



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Malcolm Smith

State Senate Democrats Launch Statewide Budget Listening Tour

MALCOLM A. SMITH December 3, 2008

Conference seeks input from local groups and institutions in key spending areas

(New York, NY) With New York State facing the biggest budget crisis in a generation, State Senate Democrats will convene a series of local forums around the state to get input and advice from officials, institutions, and organizations whose interests are at stake.

The budget forums will kick off next week in Buffalo on December 9th and in Brookhaven, Long Island on December 11th, with an additional forum in Oswego on December 19th.

Forums will focus on the key budget areas of health, education, higher education, and social services, and will include public input on proposals for current-year budget savings submitted by Governor Paterson as well as budget priorities for the coming year.

"This budget crisis is real, and it is going to have an impact on families and communities all over the state" said State Senate Democratic Leader Malcolm A. Smith (D-St. Albans). "The State Senate will partner with Governor Paterson and the Assembly to deal squarely with the state's fiscal problems. In this process, we want to hear advice from everyone we can about how we can deal with the crisis in a way that will end wasteful spending, protect our priorities, and spur job creation."

State government leaders are struggling with a budget gap of up to \$2 billion for the current 2008-09 fiscal year and up to \$15 billion for the coming year. Elected officials, experts and advocacy groups have suggested a range of options for dealing with the budget crisis. The "listening tour" is designed to gather input directly from those who will directly be affected by potential cuts, as well as to gather advice on additional savings and revenue proposals in key areas of the budget.

The forums will be presided over by the Chair and ranking members of Senate committees overseeing the areas in which the budget crisis is likely to have the greatest impact, which include:

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- *Senate Standing Committee on Education – Sen. Suzi Oppenheimer, Ranking Member*

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- *Senate Standing Committee on Finance – Sen. William T. Stachowski, Ranking Member*

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- *Senate Standing Committee on Higher Education – Sen. Toby Ann Stavisky, Ranking Member*

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- *Senate Standing Committee on Health – Sen. John L. Sampson, Ranking Member*

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• *Senate Standing Committee on Social Services, Children and Families* – Sen. Carl Kruger, Chair; Sen. Velmanette Montgomery, Ranking Member

The five-member panel will hold the first forum early this month in Buffalo and will be co-hosted by local Senators William T. Stachowski and Antoine M. Thompson.

Senator Stachowski said: "While dealing with this crisis, Senate Democrats want to reduce the tax burden on the hardest-pressed working families in New York. We're fighting for the families under the most pressure – we need to find ways to cut taxes whenever possible instead of raising them."

Senator Thompson said: "Our Conference is committed to addressing the fiscal challenges and we look forward to partnering with the local residents and organizations."

Local and regional budget forums are part of the "One New York" approach Senate Democrats have prioritized to ensure that the interests and needs of communities across the state are heard. In-person and written testimony will be reviewed by Conference members and staff and will help develop and guide approaches to the most difficult budget process in a generation.

Senator Smith concluded: "We're facing a crisis, but it's also an opportunity. The only way to get through this situation is by getting new ideas and good recommendations from everywhere and everyone, without regard to partisan affiliation or geographic location. We'll work together as one state, one community, one New York. These forums are the next step in this new approach, and we're dedicated to listening to what New Yorkers have to say."

Full details of times and locations:

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Buffalo, New York * December 9, 2008 * 9:00 AM * Buffalo Museum of Science * 1020
Humboldt Pkwy #1 Buffalo, NY * Co-Hosts: Senator William T Stachowski and Senator
Antoine M. Thompson

Brookhaven, New York * December 11, 2008 * 10:00 AM * Brookhaven Town Hall * 1
Independence Hill Farmingville, NY * Host: Senator-elect Brian X. Foley

Oswego, New York * December 19, 2008 * 10:00 AM * SUNY Oswego Campus Center
Auditorium * 7060 Route 104 Oswego, NY * Co-Hosts: Senator Darrel J. Aubertine and
Senator David J. Valesky