



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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The Budget Top Ten

Alas, after 21 years of keeping us in good spirits and good company with his “Late Show” humor, David Letterman announced his retirement this past week. In his honor, I’ll share highlights from our state’s new budget in Letterman style with a “Top 10” countdown entitled:

Top 10 - I mean 12 - reasons to like the new, New York State budget:

12. This year’s budget is the fourth, consecutive, on-time budget we’ve delivered. That hasn’t happened in nearly four decades. For a little historical perspective, that’s further back than the Knicks’ last championship. (Sorry. I couldn’t help it.)

11. Moody's Investors Service wasn’t so moody after all. They rated the new budget a "credit positive."

10. Knowing full well that our local hospitals are about to get pummeled by the federal government's health care policies, we dedicated \$1 billion to help them maintain their infrastructures.

9. We took over county Medicaid payments, saving Nassau County taxpayers \$80.6 million over the next four years.

8. A record \$162 million for the State's Environmental Protection Fund will help ensure clean air and water and protect our open spaces.

7. We added new "Extreme Winter Weather Assistance" funding to fill those extreme potholes Mother Nature left us this past winter. Overall, Nassau County and her towns, cities, and villages will receive over \$20.6 million through this funding and the Consolidated Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS, nothing to do with Erik Estrada) to repair our local roads.

6. Our Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) will cover the prescription drugs of more seniors. Income eligibility is expanded from \$35,000 to \$75,000 for singles and from \$50,000 to \$100,000 for married seniors. "Epic" is a pretty accurate description.

5. Taxpayers won't be forced to pay college tuition for inmates. Governor Cuomo's "Attica University" plan will receive funding from interested nonprofits and foundations instead.

4. We enacted a \$1.5 billion real property tax rebate to provide homeowners with direct property tax relief.

3. We established a record setting \$3.4 billion in funding for the STAR property tax relief program.

2. We provided more school aid - a 5.3% increase over last year. That means a total of \$2.6 billion in assistance to our Long Island children! And for those of us fighting the Common Core, we extracted some reforms before the budget could go forward:

- No standardized tests for students in Pre-K through grade two.
- The state assessment test scores for grades three through eight will not be recorded on a student's permanent record through 2018.

- School districts cannot make any student promotion or placement decision based solely on the assessment tests for grades three through eight.
- New limits on the amount of time spent on state assessment tests, locally developed standardized testing, and test preparation.
- Privacy protection for personally identifiable information and a parents bill of rights for privacy and security.
- A halt the state's relationship with inBloom.

And last but not least....drum roll please....

1. For four years running, we kept spending increases to less than two percent, and delivered a fiscally responsible budget with absolutely no new taxes or fees!

To be sure, no one got everything they wanted and there's unquestionably more work to be done. The good news is that balanced government, Democrats in the Assembly and Republicans in the Senate, negotiated to produce tangible results for you, our constituents.

One of my favorite Letterman bits, besides Stupid Pet Tricks, was his infamous Will it Float? in which random objects were dropped by two models into a tank of water in pursuit of scientific enlightenment. With all of the great things included, there is no question that this budget "floats."