



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Martins: Stopping the New York Exodus

JACK M. MARTINS April 1, 2014

I think it was sometime after our 10th snowstorm that some of the most die-hard New Yorkers I know said Florida wasn't looking too bad. Truth be told, when people leave the Empire State, it's not in search of better weather, it's mostly in search of a better life.

Did you know that from 2000 to 2010 New York lost more than 1.6 million residents to other states? They left because life here was just too expensive. Whether it's seniors on fixed incomes, young people just starting out or fed up couples in between, they start to feel that life elsewhere would be easier. That's bad for our economy and worse for the families and friends impacted by separation.

Our friends and neighbors are not leaving their childhood homes, the communities they helped build, because they want to; they're leaving because they need to. That's the unfortunate truth – New Yorkers have historically been chased away by high costs and taxes.

Like many of you, I grew up in a tight-knit Long Island community and I'm now lucky enough to raise my own kids in that very same neighborhood. But it troubles me to think they might not be able to do the same. We have to find ways to make our communities affordable for young adults, our children, who want to stay, but can't make ends meet.

As I was recently appointed Chair of the Senate's Commerce, Economic Development and Small Business Committee, I'm now in a position to help shape policies that keep New Yorkers in New York. And as I also Chair the Senate's Committee on Local Government, I'm in an great position to advance ideas that I know work – downtown revitalization, transit-oriented development, next generation and senior housing. As the former Mayor of Mineola for eight years, I had first-hand experience with these successful revitalization efforts that I know can be replicated throughout Long Island and our state.

I brought together community and business leaders and developed a comprehensive master plan for our village downtown that was built on consensus. It introduced “smart growth” concepts that converted a decaying industrial railroad corridor into a pedestrian-friendly downtown complete with housing and public amenities that improved the quality of life. Mineola's rebound was soon applauded by organizations like the Regional Plan Association, Vision Long Island and the Rauch Foundation's Long Island Index which even recognized Mineola as one of “the premier smart growth communities in the nation.”

As a small business owner myself, I knew that we had to get government out of the way so the private sector could crank the engine and get jobs and new homes to follow. So we ended the borrow and spend policies that had our village on the edge of a precipice and focused on redeveloping our downtown. When builders saw the rebound, they naturally wanted in too. They started building more affordable housing and even agreed to fund park and streetscape improvements which further enhanced the desirability of our communities.

We came to embrace Ronald Reagan's now-famous assessment that, sometimes, government is the problem and not the solution, especially on a local level. Why would anyone invest in creating new jobs or offer affordable housing when they could barely pay their sky-high taxes? For years, government hypocritically bled people dry and then cried foul when they fled for greener pastures.

Well New York is now ready for its own rebound and I'm happy to help pave the way. In the last four years we've lowered the income tax for middle-class New Yorkers, passed a long-overdue tax cap and delivered four consecutive, on-time, balanced budgets. We've provided record increases in aid to schools and funding for infrastructure improvements. And, most importantly, we did it all without raising a single tax or fee. We've even initiated START-UP New York, a groundbreaking initiative that transforms communities into tax-free sites for new and expanding businesses. Now, they can operate 100% tax-free for 10 years. That's real commitment from a Governor and a State Senate serious about stopping the New York exodus.

I know that what worked for us in Mineola can work everywhere on Long Island but it won't be easy. It is a tedious, step-by-step process that has to be tailored for each community, but it's a process that I'm familiar with and that I know will work. I still can't do anything about the long, harsh winters but hopefully, in a few years, that will be the only reason anyone leaves New York.