



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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Disconnect to Reconnect

A few weeks ago, my wife gleefully announced our upcoming family vacation to New York's Letchworth State Park and was met by deafening silence broken only by the sound of crickets. My four daughters and I stared blankly at each other and then simultaneously began our barrage of desperate interrogation. Where was Letchworth? Weren't state parks just a day trip on some sort of larger itinerary? Why a house over a hotel? How could anyone spend an entire week in a remote cabin in a remote state park? With just each other! What would we do for fun? What would we eat? How would we survive? And the single most nerve-wracking aspect of the whole trip: Would there be a Wi-Fi connection?

We were dumbfounded as she explained that not only was there no internet connection, cellular service would be spotty at best, and how that was what she had hoped for. We each marched off in different directions, mumbling to ourselves, absolutely certain that this woman we call mom had lost her mind. But she persisted in her mission which she had dubbed, "disconnect to reconnect."

Now if you're a regular reader of this column, you're probably well aware that friends and family (especially my wife) categorize me as a workaholic - a typical "type A" personality who

has trouble unwinding. Admittedly, I do love my work as your State Senator and technology has certainly made it easier for me to bring that work with me wherever I go – maybe too easy. But I insisted that wasn't an issue for me, that unlike "the kids" I had no problem going internet free. After all, I was a child of the seventies too and I knew as well as she how to have good, old-fashioned fun without the aid of electronic gadgets.

So off we went to Letchworth, affectionately known as the "Grand Canyon of the East." And, needless to say, my kids and I were a mess those first 24 hours. I'm sure locals were wondering who those strange people were, walking around the property and the surrounding woods waving phones frantically in the air trying "to connect." We even devised a plan by which we would find some excuse to go to the local shopping center each day to get our internet fix, away from the disapproving eyes of my wife.

But a funny thing happened on the way to our supposed calamity. With each passing day we turned to each other for conversation, entertainment and dare I say, fun. We had morning walks, afternoon hikes, and just plain old time to explore the park – all without looking at our phones. We cooked, took all our meals together, played board games, watched movies and sat around doing nothing but talking – and we didn't mind. We even took naps! I gradually came to recall what it felt like when we were growing up and our girls, to our astonishment, said they felt better too. Even the routine arguing amongst four siblings that we readily anticipated never quite materialized. (Could circumstance actually have obliged them to get along?) The day we left, we begrudgingly conceded to my wife that this happy experiment had indeed become one of the best family vacations we ever had.

In that light, I'll leave you with a few observations. If you can, consider a New York State vacation. We're blessed with one of the most diverse and stunning park systems in the nation, 179 state parks and 37 historic sites to be exact. They offer something for everyone, from campgrounds, to golf courses, to beaches everywhere from Western New York to Long

Island's East End. Check out www.nysparks.com and you can start planning an affordable alternative to high-priced, overseas or out of state getaways.

Finally, there are times when a husband must admit to his better half that she was right. This was one of those times. Regardless of whether you can get away or not, there's something to be said for her theory on "disconnect to reconnect." Maybe it's as simple as having family members surrender their phones, tablets, or computers at dinnertime. Or perhaps it's establishing internet free rooms or times in your home. In any case, I suggest giving it a try, if only in small increments. You'll not only recharge but you'll also rediscover people and passions that may be getting crowded out by digital habits. Give it a shot: unplug and let yourself unwind.