



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

David J. Valesky

# Independent Democratic Conference Launches 2015 Policy Agenda

David J. Valesky

January 20, 2015

ISSUE:

- [Aging](#)
- [Agriculture](#)
- [Economic Development](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Housing](#)

## ***“INVEST NEW YORK”***

***IDC Unveils 15 Innovative Investments that will Create Long Term Stability, Security and Sustainability for all New Yorkers***

***Proposals Invest in New York Workers, Students, Seniors and Families and Support a Significant Expansion in New York State Schools, Housing, and Communities***

ALBANY, NY - Today, Independent Democratic Conference Leader Jeff Klein (D-Bronx/Westchester) formally announced the IDC's policy agenda, Invest New York, for the 2015 legislative session. Last month, the IDC laid out a comprehensive plan, A New Deal for New York, for investing the \$5 billion financial settlement monies due to New York State. Continuing on the IDC's commitment to invest in New York and New Yorkers, the IDC is unveiling 15 smart investments that will serve to better the everyday lives of the New York worker, student, senior and family while putting more money back in their pockets and promoting common sense programs and policies that create long-term prosperity. The Invest New York agenda also includes key investment in schools, housing and communities to ensure the viability and sustainability of New York cities and counties for many years to come.

Independent Democratic Conference Leader Jeff Klein said: "Invest New York is a bold and ambitious agenda that meets the challenges facing working families head-on. We have a unique opportunity to fundamentally transform the lives of working men and women who ask nothing more than the opportunity to work hard, send their kid to college, and save for a long and prosperous retirement. Each of these investments reflects IDC priorities of making our state more affordable, making our citizens' lives better, and ensuring that a brighter tomorrow exists for generations to come."

The Invest New York Agenda is outlined through a combination of five thematic categories that include: 1) investing in a first-rate workforce, 2) investing in educational excellence, 3) investing in vibrant and sustainable communities, 4) investing in New York housing, and 5) providing financial relief for and investing in New York's working families and our seniors.

Senator David Carlucci (D-Rockland/Westchester) said: "I am committed to providing the hard working people of Rockland and Westchester County with good paying jobs and real tax relief. The Invest New York policy agenda is focused on ensuring our seniors, veterans and the struggling middle class have access to safe and affordable housing, fair wages, and the opportunities they need to live successful and enriched lives."

Senator David Valesky (D-Oneida) said: "Jobs, education, child and family care, and infrastructure are all issues of great importance to our constituents across the state. Invest New York is a comprehensive, common-sense policy agenda that will make a tangible difference in the lives of New Yorkers for years to come."

Senator Tony Avella (D-Queens) said: "Invest New York is more than an agenda – it's a map for New York's future. Through these common sense programs and 15 investments we can improve the lives of each and every one of our working families, students, and seniors. Whether it's ensuring that New York's families have the security they need to take time off work to care for a loved one or providing our most vulnerable populations the support they need, Invest New York is our chance to build a better state."

Senator Diane Savino (D-Staten Island/Brooklyn) said: "Whether it is investing in middle class housing, making college more affordable or creating the next generation of classrooms, Invest New York is a blueprint for meeting the challenges of 21st century realities. This agenda will establish the Empire State as a leader once again in making the critical investments necessary to help working families live, work and raise a family in an affordable environment. We are fully invested in these ideas and along with our signature New Deal for New York plan, we're ready to bolster our workforce and ensure greater security for the middle class for years to come."

The Invest New York agenda incorporates the following proposals:

### **Investing in a First-Rate Workforce**

#### Raising the Minimum Wage

As demonstrated by years past, the IDC has always been at the forefront of advocating for raising the minimum wage. Thanks in large part to the IDC, New York was only among a handful of states that agreed to raise the minimum wage in the 2013 budget. Going forward, the IDC believes we can go further and supports giving cities and counties throughout the State the power to decide whether they want to increase the minimum wage in their respective localities. Under legislation originally introduced in 2014 by Senator Savino (S7743A), which will shortly be reintroduced in the 2015 session, cities and counties would be given the power to increase their own local minimum wages by up to 30% higher than the State minimum wage. That means that by 2016, a locality could decide to raise their own minimum wage up to \$11.70 per hour, based on the \$9 per hour statewide minimum wage.

