



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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“... It's not easy bein' green, It seems you blend in with so many other ordinary things and people tend to pass you over 'cause you're not standing out like flashy sparkles in the water or stars in the sky.” - Kermit the Frog

Kermit's famous song was rolling around my head last month as I voted to pass New York State's latest budget. That's because our sixth, consecutive, on-time budget has been fairly described as the “greenest” one New York has ever funded.

For starters it includes a record \$300 million for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) to protect natural resources and to ensure clean water and air. This represents an unprecedented 70% increase of \$123 million over last year's budget and is actually the highest level of funding in the EPF's history. Since 1993 the EPF has invested billions in improving water and air quality, conserving open space and farms, improving recycling programs, revitalizing waterfronts, and funding bigger and better parks, zoos, aquariums, and botanical gardens. Every single region of our state has benefitted and now, with this collective effort, we'll be able to accomplish much more.

Additionally, we're tackling invasive species like the Southern Pine Beetle with a completely separate \$12 million budget line for the New York Invasive Species Council. We also included an additional \$200 million for the NYS Water Infrastructure Improvement Act

to help municipalities with their water quality projects, for a grand total of \$425 million.

That brings me to the best news of all, specifically for Nassau County. Most of you know that I have been involved in a number of high-profile, political dust-ups, some with New York City's Mayor's office, while trying to protect our island's drinking water. It's been a six-year effort to call attention to Long Island's sole source aquifer system and our need to protect it.

Without too much scientific jargon here, recklessly pumping out our groundwater water supply from under us means saltwater intrudes and eventually makes the source undrinkable. Keep in mind that we are wholly – 100% – dependent on this sole source. So you don't have to be an environmentalist to see the problem here, you have to be a realist. We simply cannot afford to upset this delicate balance. And seeing as it's already happening along the north and south shores, we have to recognize that it's a real threat to the quality of life for millions of Long Islanders.

That's why I am pleased to report that along with Democratic Assemblywoman Michelle Schimel, we were finally able to secure six-million dollars in the state budget for an island-wide study that will tell us exactly how and where our drinking water is being overtaken by saltwater. While this may not sound terribly electrifying, I assure you few things were as important as obtaining this study.

We've never had this kind of comprehensive information, and what little we do have is so old that it is virtually useless. These funds will now allow the U.S. Geological Survey to sink a new network of monitoring wells across Long Island to test and determine, among other things, precisely where and how saltwater is intruding. The data is then run through numerical models and it will guide us to more informed water management decisions and policies. Frankly, without it we'd just be guessing, and when it comes to our only water

supply, that's just not an acceptable approach.

Like Kermit says, "it ain't easy being green," especially when there are literally hundreds of pressing challenges facing our state. But I think it speaks volumes when both houses of the legislature and the Governor come together to properly protect our environment.