



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

## Ortt, Hawley Call on Assembly Majority to Pass Legislation to Prevent Canal Bridge Closures

ROBERT G. ORTT July 20, 2015

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### *Legislation to Close Loopholes in Canal Law and Hold State Accountable, Held up in Assembly*

**KNOWLESVILLE** – Standing in front of the heavily traveled Knowlesville lift bridge in Orleans County, New York State Senator Rob Ortt (R,C,I – North Tonawanda) and New York State Assemblyman Steve Hawley (R,C,I – Batavia) today urged the Assembly Majority to pass a bill that would prevent further closure of bridges over the Erie Canal and other canals within New York State. Bridges include lift or movable, highway and pedestrian.

The legislation (S.2658-A/A.7242-A) would close unreasonable loopholes in the canal law and hold New York State responsible for maintaining and repairing canal infrastructure before canal bridges fall into disrepair and are forced to close. The bill first passed in the state Senate in January. It was later revised and once again passed in the Senate in June. The bill has been referred to the Transportation Committee and currently sits in the Assembly.

“Closing the Knowlesville bridge would be a major hardship to its community and surrounding communities,” said **Senator Ortt**. “As we’ve seen from the countless other bridge closures across Western New York, once a bridge is closed or restricted, it impacts our farmers, emergency personnel, schools, and residents. Our legislation would not only address safety concerns, but would also maintain the local economies often devastated by closures. Right now, the state is able to tip-toe around the law by closing canal bridges that are in poor shape, rather than regularly reinvesting in them. Ignoring vital infrastructure needs is completely unacceptable. It’s time to close these loopholes, hold the state accountable, and protect our communities.”

Orleans County has at least two bridges that are currently closed – the Brown Street Bridge in Albion and Hindsburg Road Bridge in the Town of Murray. Orleans County is home to more than 40 percent of the lift bridges in the Erie Canal system.

**Assemblyman Hawley** said, “My district alone contains 56 percent of the lift bridges on the Erie Canal. This legislation would mandate that infrastructure improvements be made to all deteriorated lift bridges, which will ultimately make more highway routes available. It is unfair to residents, businesses and farmers in my district who must find longer and more costly travel routes because New York State has failed to make necessary infrastructure improvements.”

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 bridges in the New York State Canal System. 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 bridge as long as there is an alternate transportation route.

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

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

Pictured from left to right: Chairman of the Orleans County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board Barry Flansburg; Orleans County Legislature Chairman Dave Callard; Senator Ortt and Assemblyman Hawley