#### Establishing Paid Family Leave and Raising Temporary Disability Insurance Benefits

As other states like New Jersey and California have already done, the IDC continues to advocate for the adoption of a meaningful paid family leave program in New York that truly meets the needs of working families. The IDC proposal would allow workers to claim a weekly benefit for up to six weeks per year equal to half their weekly wage to care for a new child or take care of a sick loved one. This plan extends to both public and private sector employees and ensures that businesses do not bear any direct out of pocket costs.

In addition, under a bill sponsored by Senator Tony Avella (S.7752), families would be able to secure greater flexibility by allowing workers to use accrued sick time benefits for the purpose of taking care of ill members of one's family.

In order to meet the rise in cost of living, the IDC proposes increasing the weekly TDI benefit for workers through a gradual yearly phased-in process. Through a small increase in employee contributions and with the assistance of a State subsidy, working families will gain expanded financial benefits of up to a \$250 a week maximum in order to accommodate their time away from work. Under the plan, New Yorkers would still be able to claim the benefit at the current maximum duration of 26 weeks per year.

### Agricultural Resurgency Program

The IDC recognizes that agriculture has traditionally been a leading industry in New York State, but could be on the radical decline as the current population of farmers ages and there are no newcomers to fill the gap. Therefore, the IDC envisions the creation of a Agricultural Resurgency Program (ARP), a matching grant program which would be developed to assist new and beginning farm businesses with start-up or expansion costs. Funding would be used to purchase equipment, seed and/or stock, infrastructure, or other expensive capital improvements that present a barrier to opening or expanding a farm in New York and making it a viable business option. This program would ensure that high initial capital costs would no longer be a major impediment, especially to young entrepreneurs who want to open farms or expand existing family farms.

## **Investing in Educational Excellence**

### Student Loan Debt Relief and Prepaid College Tuition

With the cost of student tuition skyrocketing faster than inflation and drowning students in debt, the IDC proposes a grant program that would compensate students who graduated from an undergraduate or graduate school based in New York and are employed in public service in the state. A grant of up to \$2,000 per individual would be applied towards the outstanding student loan balance. Additionally, New York would create a state tax deduction for interest paid on an undergraduate loan to match the federal deduction at 100%.

In addition, the IDC proposes strengthening tuition affordability in New York State by enabling parents and students to pre-pay college tuition. This would be accomplished by locking-in present day tuition rates at public and private colleges statewide. Already other states like Florida and Texas have implemented similar programs, and in doing so, will ensure that parents get a head start on financial planning for decades to come. This will ultimately save working families thousands of dollars of their own hard earned money.

#### Creating an Education Investment Tax Credit (EITC) for Public and Private Schools

When it comes to effectively educating our children, New York's schools need every dollar they can get. The IDC believes in rewarding New Yorkers which opt to voluntarily donate to their local public or private school by finally making these donations tax deductible. In order to make sure every dollar is spent fairly and effectively, tax deductible donations made to private schools must be used to fund scholarship opportunities that qualify.

#### School Construction Trust Fund

The IDC proposes \$400 million for the creation of a School Construction Trust Fund that would be a dedicated revenue stream for school improvements and expansions. The fund would address downstate issues of overcrowding in classrooms and accommodate upstate issues with regards to aging infrastructure of schools.

### **Investing in Vibrant and Sustainable Communities**

#### The Sustainable Communities Program

In order to combat the effects of sprawl and decaying urban infrastructure, the IDC proposes the creation of a \$150 million fund that would provide matching grants for smart-growth investments that create communities that are more pedestrian

focused, use environmentally friendly construction techniques and revitalize waterfront property.

### Green Homes Tax Credit

In order to spur development of environmentally efficient and green friendly homes the IDC proposes a refundable tax credit that would be offered to offset the cost of green development or retrofitting.

