



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Rachel May

Senators Along Erie Canal Oppose Proposal to ‘Rebrand’ the Erie Canal

RACHEL MAY February 4, 2021

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Albany, NY - Today, seven New York State Senators representing districts along the Erie Canal announce their opposition to a proposal to ‘rebrand’ the Erie Canal. The Division of Budget’s recent budget [briefing book](#) included details of a plan to market the combined Erie Canal and Empire Trail as a single ‘Empire Line.’ The [article today](#) stating that the renaming is no longer under consideration is a welcome development, but the Senators are seeking official notification that the proposal will not be included in the final budget.

The Erie Canal represents 363 miles of incredible ingenuity and engineering prowess of early 19th Century New York State which continues to play an important economic, cultural, and historical role in our region to this day.

According to a 2018 Canal Corporation study, the economic impact of the Erie Canal on tourism and recreational activities totals nearly \$400 million. The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor — comprising 524 miles of historic sites across upstate New York — generates more than \$300 million in economic impact, supports 3,240 jobs and generates almost \$35 million in tax revenue.

The Erie Canal continues to drive important economic activity for the communities that grew and flourished along its path. For visitors and natives alike, it stands as physical testimony to the kind of ingenuity and vision that drove progress and prosperity and earned New York the moniker of Empire State. From western New York through the Hudson Valley, the towpath along which horses and mules once towed barges now draws bicyclists, runners and families out for exercise along a trail rich in scenery, wildlife, and history.

The continued expansion of the Empire Trail and investments in communities along the canalway are important steps to maintaining this treasure's importance to Upstate communities. We support any effort to increase tourism and activity along the canalway, but believe that those efforts should emphasize rather than obscure the Erie Canal's importance.

Senator Rachel May (D-53) said, "Many schoolchildren in Upstate New York fondly remember their field trips along the Erie Canal or to visit the Tugboat Urger. Many families have long traditions of spending summer vacations on and around the Canal. The Erie Canal is part of New York's identity. And the history and economy of Upstate have been shaped by its long story. I have been gratified to see investments made in the canalway and in the Empire Trail, and I strongly believe those investments will bring new generations to explore it. But I also believe that the Erie Canal is an iconic brand with more than enough to draw tourists from around the world to experience their 'fifteen miles on the Erie Canal.'

Senator Sean Ryan (D-60) said, "Buffalo's rise as one of America's most prominent cities is inextricably linked to the Erie Canal, which also gave rise to communities across Upstate New York. Today, the Erie Canal is not just a part of our history, it is an essential part of Buffalo and Western New York's future, with the growing prominence of Canalside and the Outer Harbor, and efforts to boost canal related tourism. Visitors to Canalside learn about the rise of Buffalo as the western terminus of the Erie Canal, where Governor DeWitt Clinton famously took water from Lake Erie for his opening journey of the canal in 1825. Changing the name of the Erie Canal would damage a brand that has been built for centuries. Erie Canal communities are proud of the identity they have cultivated over the years. While I appreciate efforts to

boost tourism and draw more visitors to Upstate communities, renaming the Erie Canal is the wrong way to go.”

Senator Michelle Hinchey (D-46) said, “The Erie Canal is an important part of our Upstate history and has played a central role in propelling commerce for our region, establishing our communities as destinations for outdoor recreation and cultural connection. While we are very appreciative of investments that seek to revitalize the Canalway and Empire Trail, the Erie Canal should be a cornerstone to our Upstate economic recovery, and to rebrand it would obscure the identity of this treasured, centuries-old institution.”

Senator John Mannion (D-50) said, “The Erie Canal is known all over the world as a symbol of American progress and New York ingenuity and the last thing it needs is an expensive and counterproductive rebranding. The Empire Trail is a magnificent new state resource that compliments and enhances the canal and our canal communities. However, the fact is it will never come close to the Erie Canal's rich and tradition-filled history and could never surpass it in the hearts and minds of visitors and New Yorkers alike. The best way to support the canal, expand economic activity, and attract more visitors, is to invest in its future by doubling down on its history.”

Senator Timothy Kennedy (D-63) said, “The Erie Canal made Upstate what it is today, opening up the heart of the nation to global trade, and that heritage deserves to be honored in its own right. While I appreciate the intent of this proposal, I was concerned that it dilutes both the importance of the Erie Canal, as well as the impressive accomplishment of the completion of the Empire State Trail. While these systems are coexistent, each is clearly deserving of their own unique recognition. I look forward to working with the Administration and the New York Power Authority to further these goals.”

Senator Neil Breslin (D-43) said, "The Erie Canal is an icon in American History and to this day, is central to the communities that have been built around it. Albany is the eastern entrance to the Erie Canal, and is often referred to as the ‘Gateway to the West’. For hundreds of years it has been an economic engine for the region. I support investments to expand tourism to the Erie Canal and the Empire Trail but I believe rebranding the Erie Canal needs to be discussed further.”

Senator Jeremy Cooney (D-56) said, “You'll always know your neighbor and you'll always know your pal on the Erie Canal. That's the promise millions of New Yorkers remember, and we're not throwing away our proud history for a state marketing pitch.”

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