



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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What a Difference a Year Makes

When I write these columns, I find it helpful to think about the friends and neighbors that I've met throughout our district. I envision this column as sitting together over a weekly cup of coffee and having a healthy, steady exchange about what's happening in Albany. To be sure, so much of what I have carried upstate about good governance was born of these everyday sessions. Sharing this particular week's column is indeed a pleasure.

It's been a month since the end of the 2011 Legislative Session in Albany and it has already been recognized as "historic," standing as one of the "most productive in New York's history." I'm humbled to have been a part of that and while there is still much to do this coming year, we should take a moment to reflect on the magnitude of what's been accomplished. Far more than an impressive list of legislation, together we've actually changed the outlook of our state. For the first time in a long time, New Yorkers don't feel jaded about Albany, but feel they were instrumental in bringing about real change there. For the first time in a long time, New Yorkers have hope that things are getting better.

Last year at this time our government was mired in inefficiency with fiscal policies that flew in the face of common sense. The State's representatives regularly spent beyond its means and then, with a creativity matched only by their recklessness, found ways to pass those bills onto the taxpayers in the form of new taxes and fees. In fact, they imposed 124 new taxes and fees that amounted to \$14 billion on anything they could think of while simultaneously eliminating star rebate checks, increasing income taxes, and imposing a payroll tax. To make matters worse, scandals and abuse of power filled our headlines, robbing citizens of their faith in government.

In response, you sent my colleagues and me to Albany with a clear and simple mandate: to balance the state's budget by cutting spending and finding efficiencies, not by raising taxes. We did that and then some.

- Working with Andrew Cuomo, the new Senate Majority passed one of the first on-time budgets in decades that closed a \$10 billion budget deficit without raising a single tax or fee.
- At the same time, we successfully implemented incentives to get New York business back in the business of creating jobs.

· And to top it all off, we did what so many thought was impossible: we passed a two percent tax cap to finally put an end to New York's legendary runaway taxes.

In addition and as important, we worked collaboratively to enact long overdue, tough, new ethics reforms to restore integrity and confidence in State government.

As chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Local Government, I spearheaded efforts to do away with numerous state mandates that tied the hands of schools and local governments and forced them to raise local taxes. The mandate relief package was historic in that it was the first time such comprehensive relief was enacted. It set the tone for future discussions and future legislation offering further relief. A key component of this year's legislation was the creation of a Mandate Relief Council that allows our local governments to challenge unnecessary and unfair mandates, both existing and going forward. Through the Mandate Relief Council local governments can achieve billions of dollars of property tax relief statewide over time – a win-win with the flexibility necessary to address the concerns our local governments and school districts deal with “on the ground.”

None this was possible without everyday people insisting on common sense and honesty from their representatives. After our first legislative session in Albany, I can't help but be enthusiastic about our future. I hope you are too, because it's the desire for real change that finally got us on the right track. To be sure, it will be what keeps us there.

Thank you for opportunity to be a part of this historic year.