### Zombie Property Act

The Abandoned Property Neighborhood Relief Act of 2014 would expand the 2009 signature law requiring lenders to maintain foreclosed properties from falling into disrepair. It would now require lenders to frequently inspect delinquent properties to determine if they are abandoned, while also requiring to maintain them regardless if a foreclosure judgment has been issued.

## **Investing in New York Housing**

### Enhance funding for Mitchell-Lama 2020 & Middle Income Housing Tax Credit

The IDC continues to believe that a cornerstone plank to making New York more affordable is through the availability of affordable middle class housing. That said, the IDC proposes investing \$675 million in middle income housing: \$650 million in the Mitchell - Lama 2020 program that would provide capital subsidies of up to \$125,000 per unit for the construction of middle class housing that remains affordable for 30 years; and \$25 million for the Middle Income Housing Tax Credit which would provide tax credits for developers financing the construction of middle class units.

### Public Housing Revitalization Plan

A significant portion New York City Housing Authority units are in vital need of an upgrade. The IDC proposes a three-point plan that will provide much needed funds for NYCHA to repair and maintain current units. This includes (1) \$500 million through a Public Housing Revitalization Fund for repairs, rehabilitation and upgrades (2) a restoration of \$12 million in annual State operating subsidies for NYCHA, and (3) a long-term revenue generating strategy that will ensure NYCHA's long-term viability through redevelopment of underused NYCHA land for affordable housing and mixed use. The IDC also supports giving preferences to disabled veterans

(S.1702, sponsored by Senator Avella) and victims of domestic violence who meet all other requirements to apply for a public housing unit.

### Making Housing Available for Our Vulnerable Populations

In order to ensure that those who are physically challenged, have mental health issues and our seniors have a safe and comfortable place to call home, the IDC calls for: (1) a \$40 million fund dedicated to providing a direct subsidy for developers to incentivize housing for middle and low income seniors; (2) a REPAIR 2015 tax credit of up to \$7,500 for repairs to seniors' homes where the resident cannot afford the cost of the project; (3) the creation of a \$25 million housing disability fund that would be used to leverage up to \$180 million in private financing to be used to develop or retrofit up to 1,400 housing units for people with disabilities.

### **Investing in New York Families & Seniors**

#### Dependent Tax Credit

The IDC understands that today's economy requires both parents to work to make ends meet. Critical to both working parents and single parent families is affordable child care. Therefore, the IDC proposes continuing New York State's effort to aid these families in their child care costs by increasing the Child and Dependent Care Credit by approximately 50 percent.

#### Senior Support Package

New York senior citizens face rising costs, yet most have to survive on a fixed income, therefore the IDC proposes reducing their financial burden through a senior utility circuit breaker program. This refundable tax credit would be available starting tax year 2015 and allow senior filers to be able to claim a credit equal to 50% of out-of-pocket utility expenses, over 7% of their income.

The IDC is also proposing providing a 10% discount on senior DMV transactions since one must pay registration and reregistration fees to drive in New York.

#### Child Care Subsidies

The IDC believes strongly in the importance of affordable child care and is calling for not only a full restoration of funding for the block grant back to 2010 funding levels, but an increase beyond that level to take into account rising needs. The IDC

supports spending \$100 million more in child care subsidies than we spent in the 2014 budget. The IDC also proposes an expansion of Facilitated Enrollment subsidy to \$25 million within the NYS Child Care Block Grant into those cities that have demonstrated both need and momentum.

### **Praise for the IDC Invest NY 2015 Legislative Agenda:**

Stuart Appelbaum, President of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union said: "The RWDSU applauds the IDC in prioritizing issues which impact working people, such as paid family leave and local control over raising the minimum wage. Low wage workers, in particular, are struggling to survive in this state. New York families need the State Legislature to act immediately to pass these important pieces of legislation."

