



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ted O'Brien

## Senator O'Brien highlights state's increased focus on tourism

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**ROCHESTER, N.Y.** – Today, Senator Ted O'Brien stood alongside representatives of several tourism-related organizations and businesses, along with local elected officials, to tout the 55th Senate District's growth as a tourism destination. He also highlighted state programs, newly introduced in this year's budget, that seek to specifically promote, market and develop upstate tourism.

“As vibrant and exciting as the tourism industry is in Rochester and the Finger Lakes Region, we have only begun to unlock our full potential,” Senator O’Brien said. “These new initiatives, which will work in concert with our existing tourism groups and businesses, will be tremendous catalysts for growing our region’s tourism economy.”

Monroe and Ontario counties rank first and third, respectively, in the Finger Lakes Region in terms of generating tourism revenue. Monroe County alone is the recipient of more than a third of tourists’ spending in the region.

The new initiatives that Senator O’Brien helped pass in this year’s state budget include an expanded "I LOVE NY" program, which includes a competitively-awarded \$5 million advertising fund, "TASTE NY," which will market New York State food and beverage products at select Thruway rest stops and at major events, including the PGA championship in Rochester, and increased efforts to encourage tourists to visit upstate destinations during their vacations, including \$2 million in advertising space on buses and subway cars. In total, state tourism spending has increased to \$60 million this year – triple what was allocated in last year’s budget.

**Local tourism officials and industry leaders spoke out on various aspects of the importance of developing tourism to job creation and economic revitalization:**

*Don Jeffries, President of VisitRochester:*

“The state recognizes that 50 million people visit New York City every year compared to 20 million for all of upstate, and the state is putting programs together to get some of those 50 million people to enjoy upstate New York. We have the perfect region for tourism. We have the cultural attractions of an urban center along with our great neighborhoods like Corn Hill and the East End and fabulous restaurants, and in a 30 minute drive you can be in the heart of the Finger Lakes enjoying the many lakes and wineries. Our region has it all.”

*Cindy Kimble, President of the Finger Lakes Tourism Alliance:*

“Tourism is an economic super engine sustaining over 59,000 jobs in the Finger Lakes tourism region. The Finger Lakes tourism region saw visitors spend \$2.7 billion dollars in 2011. This spending resulted in every household within the region saving \$375.00 in taxes.”

*K. William Gunther, New York representative for the American Hotel and Lodging Association:*

“Tourism should be a key component of any economic strategy, aimed at job growth and local revenues. The recent investment of \$60 million to grow tourism puts New York State third in the country in tourism campaign funding. In 2012, tourism, the fifth largest employment sector in New York State, sustained more than 714,000 jobs. In fact, 1 in 12 jobs in New York State is sustained by tourism. It is clear that Governor Cuomo and Senator O'Brien understand the positive economic impact tourism has on our state.”

*Mike Roeder, chair of the Finger Lakes Visitors Connection, Ontario County's tourism office, and general manager of Ravenwood Golf Club in Victor:*

“Every New Yorker benefits from tourism's positive economic impact within our communities, and the importance of our industry cannot be overstated. We are an industry that generates millions in local taxes and more than 4,000 jobs in Ontario County. We thank the senator and our other elected officials for their interest and support of our industry – and we look forward to future partnerships to maximize our economic benefits to the state and the residents.”

*Benjamin Woelk, Vice President, Western Erie Canal Alliance*

“We recognize that the natural assets that Western New York and the Finger Lakes region possess are worthy of promotion and we stand in support of Senator O'Brien's efforts to increase tourism awareness within the Finger Lakes region and the Western Erie Canal Historic Corridor.

The Finger Lakes and Western New York are rich in local water assets, agriculture, heritage and recreation. Increased and sustained tourism and marketing of our region will create a recognizable brand, rekindle community pride, and lead to new businesses development and job creation.”

*Michael Marsch, President, Rochester Hotels Association & Radisson Hotel*

“Our industry generates new money for the locality as well as the State, by driving dollars from customers who travel from outside of the Rochester area or outside of New York State or even outside of the country. Many other industries just recycle dollars within a community. Our customers come, spend their money, pay taxes on the goods and services that they purchase and then leave without utilization of our schools, highways, sewers, government services, etc.

As you might or might not know, the bed taxes generated in 2012 was the highest ever at almost \$7.2 million dollars. That being said, we have much opportunity as we are only running 56.6 percent occupancy at an average rate of \$93.74. With just over 7,200 hotel rooms in the market, just increasing our occupancy to 60 percent at the same average rate will result in another \$931,000 in bed taxes.”

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*Sen. O'Brien represents the 55th district in the Senate, which is made up of the eastern half of Monroe County and the western half of Ontario County, including much of the city of Rochester.*

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