



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

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JOSEPH A. GRIFFO February 3, 2011

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Senator Joseph A. Griffo today affirmed his support for the broad overall goals of Gov. Andrew Cuomo's budget, while noting that a thorough review of the budget is required to address his concerns.

"As I have been saying for years while Albany tried to jam tax increases down the throats of New Yorkers, the state must spend less and must stop increasing taxes and fees. New York needs to take strong action to create a better business climate and restore our image as a can-do government," Griffo said. "I commend the governor for starting this process with a strong budget that takes a head-on approach to serious issues that have needed to be resolved."

Griffo said that his concerns in the budget center around fairness.

"If schools are being asked to manage with less for a year for the greater good of the state's fiscal situation, that's understandable and hardly surprising. My concern is that schools where needs are high and increasing are being asked to do this at the same time they are being told to help high-risk students pass tougher state tests. When we look at education spending, we cannot just look at the dollars, we need to look at the impact of those dollars and be certain that the young people of New York state will not be suffering because we made what could be seen in one context as a necessary fiscal decision."

Griffo, who has proposed reductions in Medicaid spending for years and demanded reduced mandates on county governments, said Cuomo's Medicaid reductions address a program that must be reduced. "New York State cannot afford to continue the program as it is, because too few people are paying too much while far too many are taking too much," he said. "The current menu of services and expanded eligibility are costs that are brining governments at all levels to their knees. We can no longer mortgage the future of state government and our heavily burdened county governments to supporting a program that is top-heavy with costs. It is impossible to reform New York's spending without substantive reform of Medicaid."

Griffo also said that he will push for a review of all corrections cost-saving measures before considering prison closures. "We should be ready to identify cuts to upper-management levels at the same time that we're looking at the consolidation of prisons. Governor Cuomo says he will create, by executive order, a task force to recommend specific facilities be closed. We'll soon have details as to the makeup and mandate of the Task Force. Will they rank facilities on a point system and judge some as more efficient than others? It is a different matter if more efficient facilities are closing while less efficient ones remain open," Griffo said. "I'm also holding the Governor to his word when he says that we will not be putting more criminals back on the streets. I do not believe that simply giving criminals shorter sentences makes New York a safer place. Sending more offenders back into their communities is going to create public safety risks that are unacceptable."

Griffo also voiced concern over the scale of employee layoffs. “In an unprecedented fiscal time, there is a need for unprecedented action,” he said. “But we’re talking about putting thousands of New Yorkers out of work. I hope that all the stakeholders - the public union leaders and legislative negotiators - can come together on immediate action to necessitate agency savings to avoid massive layoffs. We need to be sure state workforce reductions focus on the many layers of bureaucracy and not at the levels providing service to the people of New York. ”

Griffo said that scaling back increases that would otherwise happen through archaic formulas is an important step. “Right now, millions of dollars are doled out based upon funding formulas that no one fully understands, and which have been adapted and convoluted to the point where the original intent was lost. Instead of trying to deal with formulas that tell us as legislators what we have to spend, I want to see the power of a zero-based approach brought to state government, so that the budget process is a real process of determining where tax dollars should go, and not just a back room conversation to try to tweak the formula for some special interest.”

Griffo said that he supports Cuomo’s efforts to merge agencies, as long as the merger is accompanied by operation savings. “The idea of restructuring government is not just to move the pieces around, but the change the structure for the future so that government will cost less – not only in the year to come but for many years to come,” Griffo said. “Restructuring must produce substantive savings, and I look forward to exploring the Governor’s proposal in depth and working with his office to ensure that the realignment he proposes also provides the cost reductions New Yorkers deserve.”

Griffo said that he will oppose tax increases, whether labeled as increases in fees, or “loophole closers.” Griffo said taxpayers have been hit hard and deserve a break. “After the approval of \$14 billion in new taxes over the last two years - - passed without a single Republican vote - - New Yorkers simply can’t afford to pay any more in taxes. Senate Republicans have consistently opposed new taxes, and we’ll continue to urge the Governor and the Assembly to hold the line,” he said, noting that on Monday, the Senate passed the Governor’s program bill to cap property taxes at 2 percent or the inflation rate, whichever is less.

Griffo noted that creating new jobs in the private sector requires a revamped business tax climate, and said that part of the answer is his proposed job creation tax credit that rewards businesses for every new job they create. Griffo said that Cuomo’s economic development proposals provide a stronger Excelsior Jobs program, but noted the critical issue remains lower taxes. “New York State has always been the place where innovation and creativity helped us to lead the nation,” Griffo said. “In this serious fiscal crisis, we need to show that spending restraint can turn around our state and its economy, and that working with our private sector and our taxpayers will foster a new climate of opportunity. This budget is a realistic first step. I am ready to work with the Governor, and all of the legislators of both parties to produce a final budget agreement that will embrace the best of the Governor’s ideas and move New York forward.”

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Watch Senator Griffo comment on the budget here:

<http://www.nysenate.gov/video/2011/feb/04/senator-joe-griffo-comments-governors-budget-presentation-2111>