



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Senator Martins on the Importance of Teaching 9/11 in Our Schools

JACK M. MARTINS September 20, 2011

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I want to thank you for the feedback I received on last week's column in which I shared some thoughts about the tenth anniversary of September 11th. Many of you were as astonished as I was to learn that the events of day are not part of our state's education curriculum, consequently leaving our young people asking questions that no one answers. We tell them to "Never forget," but don't bother explaining what it is we're asking them to remember.

Understandably, part of your reaction was "Are we doing something about it?"

I want to assure you that I am. Earlier this month, I introduced a bill (S.5883) in the State Senate that would require the events of 9/11 to be taught in New York State schools. I looked for advice and input from many sources, including some of our local school district superintendents. Everyone agrees that it's time to incorporate 9/11 into official lesson plans but there are different opinions as to when, what, and how to teach it. Most felt that details should be worked out locally with particular attention to the sensitivities and sensibilities of their student bodies. In an area like ours, where community members have actually lost a mother and father that day, I wholeheartedly agree that this isn't something that can be dictated line by line from afar. (Albany)

My bill would amend the Education Law to include the events of September 11, 2001 in the currently required courses of instruction of patriotism, citizenship and human rights issues. It will give appropriate importance to this turning point in history and ensure that current and future New York students are properly instructed by requiring schools to dedicate time and resources to teaching the events of that day and their impact on our nation.

Teaching 9/11 is not going to be easy. It will require a lot discussion and forethought but it isn't something we can afford to ignore any longer. How do we expect children who weren't old enough to remember 9/11 to know what happened? Will people 20 years from now recall the response of our emergency personnel who ran in while others ran out? Will we honor those in our armed forces who perished only because they were proud Americans willing to set things right?

The honest answer to all of these questions is a resounding "no" – unless we choose to start teaching it in our homes as well as our classrooms. The lessons of 9/11 go beyond the events of that fatal day and are lessons in unity, tolerance, sacrifice and responsibility that help determine America's larger role in world affairs today. Undeniably, the single best way to avoid tragedies like this from ever happening again is to make sure our children understand how they happen. Hopefully they learn to prevent them through understanding and diplomacy or how to persevere with courage and unity when that fails.

We have an intergenerational responsibility to our children to ensure that the events and lessons of 9/11 are passed on – this bill will ensure that the responsibility is met. Never forget!