



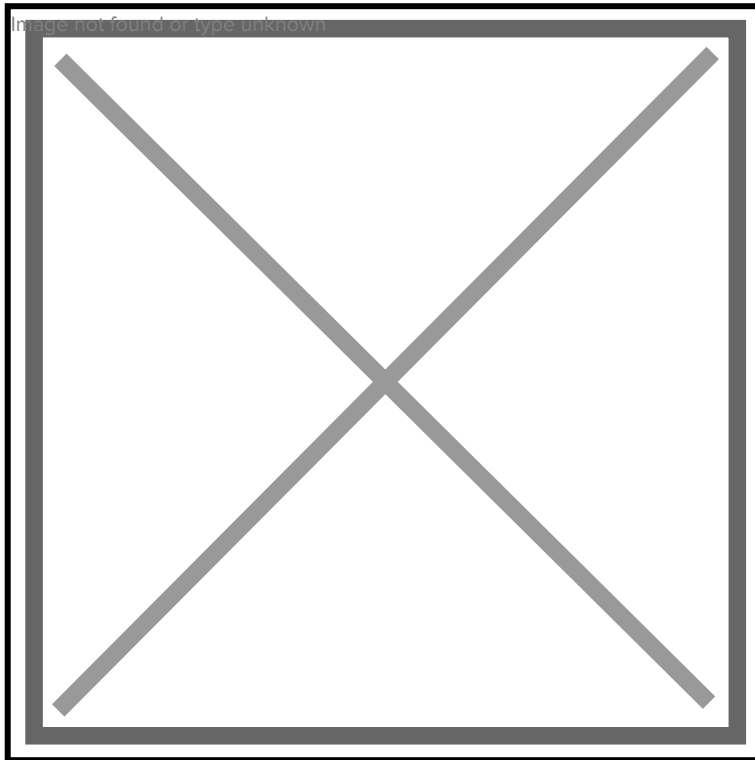
NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John J. Flanagan

Newsday: Senate passes state budget, increasing aid for LI schools

JOHN J. FLANAGAN March 27, 2013

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March 27, 2013 by Yancey Roy

ALBANY - New York's senate approved an approximately \$136 billion budget that raises the minimum wage to \$9 over three years and offers a \$350 rebate to families with children, completing the votes a little over two hours before dawn on Wednesday.

The Assembly plans to take a pass at the budget on Thursday. This will be the

third time in a row the state will have met its April 1 deadline.

The new accord will increase school aid by about \$1 billion, crack down on abuse of a property tax program, and ensure that downstate gas stations have back-up generators if there are power outages.

Sen. co-leader Dean Skelos (R-Rockville Centre) called the new budget "pro-jobs and pro-family." He added: "I think we have achieved a budget that is fiscally responsible."

There were complaints, however.

Sen. Kevin S. Parker (D-Brooklyn) said: "The governor bullies us," faulting many aspects of the budget, from the failure to decriminalize the possession of small amounts of marijuana to a so-called pension smoothing plan to help localities afford contributions.

Parker is no stranger to confrontations. In 2010, for example, he was found guilty of misdemeanor charges that resulted from a scuffle with a photographer.

Sen. Jose Peralta (D-Queens) bashed a provision that gives employers a tax credit for hiring minimum wage workers who are students, aged 16 to 19 years old, saying this created an incentive to discharge them once they turn 20. "We're paying Walmart to fire people," he said.

Approximately ten senators criticized this and other aspects of the new budget as "kumquats," picking up on one senator's reference to the budget as a fruit basket that contained this unlikeable component as well as likeable items, such as peanut brittle.

Long Island school districts will receive a collective \$121 million increase in school aid -- more than 5 percent on average -- under the new budget, Senate co-leader Dean Skelos (R-Rockville Centre) said Tuesday.

Skelos, the legislature's top Republican, said lawmakers added \$58 million in operating aid for Long Island schools above what Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo proposed in January. They also blocked a Cuomo proposal to reduce a category of school funding called "high tax aid." Island schools could have lost more than \$40 million, more than any other region in the state.

Together, the additions brought the Island's "share" of school aid to 12.96 percent, Skelos said, matching what it traditionally receives.

The Island will also receive hikes in state aid for bus service and highway aid.

"So it's a win for Long Island," Skelos declared.

Late Tuesday night, the Senate approved the first budget bill.

The Senate began passing parts of the budget this week, aiming to finish sometime in the wee hours of Wednesday morning.

The Assembly planned to vote on budget bills beginning Thursday, after returning from the Passover holiday.

Overall, the 2013-14 spending plan would increase by less than 2 percent, to about \$136 billion. The total increases to \$142.6 billion when federal aid for superstorm Sandy is included.

Budget documents published Tuesday show the state will spend an estimated \$28 million to develop a new statewide gun-permit database as part of a new gun-control law.

The state will create a central database to hold records currently maintained at the county level.

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver (D-Manhattan) called it a "powerful tool that will aid in enforcement" of the gun law, passed following the Newtown, Conn., school massacre. The law tightened the state's ban on military-style weapons.

The budget also includes a minimum-wage hike and a generous tax credit to businesses that pay the new minimum wage. The wage is set to go from its current \$7.25 per hour to \$9 by

the end of 2015. Tax credits could cover \$1.35 of the \$1.75 hike that employers would pay.

Republicans fought for the tax credit, saying without it businesses might lay off low-wage workers rather than face higher payroll. But the Fiscal Policy Institute, a labor-backed think tank, called the credit "ill-conceived and poorly drafted" and said taxpayers will end up subsidizing much of the minimum-wage hike.

Blocking the cut to "high tax aid" was a top priority for the Island delegation, said Sen. John Flanagan (R-East Northport).

"All the schools I talked to, their main concern was restoring high tax aid," said Flanagan, chairman of the Senate Education Committee.

To read more about the state budget, please [click here](#).