



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

## From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

JACK M. MARTINS June 26, 2012

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### **Another Step Forward**

After the final 24 hours of our legislative session, I felt like I had been shot out of a cannon. On Thursday, June 21, my colleagues and I in the State Senate had a jam-packed day that officially finished up our work for the 2012 session. We adjourned just after 10 p.m., at which time I picked up my bags at the hotel to start home, making the nearly three hour drive from Albany to Mineola. It's great to be home.

As I reflect on the tone and tenor of the past two years in the state legislature, I am pleased with the progress we've made and with having had a hand in it. Last year's session was a comprehensive adjustment in the way business was conducted in Albany. We truly accomplished a lot, not just legislatively but also in process. Both are important.

As we have seen, working together does not mean agreeing on everything, nor should it. There are issues where we should properly disagree, but in contrast to past sessions, there has been a willingness to compromise in reaching consensus. Most telling, however, is that when compromise is not possible, the process no longer devolves into partisan attacks.

This year, we took a further step forward. This was once again a year of progress on many fronts with an overall impact that can't be missed: state government in New York is finally working again. Here's just a few ways how:

- Our second, genuinely balanced budget with no new taxes or fees. There's no sleight-of-hand. Even in the midst of an ongoing recession, we kept spending under control and taxes down, building on the success of our 2% tax cap.
- After more than 50 years, we've finally reformed the state's income-tax code, lowering taxes for 4 million middle-class New Yorkers to the lowest point since 1953.
- Repealed the MTA payroll tax for hundreds of thousands of small businesses - the tax that hampered our recovery by forcing our businesses to subsidize the MTA.
- We tackled public employee pension reform with the new Tier 6, which includes new employee contribution rates, an increase in retirement age and other cost-saving measures. It will save taxpayers more than \$80 billion over the next 30 years.
- Creation of the first all-crimes DNA databank in the nation. Not only will it help solve crimes and take criminals off the street, but it will help prevent crime as well.
- We passed I-STOP, a real time database to track drug prescriptions, giving doctors and pharmacists the tools necessary to curb our prescription drug abuse epidemic.
- We have plenty to fix here in New York and plenty of New Yorkers who can do the fixing, so we started "NY Works," which will employ thousands to rebuild our roads, highways, bridges and infrastructure.
- We increased state aid for Education by 4% for a total of \$805 million and we provided \$7 million for the unfunded mandates at nonpublic schools that had previously gone

unreimbursed.

- Seniors were a priority as well and we made their EPIC prescription program whole again with an additional \$30 million.

The list could go on and on with a myriad of other smaller items that were passed as well and we didn't accomplish everything we had hoped for. Restoring your STAR rebates for homeowners was a priority in the Senate and we fought for it right up to last minute but hit a brick wall with the Assembly. We'll try again.

All these achievements make one thing abundantly clear: Albany is working again. The Senate is working hand-in-hand with Governor Cuomo to get things done and a spirit of bipartisan cooperation is being nurtured – finally. But let's not kid ourselves. We're not out of the woods yet and we could all too easily return to the chaos of the past if we're not vigilant. We have to keep the fires burning – with accountability and reform being priorities as much as they were two years ago. Then, we can keep building on the success of these last two years.

We have all heard how the longest of journeys starts with the first step. In our long journey to accountability in state government, we have now taken a second step. I look forward to working on the progress of these past two years, building consensus and compromise when we can, and holding firm when we can't, but, most importantly, bringing the good sense of our suburban communities to the halls of our state's Capitol.