



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James L. Seward

Seward Details 2016 Priorities

JEFF BISHOP, COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR January 11, 2016



ONEONTA, 01/11/16 – In media conferences across his district kicking off the 2016 session of the New York State Senate, State Senator James L. Seward (R/C/I-Oneonta) today detailed his legislative priorities. Senator Seward says his agenda follows the concerns brought to him by constituents and includes ethics reform, highway funding, education aid, economic development, broadband, and the heroin crisis.

“As I begin my 30th year as a state senator, I can honestly say that the best part of the job is helping people,” said Senator Seward. “The best way to accomplish that task is to spend time meeting with constituents and learning their concerns. It is those communications that have helped craft my priorities for 2016.”

Ethics Reform

The 2015 session was challenging for a number of reasons, including the indictment and eventual conviction of two top legislative leaders. It is important that steps are taken to restore public trust in Albany.

“A number of actions have been taken in recent years to ‘clean up’ Albany, however, there are additional steps I will be focusing on.

“We can start with final approval of legislation that ends pensions for those convicted of a felony. If a politician spends time feathering his own nest there is absolutely no reason he should receive a taxpayer funded pension. Last year there was a three-way agreement on legislation that would put an end to this deplorable behavior. The senate passed the legislation, however, the assembly did not follow suit.

“The senate has also instituted voluntary term limits on leadership positions and committee chairmanships and has passed legislation to make this law. The bill would also put limits on assembly leadership, but again, the measure has not been brought forward for a vote in the assembly.

“I also believe we should look at improved financial disclosure for legislators. Disclosure forms that are filled out by every senator and assemblyman are more extensive than in past years, but additional openness is always welcome.”

Highway Funding

Quality roads and bridges are indispensable when it comes to improving our economy and making sure the motoring public is safe.

“Significant funding for downstate mass transit projects, to the tune of more than \$8 billion, has been promoted by the governor. We need equal funding for upstate roads and bridges.

“For several years, upstate roads were neglected but in the last three state budgets I was able to fight for added CHIPs (Consolidated Highway Improvement Program) funding to help maintain and improve local highways without negatively impacting county budgets.

“Improving our roads and bridges will help attract business, make it easier for existing employers to ship their goods, and keep travelers safe.”

Education

“New York State’s public education system is the core that supports so many other elements of our day to day life. Ensuring our schools have the resources they need to help students grow and meet new challenges has always been one of my leading priorities. Not only does the funding help with classroom needs, it is also imperative to keeping local property taxes in check.”

One major item schools have contended with in recent years is the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA). Seward voted against the GEA when it was first imposed on schools and has been working to make schools whole again financially. The senate has lead the fight to erase the GEA and in 2015, Seward helped direct \$603 million to schools to help restore the GEA – 85 percent of the original cut has been erased.

“Great strides have been made in eliminating the Gap Elimination Adjustment, one of the foremost obstacles for many schools in my district. This year, the GEA must be retired once and for all.”

Economic Development & Job Creation

In 2015, new proposals were adopted to reduce energy taxes, invest in major economic development and transportation projects, and expand job training programs.

“Ensuring we have a vibrant and robust economy will help on so many fronts. Controlling state spending, improving our infrastructure, cutting energy costs, and rejecting new taxes are some of the strategies that must be employed to help create a strong job growth climate. Regulatory and mandate relief, along with targeted tax cuts are also vital helps that will lower the cost of doing business in New York State.

“There is also a great deal of discussion concerning a minimum wage increase. The fact is, the minimum wage just went up on January 1st, and is up 75 percent in New York State since 2004.

Before any further increases are approved, it is vital that we carefully study the impact such a hike would have on businesses – especially the small businesses that populate many of our Main Streets.”

Broadband

The 2015 state budget included \$500 million to develop high-speed internet access. This is a small portion of the ongoing state support directed toward broadband expansion projects in recent years.

“Broadband is integral to business, education, emergency response, and general quality of life. While connecting rural communities can be a meticulous, time-consuming process, it is imperative that work progress at an efficient pace. I will continue to support new funding to advance connectivity and also advocate for speedy completion of approved projects.”

Heroin

As a member of the Senate’s Joint Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction since its inception in 2014, Senator Seward has been a leader in enacting new laws focused on addressing the heroin crisis.

“The heroin crisis has reached every segment of our population and is destroying individuals, families, and communities. I have worked to initiate a multi-prong strategy and new laws have been adopted to prevent drug abuse and overdoses, increase the availability of addiction treatment, and enhance the tools provided to law enforcement to keep heroin off the streets.

“Additional measures, which were passed by the senate but not the assembly, will be front and center in 2016. I will also continue to work with community groups that are on the front lines and are making a real difference.”

Summary

“There are challenges in front of us as we start 2016, but there is also considerable optimism and hard proof, that New York State is headed in the right direction.

“Five straight on-time, fiscally responsible state budgets, record school funding, significant infrastructure investments, and new programs to help farmers and small businesses are just a few of our recent victories.

“The priorities I have outlined aren’t just mine, they are the concerns that I hear from those who live and work in my district – the ‘People’s Agenda’ – and advancing these concerns will be a true victory.”