



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

## **LATE BUDGET UNACCEPTABLE, Column by Sen. Cathy Young**

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Recently, I was visiting one of my volunteer fire departments, and a state corrections officer told me he knew how to save taxpayers \$1 million.

It was simple. Substitute bread slices for hamburger and hot dog rolls across the entire corrections system, replace Kool-Aid with water twice a day, and serve hard-boiled eggs instead of deviled ones, and the savings would add up.

It made great sense to me.

While I was growing up, our family of two adults and six children often ate bread instead of the fancier and more expensive rolls. We didn't feel deprived, it still tasted good, and we had enough to fill our stomachs.

Water is superior to sugary drinks from a nutritional standpoint, and hard-boiled eggs have less fat than ones laden with mayonnaise.

Even small, common sense changes can make a difference.

I asked this corrections officer whether he had approached his supervisors with his ideas to save money. He said he did, but nothing came of it.

Sure, shaving \$1 million doesn't solve the state's \$9.3 billion budget hole, but the point is that there are countless savings to be had, if you have the opportunity to get them on the budget negotiation table in Albany. Common sense spending cuts can be made, waste can be rooted out, and structural changes can be made to the state budget, if there are open, transparent discussions and negotiations.

Shockingly, that dialogue is not taking place, because New York City-beholden politicians who currently control the agenda in Albany are violating the law by not holding open Conference Committees and passing the state budget.

The state budget now is several weeks late, yet no meaningful budget talks are underway because downstate Senators and Assembly Members who dictate the agenda refuse to meet in public, if at all.

In the meantime, taxes, spending and borrowing are spinning out of control, hitting struggling taxpayers hard, and driving more people and jobs out of the state.

Sorely-needed road construction projects that would jump start the economy are stalled. Schools are laying off teachers. State workers are being furloughed, throwing state government further into chaos.

Despite an unprecedented fiscal crisis and the threat of running out of cash by June if action isn't taken, those who currently control Albany continue to fail to lead.

These are the same politicians who gave overburdened taxpayers a record shattering \$11 billion tax hike and went on an irresponsible \$13 billion spending

spree last year, the product of secret deal cutting by three men in a room from New York City. Upstate New York was severely hurt, our taxpayers got walloped, and our economic recovery was set further behind, with our state losing 270,000 jobs.

They are up to their same antics again this year, except worse.

The reality is that Governor Paterson and New York City-controlled majorities in both the Senate and Assembly are fiddling while the state burns.

Instead of following the budget reform laws of 2007 that require bipartisan Conference Committees to be convened to hammer out the budget in public, these so-called leaders are stalling by sticking their heads in the sand, hoping against hope that they will wake up one morning and the \$9.3 billion budget deficit will have magically disappeared.

It doesn't work that way.

Passing budget extenders to pay the bills week-to-week instead of tackling the tough decisions only is making the problem worse.

Conference Committees worked in 2007 and 2008 to pass on-time budgets. Our taxpayers need open discussions about solutions.

Every person in our state is affected by the state budget, whether they pay taxes, send their kids to school, drive on a road or bridge, or need hospital or nursing home care. The people have a right to know what their government is doing.

They also have a right to expect that their government will get the job done.

There are many cost-cutting solutions that Senate Republicans have proposed, including reforming the Medicaid system, reinstituting welfare fraud controls, consolidating services, streamlining state agencies and freezing purchases of recreational lands. We also have a detailed jobs plan that would grow manufacturing jobs, small business and create opportunities so that our young people don't have to leave.

These solutions could be part of the final budget, if only the majorities followed the law and held open negotiations to get the budget passed immediately.

The bottom line is that you can't tax, spend and borrow your way out of a recession.

We need sweeping policy changes that overhaul state government, including a Constitutional spending cap, property tax relief, and economic growth.

I will continue to fight for these reforms -- our people and communities are worth the fight.

With the right changes, we can turn our state around, and have a brighter future for ourselves and our children.

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