



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Statement on St. Lawrence County 'Home Rule' Legislation

PATTY RITCHIE June 22, 2013

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Today, the Senate gave final approval to “home rule” legislation to allow St. Lawrence County to set its own sales tax rate, just as 57 other counties across the state are already authorized to do.

I continue to oppose raising taxes in St. Lawrence County or anywhere in the state. Indeed, I have spent the past three years successfully working to reduce state taxes, and provide relief for hardworking taxpayers and help create jobs and better opportunity for Northern and Central New Yorkers I represent.

I respect “home rule” because I believe that the best government IS the government that is closest to its people. But I do not believe the role of State Senator is to be a “rubber stamp” for local officials, especially when it comes to the issue of taxes.

There is no dispute that my home county, more than many others, is in fiscal crisis. My long-held concerns about the county's finances were borne out by the [state Comptroller's report on the county's budget practices](#). Chief among the issues raised by the Comptroller was the lack of a sound financial plan, alongside continued overspending.

St. Lawrence County has agreed to clean up its act, and stop kicking its problems down the road: the county has presented a plan that will immediately reduce property taxes by 14 percent, and assures that, even in five years, the county's overburdened homeowners will pay \$3 million less in property taxes than they do right now.

Under [the county's five-year plan](#), every penny of increased sales tax revenue is to be returned to homeowners in the form of property tax relief, while also rebuilding the county's fund balance, or "rainy day" fund, which has been almost entirely depleted due to overspending. This latter reform alone should save county taxpayers millions of dollars in unnecessary borrowing costs.

The county also has committed to a strict spending diet, which will limit the growth in its future budgets to about the inflation rate.

These necessary reforms will not be easy to achieve and I, along with countless other county taxpayers, will be watching closely to see that the county sticks to its pledge.

I wish to thank the county leaders who spent many long hours crafting a responsible plan that is considerate of taxpayers needs, as well as those of government. And I look forward to continuing to work with them to restore St. Lawrence County to fiscal stability, and growing our economy to create and support good jobs and a brighter future.