



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Terry Gipson

Op-Ed: Sen. Gipson & Asm. Lalor Join to End Unfunded Mandates

TERRY GIPSON August 13, 2013

It's no secret that we don't see eye to eye on every issue.

However, we were both elected last year as outsiders committed to reforming our state government and reducing the cost of living in our community. We both understand the burden unfunded mandates place on local governments, school districts and, ultimately, taxpayers.

As we have done with our legislation to establish term limits in Albany, we are working together and proposing a bipartisan constitutional amendment to end the decades-long practice of passing down unfunded mandates from the state to local governments.

Unfunded mandates are legal requirements imposed by the New York state Legislature on counties, school districts, towns, cities and villages. The cost of implementing and complying with these unfunded mandates inflates our local budgets.

The Senate and Assembly have voted on mandates hundreds of times, to the tune of billions of dollars, over the past 10 years alone.

For example, counties in New York are required to pay for more than 40 state mandates, including \$8 billion for Medicaid.

Many mandates are great programs with a noble purpose, but we cannot continue to place the entire cost on the backs of local governments and school districts. These costs are escalating at out-of-control rates, causing skyrocketing property taxes that are driving businesses and families out of our state.

The Albany establishment of both parties has shifted the burden onto local governments while ignoring the impact unfunded mandates have on inflating local taxes. In short, unfunded mandates obscure accountability for spending and taxes and lead to more money out of your pocket.

For years, Albany has ignored requests for mandate relief, so our bipartisan constitutional amendment is desperately needed.

In order to spur our local economy while preventing tax increases, New York needs to be creative and fiscally responsible in finding ways to fund these programs. Our bipartisan bill is one key innovation toward that end.

Our legislation would let local governments choose whether an unfunded mandate will be implemented in their area, and require the state to fund mandates that are unreasonably costly.

This will protect our municipalities from financially burdensome requirements while allowing local governments to continue to serve their constituents in the most cost-effective and efficient manner possible.

Many local municipalities are faced with unsustainable budget deficits and the potential for insolvency. This hurts our schools, municipalities and the local economy.

Now is not the time for party politics, making excuses or allowing special interests to dictate policy. It's time to reform New York and get to work for those who elected us.

We are committed to working with municipalities in our districts and across New York to achieve greater fiscal health through smart, fiscally responsible reforms that create jobs and move our economy forward.

Career politicians are one of the big reasons our state has so many problems. The career politicians ignore the big problems. They only nibble at the edges of secondary and tertiary issues for fear that taking on the weighty issues will jeopardize their next re-election.

In contrast, we are committed to term limits and the citizen-legislator model.

This mindset empowers us to tackle the big problems in bold ways.

Undoubtedly, the career politicians and entrenched special interests will fight our constitutional amendment to end unfunded mandates.

We are undeterred by this opposition because the financial health of our communities hangs in the balance.