



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jose M. Serrano

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JOSÉ M. SERRANO October 28, 2009

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Senator Serrano Advocates for Arts and Cultural Community as an Economic Engine in Upstate New York

Addresses Educators, Arts and Tourism Organizations in Syracuse

(New York, NY)-- Following a successful trip to Syracuse New York, Senator José M. Serrano (D-Manhattan/Bronx) is optimistic about the future of tourism and the arts in New York State. "Arts and Culture are a pillar of our society, and should be respected and treated as such by our legislature," said Serrano.

"I am thrilled to have had the opportunity to meet with various agencies and organizations, as well as with my own colleagues in the Senate, to advance the issues affecting tourism and the arts in Upstate New York," he said. "As the new Chair of this committee, my first task was to change its name to Cultural Affairs, Tourism & Parks and Recreation. This was done to show that the focus of this committee was on the arts, artists, and the transformative effect that the arts have on our communities."

A staunch advocate for arts education, Serrano addressed the arts education conference titled Creativity and Other Boundless Resources for Recession-Era Education. He spoke on the importance of including arts instruction in the academic curriculum and of pushing for statewide compliance of state arts education laws.

"Statistics from the New York City Department of Education tell us that in the 2007-2008 school year only eight percent of elementary schools and less than half of middle schools met the minimum arts education requirements established by the state," said Serrano. "We don't know to what degree these appalling numbers extend to the entire state of New York, and I don't assume they're much better, but we must do everything we can to enforce compliance.

"A recent report by the Center for Arts Education point to statistics that show the highest

dropout rates among youngsters who have the lowest amount of arts in the classroom. The facts are clear- we cannot expect better educational outcomes if we continue this short-sighted approach to arts education.”

Serrano, who is the Chair of the Senate Committee on Cultural Affairs, Tourism, Parks and Recreation, recently introduced a bill (S5878) that would require the State Commissioner of Education to audit and report on statewide compliance of arts education regulations. He was also the sponsor a bill (S6105), which recently passed the senate, that creates the Arts Advisory Committee within the school governance structure of the NYC Department of Education.

At the conference, Serrano presented a resolution- which passed the Senate in July- declaring October as Arts Education Month in the State of New York. It was received by Jeremy Johannasan from the New York State Alliance for Arts Education for his efforts in the fight for arts education. “As we stand here today we are at the tail-end of Arts Education Month,” said Serrano, “and it is meaningful that educators, administrators, arts leaders, and policymakers are all in the same room united for one common cause- providing equal access to arts education for all children.”

Senator Serrano and other Senate Leaders, including Senate President Malcolm Smith, Senate Majority Conference Leader John L. Sampson, Senators Dave Valesky (D-Oneida) and Bill Stachowski (D-Buffalo), also met with various arts organizations to discuss ways to better merge the arts with economic development in Upstate New York. The Senators also met with local tourism groups for a roundtable conversation on the importance of tourism as an economic engine and to discuss new ideas for garnering support for New York State tourism initiatives.

“As Chair of the Senate Committee on Cultural Affairs and Tourism, I have always maintained that tourism and the arts are real and proven investments in the future of the State of New York,” said Senator Serrano. “In order to help dig the country out of the Great Depression, President Roosevelt invested a great deal of government resources in public work arts through the WPA-and he was successful in moving the country forward while creating a lasting legacy that we see and enjoy every day. We must let history guide us through this economic downturn and use the methods that have worked in the past.

“Both the tourism and arts industries have a proven track record for serving as economic catalysts during difficult economic times, and they have positive economic effects on other industries like hotels and restaurants. In so many ways, the cultural community has been at the forefront of every economic recovery.”

Serrano and Senator David J. Valesky, also met with a wide range of Upstate arts and cultural organizations at the Everson Museum, where there was a lively roundtable discussion on the significance of the arts organizations of the area in the context of the cultural landscape of New York State.

“Arts and the cultural sector have an incredibly transformative effect on communities,” said Serrano. “Indeed, communities that have experienced revitalization have always had a cultural community that lead the charge.

“It has been a great honor to hear the triumphs and concerns of those who are working daily to advance arts and tourism issues in the State of New York. Now is the time for the legislature to think ‘outside of the box’, and fully understand that when we ignore the arts

we are missing a tremendous opportunity for educational, economic and community growth and renewal. The Arts are a proven vehicle that can help drive our State's economy in the right direction. It is my hope that upon my return to Albany we can address these topics in the upcoming session."

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