



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Building a Brighter Future for New York State

PATTY RITCHIE April 6, 2015

| ISSUE: **AGRICULTURE, ELECTIONS, TAXES**

Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

For the past several months, my colleagues and I have been working to deliver a new State Budget that creates more—and better—opportunities for all New Yorkers. The result, is a plan, just approved last week, that holds spending growth below two percent, provides new tax relief for hardworking families, includes record funding for agriculture and makes major, much-needed investments in education, job creation and efforts to strengthen our economy.

These new investments, which will help to build a brighter future for our state, include the following:

Increased support for farmers: As Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I worked diligently to secure record funding for agriculture programs, with the end result being a final budget that adds \$12 million to the Governor's original spending proposal and restores cuts to 33 different programs that our state's hardworking farmers depend on. The State Budget also includes funding for key components of my "Grown in New York" plan, which aims to strengthen the connection between farmers and consumers looking to buy locally grown and produced food, as well as increased support for the state's "Young Farmers" program, which aims to encourage more young people to pursue careers in agriculture. Going hand in hand with efforts to boost New York's leading industry, are investments in job creation. The new State Budget also includes \$1.5 billion in funding dedicated to spurring economic development throughout Upstate New York. In addition, it also includes \$500 million to help develop high-speed Internet access throughout all corners of the state; an investment that will help make sure businesses are connected and can operate efficiently.

More opportunities for students: The new State Budget includes a \$1.4 billion increase in school aid—which translates to \$25 million more for the schools I represent in Oswego, Jefferson and St. Lawrence Counties. It also eliminates 97.7 percent of the Gap Elimination Adjustment, also known as the

GEA, for St. Lawrence County schools, and 72.5 percent for other schools throughout the region I represent. While I favored the complete elimination of the GEA—which is a budget gimmick imposed before I took office that has placed a huge strain on local schools—the Assembly rejected the proposal.

More help for municipalities: It's no secret that this year's winter was brutal, with ice and snow hammering local roads. Included in the new State Budget is a \$50 million increase in local highway aid, which will help local governments balance road repair budgets—that's funding that will be especially important as we continue to work to bounce back from the severe weather of the past several months. In addition, New York will also be investing \$1 billion in additional funds to repair and replace roads and bridges statewide.

These are just a few examples of the key investments included in the State Budget which will continue to move our state and our local communities forward in the years to come. For more information on other aspects of the budget—including those in the areas of tax relief, job creation, infrastructure improvements, and more—I welcome you to visit my website at www.ritchie.nysenate.gov.