NYC Councilmember Ritchie Torres, Chair of the Committee on Public Housing: "For too long the state has abdicated its responsibility to public housing and complacently accepted its rapid decline. I commend Senator Klein and the IDC for issuing a forward-thinking report that provides a long overdue roadmap for Albany's reinvestment in NYCHA and common sense reforms to ensure public housing is accessible to New York's most vulnerable populations."

Donna Dolan, Executive Director of the New York Paid Leave Coalition and a steering committee member of the Family Leave Insurance Campaign, said: "Paid Family Leave and a long overdue increase to Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) benefits are critical for New York's communities. We applaud the IDC for continuing to prioritize these important issues and look forward to working with the Senate, Assembly, and Governor's office to make sure the needs of New York working families are met."

Beth Finkel, State Director, NYS AARP said: "Senator Klein and the IDC rightly address affordability and livability issues that are so important to New York's 50+. Paid family leave for caregivers, more affordable senior housing and assistance for older New Yorkers to modify their homes would all help our loved ones age in place - as virtually all of them want - while avoiding costly, taxpayer-funded institutional care. Older New Yorkers struggle to afford utilities and the IDC plan would help. And promoting "smart growth" through initiatives such as pedestrian-friendly street design would help make our communities more age-friendly."



Rachel Fee, Executive Director of the New York Housing Conference said: "The New York Housing Conference looks forward to working with Senator Jeff Klein and the Independent Democratic Conference to support affordable, supportive and public housing in the New York State budget. The Independent Democrats have the right approach to public investment by focusing resources on affordable housing to create jobs and spur economic growth. I am particularly pleased that the IDC supports the preservation of public housing for future generations through State investment. Housing authorities will be able to use capital funds to create healthy, sustainable and safe living environments for residents."

Susan Antos, Senior Attorney, Empire Justice Center said: "Quality affordable child care in New York is critically important for working families, who rely on this assistance while they work. Empire Justice Center applauds the Senate Independent Democratic Conference's proposed investment in child care, particularly the additional \$100 million for the 2015-2016 state budget. This investment will serve at least 13,000 additional children who are eligible and waiting for a slot."

Jolie Milstein, President and CEO of NYS Association for Affordable Housing said: "Supportive housing is a proven cost-effective tool for enhancing stability and quality of life for New York's most vulnerable populations. Given the tremendous need for this type of housing, NYSAFAH supports an equitable allocation of MRT funds throughout the state to ensure that no community is left behind."

Bobbie Sackman, Director of Public Policy, Council of Senior Centers and Services (CSCS), states, "On behalf of older adults throughout the state, CSCS is greatly appreciative that the IDC continues to pay close attention to the needs of the most rapidly growing population in New York. We are particularly pleased that the IDC has focused on housing for both low income and middle income older adults. Affordability is the cornerstone for seniors to age in place in their homes and communities which is what they want to do. CSCS looks forward to working with state partners to ensure that older New Yorkers can age with grace, confidence and vitality in the communities they've lived in and supported over their lifetime."

Glenn Liebman, CEO, Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc., said: "People with mental illness can and do live successfully in the community like everyone else. There are many populations of people with mental illness including those in psychiatric and community hospitals, those in long term settings, those living at home with aging parents, and those coming out of correctional facilities,

that desperately need housing. The Invest NY proposal will help thousands of vulnerable New Yorkers live independently and successfully in the community.”

David R. Jones, President and CEO, Community Service Society (CSS), said: “The Public Housing Revitalization Plan is a welcome, long-needed Albany initiative that acknowledges the State’s role in past NYCHA disinvestment and recognizes its responsibility to help restore our critically needed public housing.”

Richard E. Barnes, Executive Director, New York State Catholic Conference said: “It’s plain and simple, the Education Investment Tax Credit proposal has widespread support because it helps all teachers and will help the children of low-and middle-income families regardless of where they go to school. We are grateful to Senator Klein and the Independent Democratic Conference for their leadership and for joining the Governor, Senator Skelos and the many legislators who recognize that its enactment is long-overdue.”

