



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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ISSUE:

- [Local Government](#)
- [Budget](#)

COMMITTEE:

- [Local Government](#)



Times are indeed changing in Albany and for the better. Not only do we have an on-time budget for the 2011-2012 fiscal year, but we went through the process with both sides of the aisle working together. The budget passed with overwhelming support in the legislature. Most importantly, we passed a fiscally-responsible budget that closed a \$10 billion deficit without raising any taxes or fees. It is quite a change from years past when our state government found a way to overspend and overtax in the middle of a financial crisis. Quite frankly, we couldn't suffer another year of those past practices and so we made a commitment – we would balance the budget, not on the backs of our taxpayers, but by cutting spending. The result was Republicans and Democrats working together to get the state back on track – a true win-win.

The \$132 billion spending plan reduces year-to-year overall spending by 2 percent, trims State operations expenditures by 10 percent, and forces nearly every area of State government to increase efficiency, maximize performance and do more with less - - just like families across this State have been doing for years. In this budget we reconfirmed our commitment to cutting spending and rejecting tax increases. New York does not have a revenue problem, our State has a spending problem and when revenues are down, spending must follow suit. This budget makes real progress toward making New York a more affordable place to live and work.

As mentioned, key to this year's budget was the realization that there would be cuts and despite the state's new found commitment to fiscal discipline, the budget would not be balanced on the backs of those most in need. In other words, there would be shared sacrifice, but with an eye toward ensuring that those most vulnerable were not inordinately affected.

In this light, after receiving the Governor's proposed budget, my colleagues and I led the initiative to restore state education funding to our public schools. Through our efforts \$272 million was rededicated to state aid to public schools including restoring over \$4.2 million in cuts that the Governor had proposed for our schools in the 7th Senate District.

Also, my colleagues and I led the way on restoring funding for 4201 schools, those serving the severely disabled, blind, and deaf (i.e. Henry Viscardi School in Albertson). The Governor's budget had cut funding for these schools and transferred the cost to our local school districts. By restoring over \$98 million not only did we reconfirm our commitment to protecting those most in need, but we also took the expense off our local districts' ledger.

We restored \$86 million to higher education that had been cut in the Governor's budget. In doing so, we stay true to providing quality, affordable higher education for all our children.

Throughout the budget process, I also heard from many senior citizens in my district who were very concerned about the Governor's proposed changes to the EPIC program. We were successful in restoring \$22 million to EPIC to help ensure continued prescription drug coverage for seniors.

Through this budget, we enacted major reforms to the state's out of control Medicaid spending, including the imposition of a cap on Medicaid expenditures and restructuring Medicaid to be more efficient and get better results for patients. New York spends, by far, more on Medicaid than any other state in the country, both in total and per capita. We must stop the practice of simply spending more and more without re-evaluating how funds are being applied.

It was, as we have undoubtedly seen, a rather difficult and contentious budget as special interests, desperate to derail any effort to reform Albany, spent millions on radio ads and mailers hoping to manipulate public opinion for their own interests. I know that these efforts unfortunately caused a great deal of concern to many.

Despite the best efforts of these special interests to skew public opinion, facts are stubborn things to ignore. I hope, as I noted above, that concerns have been allayed. I supported the Governor's commitment to a balanced budget without raising taxes and worked with my colleagues and the Governor to restore funding to education and health care so that our communities would not be asked to shoulder more than our fair share of the sacrifice.

The fact remains that we in the Senate are making historic bi-partisan progress with Governor Cuomo and the Assembly that reflects a new era of fiscal responsibility which bodes well for us all.

We have a balanced and sound state budget, but there is more work to be done. We need real mandate relief for our local governments and school districts to ease the cost burden on local taxpayers. We need to address pension reform as skyrocketing pension costs are driving up property taxes for local governments and school districts alike.

During this session we have focused on and passed legislation encouraging job growth and must continue to do so. I voted to make the Power for Jobs program permanent. Now named Recharge NY, this program will provide a steady supply of low cost hydro power to businesses throughout the state, especially manufacturers – saving them thousands of dollars in energy costs. Making the program permanent means that businesses can budget their future energy costs without relying on Albany to pass year to year extensions of the program. I voted to enhance the Excelsior Jobs Program to include expanded tax credits to encourage the creation of new private sector jobs. I supported increasing the research and development credit from 10 percent to 50 percent of the federal credit to help encourage growth in high tech R&D jobs.

To further demonstrate what a difference a year makes: as of April 1st, the state sales tax exemption on clothing will be restored so there will be no state sales tax for clothing purchases under \$55, after one year it increases to \$110. The sales tax exemption was eliminated last year. This will be an enormous boost for our local retailers.

It is an interesting time to be in Albany. As always, thank you for the opportunity to serve.