



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## Statement on the 2015 Legislative Session

PATTY RITCHIE June 25, 2015

From enacting our fifth on-time budget to investing in schools, strengthening the future of agriculture, protecting and creating jobs, and delivering on the promise of relief for hardworking taxpayers, the 2015 legislative session put the needs of everyday, middle class New Yorkers first.

### **Budget and Taxes**

For the fifth time in as many years, we passed a balanced budget that was on-time and strengthens New York's economy by holding the line on spending and taxes. We extended the successful property tax cap, and approved a new round of property tax rebates to bring significant tax relief that middle class taxpayers desperately need.

### **Strengthening agriculture**

As the Chair of the Senate's Agriculture Committee, I was proud to lead the way to providing record state funding to strengthen and preserve family farming. We expanded the Young Farmer program I created in 2014 to address the challenge of replacing aging and retiring farmers, and encourage a new generation of agriculture professionals, and introduced the "Grown in New York" initiative to help strengthen farmers' bottom lines by connecting local farms and consumers.

### **Investing in our schools**

We provided record funding for public schools, including a \$25 million increase in state school aid to districts I represent in Jefferson, Oswego and St. Lawrence Counties. Over five years, per-pupil school aid in my Senate District increased more than 20 percent. We virtually eliminated the aid-cutting Gap Elimination Adjustment, responded to concerns of teachers and parents about excessive testing and repealed a gag order that prevented teachers and administrators from discussing the tests. We recruited the learning experts at the State Education Department to design a better system to evaluate and recognize

teacher excellence. We increased funding for public libraries and increased tuition assistance to help middle class families pay for college.

### **Protecting Fort Drum**

For the fourth time, I hosted the annual Fort Drum Day at the Capitol to raise awareness and support for the post—Upstate New York’s largest employer—and secured \$3 million in special State Budget funding to help secure Fort Drum and other military posts in our state from federal military cuts. We expanded buffer areas outside the post to bolster the Army’s training mission, and I directed new health care investments to benefit troops and their families, as well as the entire community, including funding for area hospitals and for local PTSD programs in Watertown and at River Hospital in Alexandria Bay that serve veterans and troops returning from war zones.

### **Women’s Equality**

We passed sweeping legislation to protect the rights of women to be treated fairly in the workplace, including a landmark Equal Pay bill, and protections against pregnancy discrimination and sexual harassment, and to crack down on a growing problem of international human trafficking, where women and children are treated and sold like property.

By these actions, and many others, we once again demonstrated that by working together in a bipartisan way we can achieve real results that have a direct and positive impact on our economy, community and, by expanding opportunity for individuals and families, create a better future for all New Yorkers.