



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Taxed Enough Already

JAMES L. SEWARD April 16, 2009

Thousand of New Yorkers spent some time recently rallying against high taxes. Tax Day Tea (Taxed Enough Already) Parties took place nationwide on April 15th, and several were held right here in the 51st district. The Boston-like tea parties were an opportunity for people to vent their anger over their ever growing tax bills. I too feel the frustration expressed by these hard working, overburdened taxpayers.

New Yorkers are furious, and for good reason. They, like other Americans, should be celebrating Tax Freedom Day, when most Americans will have earned enough money to pay this year's federal, state and local taxes. But Tax Freedom Day in New York will be much later than other states because New Yorkers pay among the highest taxes in the nation.

April 15th also marked another milestone for this state, as it was the 100th day that the Democrats have controlled the state senate. For taxpayers, there was no celebrating this occasion either. That is because the Democrats have little to show for their efforts other than higher taxes, broken government and broken promises.

But the senate leadership is celebrating. They are heralding the recently passed budget as their greatest achievement. They are proud of a budget that increases taxes by more than \$8.5 billion to pay for an unprecedented increase in spending of more than \$12 billion. But they are the only ones celebrating.

Homeowners will pay more in property taxes, as they lose their STAR rebate checks. Income taxes, utility taxes, health insurance taxes, taxes on just about everything else that affects working families are increasing, raising the average family tax bill by more than \$2,400 a year. And there is nothing to create new jobs, only increased costs that will drive businesses and jobs out of New York.

As we continue through the legislative session in Albany we must take significant steps to turn our state around. We must offer our residents a reason to stay here in the Empire State, and create incentives to attract others to join us.

Several different property tax relief strategies have been discussed in recent years. A special commission last year called for a cap on school property taxes. A “circuit breaker” approach has also been discussed. This method would focus on an individual taxpayer’s ability to pay, reducing property taxes that exceed a certain percentage of a taxpayer’s income.

Another proposal would put an end to local school property taxes entirely. This initiative, NY-STOP (Stop Taxing Our Property), would reduce school property taxes by 20 percent a year until they are eliminated after five years. The senate approved this ground- breaking piece of legislation last year, but the assembly failed to join us.

These are all options which need to be brought to the table now for a serious discussion. People are calling for real tax relief and we must find a way to deliver.

State spending is also an issue that must be addressed. A constitutional spending cap is needed to prevent enormous increase like the one included in this year’s budget. While people are tightening their belts to make ends meet, the legislature is showing no similar restraint.

Businesses, especially small, locally owned companies, need to know we are ready and willing to work shoulder to shoulder with them to create jobs. SUNY students need to know that we will give them the resources they need to prepare for the careers of their choice. Families and individuals need to know that we are fighting to keep costs in check and that we won't ask them to foot the bill for runaway state spending.

Tax Day Tea Parties were a great start. Now we need to build on the momentum by reining in out of control state spending and enacting meaningful tax relief measures that will help individuals and families stay in their homes, and allow small businesses to thrive and create jobs.