



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

Senator Martins Discusses Finances With School Superintendents

JACK M. MARTINS February 14, 2011

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State Senator Jack Martins met with school superintendents from throughout the northwest quadrant of the 7th Senate district to discuss state aid, mandate relief and canceled grant funding. The meeting was chaired by Floral Park Bellerose School District Superintendent Dr. Lynn Pombonyo. Among the local school superintendents at the meeting included Al Harper of Elmont, Warren Meierdiercks of Sewanhaka, Patrick Manley of Franklin Square, Dr. Tom Dolan of Great Neck South, Robert Katulak of New Hyde Park-Garden City Park, Charles Cardillo of Manhasset, Dr. Brenner of Roslyn, Dr. John Bierwirth

of Herricks, Dr. Lorna Lewis of East Williston and many more were in attendance.

Senator Martins characterized the meeting as “a frank discussion about the State’s fiscal crisis, mandate relief and strategies to look at pension costs and expanding the tax base.”

Senator Martins opened the session by talking about the recently Senate passed property tax cap and his ideas of reform and mandate relief. The Senator related his personal commitment to helping property taxpayers and students in this year’s state budget. “What we need to do together is to look at ways where we can take steps forward in pension reform, mandate relief and making sure that resources are utilized efficiently,” said Senator Martins adding, “people are hurting and I know you are feeling it in your own areas.”

During the discussion, superintendents offered their assessment of the state budget proposal and how it would impact their respective districts. Different school districts are looking at strategies to cut positions, close programs and other cost cutting measures.

Senator Martins discussed his support for immediate and sweeping mandate relief to relieve schools, villages, towns and counties from “costly and unnecessary mandates.” “Mandate relief is coming and will be taken up very soon in the Senate. There is a real commitment by the Senate and the Governor to help localities grapple with these rising costs. If we eliminate mandates, there is a real savings to taxpayers,” Martins noted.

In addition, Senator Martins also asked superintendents for their proposals on how to cut mandates and shifted costs to schools. Different ideas on pooling resources, health care costs, pensions and transportation were the focus of those discussions.

A flashpoint of the meeting was the ongoing newspaper reports and coverage of canceled grants to the 7th Senate district. Superintendents outlined millions of dollars of commitments made by the former Senator that were canceled by the then Senate’s New

York City dominated leadership in the closing days of 2010. The grant funding was canceled and redirected to other districts the day that Senator Martins was certified the winner of the election. The 7th Senate district was not immune to this action as Senators Zeldin, Ritchie and Grisanti have been dealing with the very same issue in their respective districts throughout the State.

“This action hurts all of you and it is unacceptable. It was a calculated political act that brings shame on the NYC dominated leadership” said Senator Martins adding, “quite frankly, there is not a day that does not go by where my office doesn’t get a call about another phantom grant that was promised on the phone. The fact is the grants were canceled. We have the letters that canceled them. They are open for everyone to see. It’s a disgrace that needy groups and organizations like fire departments, schools and hospitals were victimized like this. I will do all I can to help everyone who was fell victim by this action. It was wrong.”

At the conclusion of the meeting, Superintendents from throughout the quadrant asked questions about the budget package and offered their insight into the impact of their budgets. Patrick Manley of Franklin Square specifically noted his increasing benefit and pension costs in Franklin Square. He offered that pooling some health care related resources could result in significant savings. His thoughts were echoed by various Superintendents who were able to point to similar challenges in their respective districts.