



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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Independence Day

You cannot keep out of trouble by spending more than you earn. You cannot build character and courage by destroying men's initiative and independence. And you cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they can and should do for themselves. - Rev. William John Henry Boetcker

This 4th of July, I thought I'd go beyond a column wishing you the usual round of safe holidays and hearty barbecues. Don't get me wrong. Of course, I hope your holiday will be all of those things and more, but sentiment alone is never enough for a thoughtful column. Instead, I thought we could reflect on a more particular aspect

of the holiday and how it may actually apply to some good news about our home state of New York.

As I was exiting the Senate Chamber at the end of our legislative session a few weeks ago, one of my colleagues wished me a “Happy Independence Day.” His phraseology gave me pause. You simply don’t hear too many people choose “Happy Independence Day” over “4th of July” anymore. I got to thinking just how fitting and appropriate the name actually is. Obviously, the holiday celebrates our successful struggle for independence from King George and England, but beyond that, no other word so adequately describes the American persona or character better than “independence.” Long ago, everyday Americans said, “We can do it better,” and then threw long-standing beliefs about divine right and aristocracy out the window. They bravely cut all ties of security and put faith in their own common sense and know-how, embracing independence in deeds, and not just words. It was uphill from there. From then on, almost every aspect of American culture, from literature and the arts to business and commerce, celebrated the virtues of independence, initiative, and self-reliance.

Yet I know I’m not alone in feeling that those values seem, at times, to be on the decline in American society. To be sure, most of the heated issues facing our nation today stem from our trying to balance the help government offers people versus expecting individual responsibility from them. Definitive answers are impossible but suffice to say every great American leader knew balance had to be achieved and made it a priority.

In that light, I share some good news: the U.S. Chamber of Commerce just ranked New York as one of the top 10 states in the country for economic growth, productivity, and livability. Now I know the reaction of cynical New Yorkers is a skeptical, “How in the world did that happen?” But I can answer that. Two years ago, when you sent me to Albany, we New Yorkers as a whole were pretty fed up. Our state government was a laughingstock, crippled by corruption and marred by scandal. So in elections throughout the state, you said loud and clear, “Enough. Get taxes and spending under control, close the budget deficits, and make Albany work for the people again.” We didn’t look elsewhere or wring our hands in desperation. In short, I think the scales tipped toward demanding personal responsibility and accountability from ourselves and our leaders again.

As a result, we passed a long-overdue and historical 2% tax cap, reigning in school and municipal taxes throughout the state. We repealed the MTA Payroll Tax for hundreds of thousands of small businesses throughout Long Island. We produced on-time, balanced budgets two years in a row - with no sleight-of-hand and most important, no new taxes or fees, while simultaneously closing a \$13 billion budget deficit. We reformed the state's income-tax code, lowering taxes for 4 million middle-class New Yorkers to the lowest point since 1953 and tackled public employee pension reform with new measures that will save taxpayers more than \$80 billion over 30 years. Our mandate relief initiatives have recouped hundreds of millions of dollars for taxpayers and our "NY Works" will employ thousands while rebuilding our roads, highways, bridges and infrastructure.

I think we remembered our independence, that "We can do it better." As always, if I can be of assistance to you or your family, please don't hesitate to contact my office.