



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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State Budget Negotiations Are Underway

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This is a busy time of year in Albany. Members of the Senate and Assembly are in the process of reviewing and analyzing the governor's \$152-billion budget proposal. Hearings and meetings with the heads of various departments and agencies will continue through March with a goal of adopting a new budget by April 1.

Each year there is much debate on how to adequately and fairly fund our public schools, provide vital public health and safety services, and build and maintain safe roads and bridges. There will also be much discussion on how to provide tax relief for hardworking New Yorkers and how to help businesses grow and create jobs. But beyond these very important deliberations, the Legislature is considering three specific budget proposals this year that have garnered a great deal of attention among constituents of the 59th Senate District; the governor's idea to provide free college tuition, a proposal to expand ridesharing services to upstate NY, and a plan to close the WNY Children's Psychiatric Center in West Seneca.

Perhaps the issue that has generated the most response, virtually all of it negative, is the proposal to provide free college tuition for families making less than \$125,000 who attend a SUNY or CUNY school. Unfortunately, this idea produces more questions than answers. First of all, nothing is free and we need to know exactly how much this would cost taxpayers. Will students be required to stay and work in NY after graduation? Can SUNY campuses accommodate the anticipated increase in applications? What impact will this have on private colleges and universities? We need to do all we can to make college affordable, but this proposal is not the answer.

I have also heard from many people interested in expanding ridesharing services in Buffalo and the rest of upstate. In fact, the Senate has already passed a bill that would allow companies such as Uber and Lyft to begin operating immediately. Ridesharing will create jobs and provide more transportation options for residents and visitors while generating funds to improve our roads and bridges. It is simply unfair that upstate NY is one of the only regions in the country that does not allow this service to exist and I am hopeful we can include this in the budget.

Finally, our fight to keep the WNY Children's Psychiatric Center in West Seneca continues. Under the governor's budget, the center will close and children in need of treatment will be forced to go to the Buffalo Psychiatric Center, which is an adult-only facility. I have yet to hear anyone say this move is in the best interest of

children and adolescent patients and I and members of the WNY Legislature delegation will continue to fight to prevent it from happening.

Adopting a budget is one of the most important jobs facing the Legislature. I take that responsibility seriously and will do all I can to negotiate a budget in the best interest of the residents of the 59th Senate District.