



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph P. Addabbo Jr.

Statement by Senator Addabbo on Legislative Passage of 2013-2014 New York State Budget Plan

JOSEPH P. ADDABBO JR March 27, 2013

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Queens, NY, March 27, 2013 -- New York State Senator Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr. (D-Queens) made the following statement regarding the March 27th early morning passage of the 2013-2014 New York State Budget:

Like all products of intense compromise and negotiation, the new 2013-2014 State Budget approved by the Senate and Assembly has a lot of good things to recommend it and a number of things that I wish we could change. I am very pleased by some aspects of this \$135 billion spending plan (which totals about \$143 billion with federal Hurricane Sandy aid figured in) and I am disappointed in others.

I appreciate the fact that we were able to approve a spending plan that limits increases in state spending to under two percent at a time when New York's families are still having a hard time balancing their own household budgets and who expect their government to hold the line as well.

I am pleased that, in many areas, we directed our limited resources wisely. We increased support for our state's public schools by almost \$1 billion, but we did not include over \$200 million lost due to a lack of an agreement on teacher evaluations. The budget provided a \$13.5 million boost for non-public school children and continued to fund badly needed aid for our libraries, including \$14 million in capital construction support. The Environmental Protection Fund has been increased by \$19 million to safeguard New York's land, air and water, and there is nothing in this budget to advance hydrofracking and its accompanying environmental and public health risks. Regarding a local environmental issue, part of a \$10 million appropriation for freight rail will be directed to a Long Island Railroad engine emission standard upgrade pilot program to address air pollution from trains.

Our seniors will benefit from a significant funding increase in the Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) program to help them afford expensive prescription medication, and we approved significant tax breaks for families with children and small businesses to help them succeed. An increase in the minimum wage, while it doesn't go as far as I had hoped, will also provide a helping hand to many of our lowest paid workers by raising the wage to \$9 per hour by 2016.

For those of us in Queens who are benefitting from new job and economic opportunities arising from the Resorts World Racino at Aqueduct – which is also, incidentally, supplying significant lottery revenues for public education in our state – I am pleased that a plan to arbitrarily limit the siting of possible casinos to upstate New York was not included in the budget. If legal casino gaming is ultimately approved by the state's voters in November, our community deserves a fair chance to compete for that business and state legislators should have a say in the siting process and in representing the views of their constituents.

This budget also addresses two issues for which I have been pushing hard for a number of years: helping retirees of the defunct New York City Off-Track Betting (OTB) Corporation receive their promised health care benefits and combating unemployment among our veterans.

As part of the spending plan, health care benefits will be reinstated for many retirees of the defunct New York City Off-Track Betting (OTB) Corporation. Keeping this promise to the OTB retirees has been a priority of mine and the new spending plan contains language providing up to \$5 million annually in health care coverage for those OTB retirees and their dependents still living in New York State. I had hoped that the plan would include OTB retirees who have moved out of state, and who still deserve health benefits, and I will continue to look into this issue.

As the ranking Democratic member of the Senate Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs and Homeland Security, I am especially happy that a provision of the new budget, which is very similar to legislation that I have long sponsored and championed, will provide a permanent tax credit to businesses that hire veterans – a step that will help to combat continuing high unemployment among our former servicemen and servicewomen.

As a member of the Senate Bipartisan Task Force on Hurricane Sandy, I am happy that the budget will begin the process of disbursing long-awaited federal aid to help us rebuild and recover from the catastrophic effects of the storm. This revitalization will take many forms, including efforts to ensure that gas stations in New York are better equipped to supply needed fuel during emergency situations.

On the extreme down side of the 2013-2014 State Budget, I think it is an absolute travesty that the state Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) will be suffering a \$90 million cut, which

doubles to \$180 million when losses in federal matching funds are added in. This is a \$30 million restoration from the Governor's original cut, but these tremendous reductions in support will be devastating for disabled New Yorkers and their families. I wrote to the Governor to oppose his initial plan and will continue to speak out on the need for a greater restoration of funds to avoid program closures, staff layoffs, and irreparable harm to some of our state's most vulnerable residents.

So, all in all, while this certainly isn't a perfect document, it is one that addresses many of our state's most important needs. And where the State Budget falls short, we'll just have to work harder to find and implement solutions to problems it leaves unsolved.

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