



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph P. Addabbo Jr.

## Addabbo: I'm Back in Albany to Work on My 2012 Priorities

JOSEPH P. ADDABBO JR January 9, 2012

| ISSUE: **LEGISLATURE, SESSION**

**Queens, NY, January 9, 2012** – NYS Senator Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr. (D-Queens), reports to his constituents that while the legislative session that ended last June was very successful, there is still much work left to be done in Albany and that is why the senator believes that he and the rest of the state legislators will return there to finish urgent business in 2012. Addabbo believes the state legislature needs to deal with some important priorities this year. The senator agrees with Governor Cuomo on cutting spending and waste in the budget; pushing for nonpartisan, independent redistricting; welcoming foreclosure assistance in his district, reforming campaign finance laws and creating more jobs on site at Aqueduct, as Cuomo outlined in last week's State of the State speech. The senator's other priorities include the prevention of hydrofracking until the DEC report is completed and evaluated; discussing with his constituents the upcoming referendum that allows the public a vote to allow full casino gaming in New York State; opening new, affordable senior housing at the former Fineson Center in Howard Beach; and preserving or restoring Title XX funding to keep our senior centers open.

Concerning the state budget, in December, Addabbo supported giving middle-class New Yorkers a state income tax cut and overhauling the state's tax code to provide equity to all taxpayers. He also supported the elimination of the MTA payroll tax for private and parochial schools, as well as small businesses with a payroll under \$1.25 million. These funds to the MTA are to be included in the budget negotiations for the Fiscal Year 2012-2013 State Budget. The senator adds, "Even though we addressed the approximately \$300 million budget deficit in the current budget (FY 2011-2012), there still remains roughly a \$2 billion deficit for FY 2012-2013." He notes that coupled with a 4% increase in education and Medicaid funding in this year's budget, severe funding cuts to most every state agency is certainly a possibility. The senator believes that individuals with disabilities and seniors can hardly withstand another round of harsh budget cuts to their critical programs. Addabbo says that he will make efforts to ensure that Title XX funding remains in the state budget for senior centers, but that the lack of federal funding could cause even more drastic fiscal measures to be taken in the state. "I'll work with my colleagues to avoid any reduction in public transportation service or fare increases, and will have my concerns addressed over the vague language in the legislation that purports to restore any shortfall in MTA funding, given the elimination of the payroll tax," Addabbo said.

While acknowledging the U.S. economy is still recovering slowly from recession, Addabbo contends that the NYS Department of Finance & Taxation-Division of Budget (DOB) might have underestimated

revenue projections in state FY 2011-12. Employment and income growth in the NYC region, as well as the commercial real estate market, could be showing signs of recovery. Tourism in NYC during 2011 was very strong and the senator still expects that state revenue collections will be higher than the DOB's projections for the current fiscal year. Addabbo noted, "The state legislature should ensure the balanced stability for the remainder of the current state budget, while also preparing to meet our fiscal obligations for the next budget." The senator pointed to the opening of Resorts World New York where recent polls have the Executive and the Legislature in agreement with most New Yorkers that the state should allow full casino gaming by constitutional amendment followed by a referendum on the ballot for the public to assent. "With limited gaming already existing in our state, we should no longer allow neighboring states to gain the millions of dollars in lost gaming revenue. Our communities could certainly use those monies for our local economy, education, senior centers and other local programs," Addabbo stated. The senator also intends to promote the need to raise the minimum age to gamble at a state's casino to 21 from 18 years-old.

Resorts World has generated more than \$1 million a day in state revenues since opening in late October, and created more than 3,000 construction and permanent jobs to the area. At his State of the State address, the governor announced that he supports building "the nation's largest convention center" at the Aqueduct site. Genting's proposed convention center would be a \$4 billion private investment estimated to generate thousands of additional jobs, create new economic activity throughout the city and state, and strengthen New York as an international tourist destination. Says Addabbo, "I'm enthusiastic about this idea for a new convention center at Aqueduct, but we should move in a cautious manner. I am an advocate for community input on the plans or drawings for the proposal and want my people to be heard as they voice their concerns for public safety and traffic patterns. The potential for more jobs on site, which a convention center and hotel would bring to my district, is something I'm eager to realize, given our stagnant economy." Additionally, the senator's Facebook page, "Senator Joe Addabbo," continues to offer local job opportunities with private, public and nonprofit sector employers. In May, in conjunction with the Vietnam Veterans of America-Chapter 32, Senator Addabbo plans to hold a Veterans' Job Fair at a time when thousands of brave servicemen and women will have returned from deployments in the Middle East. He also intends to work toward creating jobs through his annual Job Fair this coming fall, working with the new owners of The Shops at Atlas Park, and legislative tax credits for businesses who hire seniors, veterans and individuals with disabilities.