Jake Adler, New York State Policy Director, Orthodox Union Teach NYS said: “The Orthodox Union applauds Senator Klein and the IDC’s inclusion of the EITC in their budget proposal. By providing a tax credit in return for corporate donations to public schools and/or private scholarship organizations, the EITC would benefit all schools across the state, both public and non-public, and create an incentive that allows all students to win. This is an important step toward ensuring that all of New York’s children have access to the education that is best for them.”

Charles D. Hammerman, President & CEO, The Disability Opportunity Fund, said: “As the head of a Certified CDFI which exclusively finances projects which support low-income people with disabilities, we commend and support the IDC’s Proposal to invest \$25 million through CDFIs to foster increased development of affordable and accessible housing in NYS. Based on our experience, CDFIs are uniquely qualified to not only work closely with OPWDD, OMH and OASAS in serving people with disabilities and their families, but we can also utilize our relationships with the financial community to leverage this investment with an additional \$180 million of capital. This “multiplier effect” will result in the ability to develop over 1400 additional units of housing in the State of New York.”

Peter Pierri, Executive Director of InterAgency Council of Developmental Disabilities Agencies, Inc., said: “We are grateful for Senator Carlucci and the IDC’s support of affordable housing for people with developmental disabilities. There is a great and

increasing unmet need for housing and we look forward to working with Senator Carlucci and the IDC to create these opportunities.”

Seth P. Stein, Executive Director and General Counsel of the Alliance of Long Island Agencies, Inc., said: "On Long Island over the past several years there has been an increasing need for additional residential opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities. We strongly support the IDC's initiative to make additional dollars available to meet these needs."

Jason Hansman, External Program Relations Director, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America said: "Extending housing preference to disabled veterans would be a great step forward toward addressing the urgent issue of veteran homelessness. With the 2015 VA deadline less than a year away, straight forward and immediate solutions are desperately needed."

Andy Person, Executive Director, Student Success and Engagement, Mercy College said: “We applaud Senator Klein’s efforts to invest in New York’s future by exploring solutions for a better classroom experience, new pathways to graduation, and college affordability. Higher education plays a critical role in closing the skills gap for New Yorkers and our state's economy. Mercy College is committed to providing students with a high quality education with innovative programs to ensure success at an affordable price. We support proposals that enable students to reach their full potential and aspirations.”

Jessica Klos Shapiro, Public Policy Director, Early Care & Learning Council, said: "The Early Care & Learning Council supports the IDC's Invest NY proposal for additional state funding that will make child care services here more affordable for more families. Currently New York is the least affordable state in the nation for child care, so this initiative is clearly a step in the right direction. This investment will have a greatly needed positive impact for the children and families of our state."

Jeffrey Leb, Managing Director of Government and External Relation, UJA Federation of NY, said: “UJA Federation of New York strongly supports the passage of the Education Investment Tax Credit. This legislation is beneficial to both public and non-public school communities and would enhance education opportunities for all students across New York State. We thank Senator Klein and members of the IDC for including the EITC as a priority in their 2015 legislative agenda.”

Laura Cameron, Executive Director of the Association on Aging in New York said: “We support the Independent Democratic Conference’s (IDC) Senior Relief Package

which includes measures to assist seniors that are facing increased costs while living on a fixed income. Every day in New York State, seniors and their caregivers reach out to our offices for aging for services and assistance. The demand for services will continue to escalate, fueled by a growing senior population, and we support initiatives that make it possible for more older residents to remain in their homes and communities as they get older.”

Ralph Fasano, President of the Association for Community Living and Executive Director at Concern for Independent Living, said: “We commend Senator Carlucci for recognizing the need for housing vulnerable populations. We also welcome the opportunity to help our members improve their current housing and develop new housing that will help integrate people with disabilities into the community.”

David Wish, CEO and Founder of Little Kids Rock, said: “We are excited that a task force is being created to expand New York’s music and arts curriculum. We hope that this task force will help us expand our work training and equipping hundreds of New York City public school teachers in building new, contemporary music programs that teach students to play and compose while enhancing learning in other subjects and developing skills as leaders.”