmers already operate under many costly and burdensome regulations. Our farm workers are protected under these regulations and for that reason I am voting no. We need to do everything we can to rebuild the economy and that means doing what we can to support agriculture.”

“Our agricultural industry is one of the driving forces of the state's economy,” said Sen. David J. Valesky of Oneida. “Though well-intentioned, I believe this legislation would irreparably damage the industry's viability and hurt the very workers it seeks to protect. We must enforce the laws that are already on the books, not add new regulations that burden law-abiding farmers.”

"The farm families of New York Farm Bureau are hugely grateful to Senator Aubertine for his leadership during debate of this bill that surely would've wrecked our industry," said Dean Norton, president of New York Farm Bureau. "Senator Aubertine led a careful and thorough debate that gave full consideration of the viewpoints of the agricultural community. We spoke out loud and large against this bill and Senator Aubertine heard our voice. We are hopeful that from here on out, Albany takes on legislation—including the Farm Tax, Fee and Mandate Relief Act—that will help our industry prosper and grow to the benefit of the Upstate rural economy and the farm towns of Long Island."