



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James L. Seward

Fight For STAR

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Providing property tax relief to New York's struggling homeowners has always been a top priority of mine. That's why I was extremely disappointed when the governor decided to drop the STAR rebate check program from this year's budget. Now, though, there is a ray of hope that the STAR checks can be revived.

I have joined my senate Republican colleagues in launching a statewide, grass-roots petition drive to let Albany politicians know how important the checks are to middle class families, senior citizens and property owners struggling to make ends meet. My hope is that with the help of the people we can bring this valuable program back.

Back in 2006 when I helped start the STAR rebate check program, the idea was to return homeowners some of their hard earned money each fall to help meet their needs. Moms and Dads often spend it on back to school clothes for their kids. Many use it to help cover their school tax bills which also arrive in the fall. Some put it toward the cost of filling their fuel oil tank to prepare for the winter heating season. The program has been a success in reducing the bite of that fall school tax bill.

Even though the program has been around for only a short period of time, homeowners and senior citizens have come to rely on the STAR rebate check. Each year there are small glitches that may delay a few checks. When that happens I hear about it. That's because people have come to depend on the program. Not everyone understands this however. Senate Democratic Leader Malcolm Smith told a television reporter, "Most of the people didn't even realize they were getting the money, it was such a small amount." That is simply out of touch with middle class families.

During debate on the 2009-2010 budget I fought to restore the STAR rebate checks. An amendment to bring back the checks was defeated when every single Democrat voted no. If just one had stood up for the STAR rebate checks we could have been saved them. Now, however, there seems to be a change of heart.

I'm not sure if its buyer's remorse or a guilty conscience but all of a sudden some are changing their tune. Senator Klein, a Democrat, has introduced legislation calling for the return of the STAR rebates and Governor Paterson says we need property tax relief. Its unfortunate neither felt this way during the budget, but I am willing to work with them to benefit taxpayers.

The new state budget, put together behind closed doors and in complete secrecy by three New York City politicians, is filled with new taxes and fees that will cost upstate families about \$2400 a year. Add the loss of the STAR rebate checks and the tax burden goes up another \$450. At a time when people are losing their jobs and struggling to stay in their homes, these added burdens are flat out wrong. That's why I am standing up and fighting for the forgotten middle class.

I am hopeful that this renewed interest in property tax relief in Albany could help turn the tide. Your help can be the final piece needed to make sure STAR rebate checks are mailed out again this fall. Let your voice be heard by signing the on-line petition at www.Iwantmystarcheck.com. The more signatures the better. If enough of us speak out we can convince those at the top to take another look and save this valuable tax relief tool.

Restoring the STAR tax rebate check program would provide an additional \$5.8 million in property tax relief for Otsego County. This is money that can help local families and senior citizens pay their bills and stay in their homes. The checks also provide a shot in the arm to the local economy, just what we need during these

tough economic times.

Join the fight by going to www.Iwantmystarcheck.com.