Addabbo also contends that the governor should move with caution and not act too hastily in issuing permits to energy companies that would allow natural gas drilling in the upstate watershed. Recent polls have shown most New Yorkers, especially downstate, are against the process of hydrofracking that endangers the drinking water of over nine million people. New York has proposed a ban on hydrofracking in watersheds and aquifers that supply drinking water to New York City and to Syracuse and in other sensitive areas, but would allow hydrofracking in a dozen other counties along the rich natural gas field known as the Marcellus Shale.

Notes Addabbo, "The upstate area has been more hard-hit economically than downstate, so fracking is seen by many upstaters, and the governor, as a boost to that region. In 2010, I supported a drilling moratorium until the EPA study was completed and I still say we need complete assurance that the process of hydrofracking will keep our water safe and protected from contamination and other environmental hazards." Addabbo feels there is no need to rush into drilling, or permit energy companies to drill inside the watershed boundaries. The senator was pleased the subject of hydrofracking was not mentioned in the governor's speech, in spite of Cuomo's emphasis on "jobs, jobs, jobs" for New York State.

On the topic of redistricting, Addabbo, who previously signed a pledge to reform the redistricting process, believes that the practice of politicians choosing their voters and district lines must come to an end. “The process of drawing new district lines should put people before politics,” he said. And, the governor has been in talks with both the Senate and Assembly about complying with the two-year-old federal law that would result in moving party primaries to as early as June. Addabbo contends that while redistricting is the state’s top immediate 2012 issue, it should have been dealt with by the end of 2011. Redistricting involves the drawing of election district lines based on new U.S. Census data for both the state legislature and New York’s congressional delegation. The task must be completed in time for the 2012 elections, which means finishing the lines this spring so that the ballot process can get underway. According to the senator, the importance of a fair and transparent redistricting process cannot be underestimated. The voice of the voters, fair and equal representation, and governmental negotiation of this year’s legislative session are all affected by the process. Governor Cuomo introduced a bill to give the task to an independent commission, which won the applause of good-government groups and some state legislators. This independent commission has yet to be created.

Since the end of the legislative session last June, state lawmakers launched a series of statewide hearings on redistricting to develop their own plan in Albany and in New York City. Governor Cuomo vowed to veto any plan that looks like traditional gerrymandering. Currently, districts can vary in population by thousands of people. Critics say the leeway allows lawmakers to protect incumbents during election years. “Independent redistricting is necessary for the process to become more transparent and equitable and for our government to become more representative and responsive to our people. We must deal with this important issue as soon as possible now that the new legislative session has begun,” Addabbo urged.

Governor Cuomo’s State of the State speech also called for comprehensive campaign finance reform in the state to ensure that all New Yorkers have an equal voice in the political process. New York ranks 48<sup>th</sup> in the nation in voter turnout and a smaller percentage of New York residents contribute to candidates to state office than anywhere else in the nation. The Governor called for a better campaign finance system that includes matched contributions and lower contribution limits, and increase enforcement at the Board of Elections. While in the City Council and member of its Governmental Operations Committee, Addabbo worked on improving the city’s campaign finance laws. He noted, “I look forward to changing the way we conduct our state elections, so that a candidate spends less time fund raising for big corporate donations and more time talking to the people about the issues that concern them.” Addabbo wants to get campaign finance and ethics legislation passed to end the practice of “pay to play” and to include current elected officials who would be prohibited from collecting their state pensions if they’re convicted of crimes related to their government role. He added, “We must do more toward restoring faith and public trust in our government. The Public Integrity Reform Act of 2011 was a step in the right direction, and I will promote the need for additional reform to create a more transparent and equitable government for the people of this state.”

The senator has other priorities to take care of during the 2012 session. He welcomes the governor’s initiative on foreclosure relief, such as forming a Foreclosure Relief Unit under the Department of Financial Services, to provide counseling and mediation services. Homeowners in Addabbo’s district want to do all they can to stay in their homes. In addition, the senator looks forward to working with the governor’s new Tenant Protection Unit under the NYS Homes and Community Renewal program, to investigate fraud and prosecute landlords who fail to maintain essential services.

For months, seniors in Ozone Park and Howard Beach have been asking Addabbo when the former Bernard Fineson Developmental Disabilities Senior Office site on Crossbay Boulevard in Howard Beach will be re-opened by Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens (CCBQ) as a senior housing complex renamed the Howard Beach Senior Apartments. These communities have a more sizable population of older adults, and according to CCBQ, a portion of the units on the site, will be allotted for current residents of Community Board 10. Construction will begin this month, with expected completion by the end of 2014. The new building will offer 96 units of housing to seniors. Addabbo, whose office has been instrumental in the land transfer from the state to CCBQ and the early clean up work already done at the site, intends to continue his working relationship CCBQ and state agencies to expedite the opening of the housing. "People are anxiously awaiting the time when applications will become available," noted Addabbo.

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