



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

JACK M. MARTINS December 5, 2012

| ISSUE: **LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

| COMMITTEE: **LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

A New Balancing Act

Writing this weekly column is one of my favorite things to do as your state senator. While it allows me to reflect on issues directly with you, it's also been great for encouraging feedback that has been incredibly helpful to me as a freshman senator. From its inception, I wanted to avoid the typical government laundry list of events and notices that you might expect from legislators. Instead, I wanted this column to be something readers look for, a more honest and readable "inside" look at the workings of state government, warts and all.

With that in mind, I'd like to share with you what I perceive as one of the more pressing issues facing our state and particularly Long Island.

It's no secret that Obama cleaned up in New York, with his long political coattails propelling Democrats to office throughout the state. But if we put our political affiliations aside for the moment, I'd like to discuss why this doesn't bode well for the delicate balance of local government. Most notable (obviously for me as a Republican State Senator) is that there are still some nail-biting votes being counted for an upstate senate seat, which, depending on its outcome, could affect control of the State Senate.

As I've often said, the issue in New York State is less about partisan affiliations – the Rs versus Ds – and more about regional balance – city vs. suburbs, upstate vs. downstate. Democratic control of the Governor's office, the Assembly and the Senate would result in an urban-centric agenda that ignores the needs of suburbs, and coincidentally, at the expense of suburban taxpayers. That's because the vast majority of the Democratic Conference comes from the City. As a result, leadership and legislative agenda is dictated by their needs there.

We are left to wonder: Who would fight for suburban school aid? Who would demand that the MTA give a fair share to the Long Island Railroad and Metro North? Who would seek infrastructure projects and new jobs for the suburbs as well? The question moves beyond party affiliation to become one of regional interests. One part of the state, New York City, would be left controlling decisions for everyone else, even areas that have a different way of life and a completely different set of problems.

The last time this happened was 2008 to 2010 and it was a disaster. In those two short years, state spending skyrocketed and 214 new taxes and fees were created that ended up costing taxpayers over \$14 billion per year. Businesses fled, a number of legislators were indicted for criminal activity and our state government attained the unenviable reputation of being the “most dysfunctional” in the nation.

Mind you, that was not because they were Democrats – it was because there was no balance of power. There was no push and pull, the natural give and take of ideas that keeps people negotiating and coming up with creative solutions. When one party, any party, has that much control, it typically results in a rubber stamp syndrome where everyone votes in favor of measures, no matter how lousy, because no one else is challenging them.

Needless to say, it didn't work out for anyone and in backlash the public returned control of the Senate to Republicans. In the two years since, state government has had a notable track-record of bipartisan cooperation that produced remarkable results: two consecutive, balanced budgets, a tax cap, lower income taxes for 4 million middle-class New Yorkers and the creation of thousands of new jobs. I want to be clear. This wasn't one-sided. These were Republican-Democratic accomplishments that came about precisely because we had to work with each other and compromise.

While one might assume this legislative balance is now in jeopardy, I think there may actually be a silver lining. The potential stalemate may not result in division, but may foster cooperation instead. Serious discussion is being had on both sides of the aisle about establishing a coalition government, one that has Republican and Democratic Senators working side by side. It seems the progress of the last two years is not something anyone wants to see slip away. Frankly, it may be the beginning of something historic for New Yorkers: a new way of governing that overcomes partisan and regional divides and compromises to get things done...and provides balance.

Who knows? The idea may even catch on in Washington D.C.