



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Statement From Senator Patty Ritchie

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ISSUE:

- [Agriculture](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Taxes](#)

Today marks the beginning of the 2014 Legislative Session and with a new year comes new opportunities to create a brighter future for all New Yorkers.

In recent years, we have worked diligently to make changes that deliver results for the hardworking people of this state. We ended decades of late, unbalanced and bloated state budgets by passing three consecutive early budgets. We have kept money in the pockets of hardworking middle class taxpayers by reducing income tax rates and enacting a property tax cap. We've also continued the hard work of rebuilding our state's economy by creating thousands of new jobs in our region and making strategic investments in Central and Northern New York.

Our achievements aside, there's still a lot more to be done. Today, we heard Governor Cuomo discuss the benefits of cutting taxes. In the past three years, I've been pleased to support a total of 30 different tax cuts—saving New Yorkers \$3 billion. This year, I'm looking forward to working just as hard to continue to push for new tax cuts that help to create more opportunities for New Yorkers to succeed.

I'm also looking forward to supporting initiatives that remove red tape and regulations and enable existing businesses to expand and create jobs as well as attract new businesses to our region. Given our region's proximity to Fort Drum, I was thrilled to hear Governor Cuomo express his support for the "New York Jobs for Heroes" program, which would provide small businesses owned by disabled veterans a real opportunity to win state contracts. Continuing to work towards creating an environment that works with businesses to create jobs and opportunities will be key to getting our region—and our state's—economy back on track.

The agriculture industry is the backbone of our state's economy, and today, I was pleased to hear Governor Cuomo state that he would continue his commitment to strengthening the bottom lines of our hardworking farmers. As Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I am excited to build upon the achievements of last year—namely the approval of a 2 percent cap on annual increases in agricultural assessments and the adoption of a budget that significantly increased funding for key agricultural programs along with many others—and look forward to working with my colleagues to grow New York's leading industry.

Today, the Governor also announced that the Department of Transportation will undertake a feasibility study on I-98, or the "Rooftop Highway." The roadway—which would connect I-81 in Watertown to I-87 in Champlain—is seen by many as a development that could not only make travel easier, but also could bring economic growth to the North Country region.

Providing the best educational opportunities possible for students is also a top priority for me, and I was pleased to hear that the Governor will be sharing that goal for 2014. Last year, New York State increased its commitment to public education with the largest school aid package in four years that was weighted to rural and Upstate schools, and provided \$25 million more than last year in education aid to districts in Oswego, Jefferson and St. Lawrence Counties. In 2014, I'm looking forward to continuing the work we've started to increase resources for our local schools that help to set students on the path to brighter futures.

Our state is home to so many hardworking and determined individuals and in 2014, I'm looking forward to working with Governor Cuomo as well as my colleagues to cut taxes, create new jobs, balance our budget and support initiatives that enable all New Yorkers to access new opportunities and achieve success.