



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

## Ortt's Bill Seeks to Hold State Accountable for Bridge Repairs

ROBERT G. ORTT June 16, 2015

| ISSUE: **AGRICULTURE, SMALL BUSINESS, THRUWAY AUTHORITY**

### *Senator Ortt Passes Bill to Close Loopholes for State Maintenance of Canal Lift Bridges*

Legislation sponsored by State Senator Rob Ortt (R,C,I – North Tonawanda) would close unreasonable loopholes in the canal law and hold New York State responsible for maintaining and repairing canal infrastructure before lift bridges fall into disrepair. The bill (S2658) passed today in the state Senate.

“Keeping our communities safe has been a key priority for me since day one,” said Senator Ortt. “Under this bill, the state would be mandated to improve deteriorated lift bridges, and would no longer be able to skirt current law by simply closing the bridge. It’s absurd to think that letting infrastructure needs fall to the wayside is acceptable. Not only would this measure address safety and economic concerns, it would also hold the state accountable, close loopholes and ultimately protect our children and communities.”

Currently, the New York State Department of Transportation (DOT) and the state Canal Corporation, under the direction of the Thruway Authority, are required to maintain canal lift bridges. Certain loopholes in the law, however, often result in the deterioration and closure of the bridges. As the law currently stands, the state can choose whether or not to repair a canal lift bridge as long as there is an alternate transportation route.

In addition, a rundown lift bridge may not be closed, but often times restricted to emergency and commercial vehicles, including tractor trailers, school buses, and other large trucks exceeding a certain weight limit. As a result, residents and those in the agriculture industry are forced to take alternate routes that are typically longer and end up costing more money in travel expenses.

The bill would require the state to maintain canal lift bridges, but doing so in a way that would not hinder commerce, transportation of students, or agriculture.

“My district alone contains nearly 20 lift bridges, most of which are located in Orleans County,” said Sen. Ortt. “Local commerce takes a hit when farmers or other small businesses can’t cross a restricted canal bridge, because of a weight limit. It’s unfair to make farmers, school buses, and tractor trailers travel 25, 30, 40 miles out of the way to get where they need to go. That, along with ignoring vital infrastructure needs, is completely unacceptable.”

Additionally, the bill would call for at least one public hearing before a lift bridge is closed.

The bill is being sent to the Assembly.