



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Lee M. Zeldin

Op-Ed from Senator Lee M. Zeldin

LEE M. ZELDIN February 18, 2011

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For too many years, state budgets in New York lost touch with fiscal reality by spending and taxing way more than taxpayers could afford. The result is that we now have the worst business climate in the country.

I commend Governor Cuomo for proposing a budget that reduces spending and does not increase taxes and I look forward to working with him, and all my colleagues in the legislature, to get a fiscally responsible budget passed on time.

There are some concerns I have regarding the lack of details in the Executive Budget. In fact, the budget does not include details for specific reductions of \$3.9 Billion or 44 percent of the spending cuts. These areas include Medicaid cuts, mandate relief, prison closures and government consolidation, and the April 1st budget deadline is fast approaching.

Medicaid alone has a target of \$2.85 Billion in cuts to health care. New York spends \$1 billion a week on Medicaid and the skyrocketing costs threaten to bankrupt state and local governments. We must have real Medicaid reform to stop waste and fraud and reduce the size of the nation's most expensive program because taxpayers simply cannot afford it.

I am also concerned about school aid. I understand that because of the state's \$10 billion deficit, education aid may have to be cut. However, it must be done in a fair and equitable manner across the state.

Many bureaucrats in Albany believe the myth that everyone on Long Island is wealthy. They don't understand just how high the high cost of living is here. This can result in Long Island schools being asked to take a larger percentage aid cut than districts in other parts of the state and that should not be the case. We need to work together at the state and local levels to reduce spending, provide property tax relief to homeowners and still ensure a quality education for our children.

Meanwhile, all school districts need to do more to share services and increase efficiencies. Additionally, many school districts are in a position to use some reserve funds to deal with state aid cuts. Much more needs to be done and it's important that all options be placed on the table for the sake of Long Island school children. Meanwhile, I will continue to work with my colleagues in the Senate to hopefully pass some meaningful mandate relief.

My priorities for this budget have never wavered and I am thankful that the Governor and Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos have approached this process with the goal of holding the line on taxes and spending. I am carrying your message to Albany and I will fight to ensure that we have a fiscally responsible budget that meets our needs while closing our large budget deficit.

God bless our Island, state and nation as we seek to strengthen our economy and way of life.