



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Session priorities: tax relief, economic development and ethics reform must be the Legislature's focus

TED O'BRIEN January 14, 2014

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As a new legislative session in Albany begins, I am preparing to address serious challenges to our region's well-being.

During his State of the State address, the governor made it clear that upstate tax relief is his top priority. Mine, too. Eliminating corporate and energy taxes for upstate manufacturers

and implementing the governor's call for additional property tax relief are on the top of my agenda, as well.

Consistent with the Governor's focus on tax relief, I do believe that one critical element of the conversation surrounding property taxes needs more attention. More must be done to provide school districts and municipalities relief from unfunded state mandates. That is why I will focus on the Unfunded Mandate Reform Act, which I introduced alongside Assembly Majority Leader Joe Morelle. It attacks the problem of mandated expenses by requiring the legislature to vote within 30 days of receiving a relief plan. This is exactly the kind of "mandate" legislators need to break the cycle of inaction on high property taxes.

As we work to revitalize our economy, we have to be sure that opportunity reaches everyone. As a recently-released report from the Community Foundation shows, Rochester has one of the highest poverty rates in the country - and nearly 40 percent of our area poor live in our rural and suburban areas. Priorities for me are expanding training opportunities that match workers with jobs that employers are looking to fill right now and, importantly, providing every student with educational opportunities that lead to student success. And the governor's plans to increase economic opportunity for urban youth and disabled veterans particularly resonated with me because of how great the needs are for those groups in my district.

Smart, targeted state investment can spark private investment as our emerging innovation economy expands. We must grow research, development and commercialization opportunities that leverage the work being done at our top-tier colleges and universities. We must also continue the promotion of tourism (and the blossoming wine and beer-making industries) in the Finger Lakes region.

Finally, I agree we must pass comprehensive ethics reform immediately. As the Moreland Commission highlighted, we desperately need to root out the culture of corruption that has plagued Albany. Common-sense reforms include stripping pensions from corrupt officials, term limits, increased disclosure on campaign funding, and tougher restrictions on how campaign funds can be used – including banning politicians from using them to pay for their own criminal defense.

There are many other issues that confront our state, but these actions lay the groundwork for the renaissance our citizens demand and deserve.