



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James L. Seward

Real People - Real Concerns - Real Results

JAMES L. SEWARD January 17, 2014



ONEONTA, 01/17/14 – In media conferences across his district kicking off the 2014 session of the New York State Senate, State Senator James L. Seward (R/C/I-Oneonta) this week detailed his legislative priorities designed to meet the most pressing needs of his constituents. Among Seward’s priorities – broad based tax cuts for property and business owners, mandate relief to aid local governments, regulatory reform to help ease the cost of doing business, and fair and equitable aid for schools along with fixes to the Common Core Learning Standards.

“Recent achievements have helped rebuild our state’s strong foundation and set the stage for what I believe will be a promising year ahead,” said Senator Seward. “While the work of a state senator is diverse, the most important aspects of the job - connecting with real people, learning their real concerns, and producing real results – are my highest priorities. My legislative agenda for 2014 is based on those priorities.”

Tax Relief

Holding the line on state spending, a middle-class tax cut, and Start-UP New York are among the recent accomplishments that are helping lower taxes and make New York a more affordable place to live and do business.

“Targeted tax relief programs adopted in recent years are translating to new career opportunities throughout the state. However, broad-based tax cuts are needed to truly help our long-standing small businesses and homeowners who continue to struggle under the heavy property tax burden.

“Lowering property taxes, eliminating the corporate income tax rate for upstate manufacturers, increasing the exemption threshold for estate taxes are among the ideas the governor recently proposed. They closely mirror the bills I have long championed. Enacting these measures will mean real savings for homeowners and businesses, especially our upstate manufacturers and farmers.”

Mandate Relief & Regulatory Reform

The property tax cap, pension and Medicaid reform, increased CHIPs funding are examples of recent victories in the area of mandate relief. Additional steps to cut unnecessary government regulations that hamper business growth and heap high costs on local governments and schools are needed.

“Over the past summer, I joined my senate colleagues to host hearings around the state to help determine the most onerous and costly state regulations. A new report on the findings identifies over two-thousand specific rules and regulations that must be revised or eliminated.

“By rebranding our state and reversing the anti-business, high tax climate that has developed, we will be able to make real strides. Businesses will have the ability to expand and hire, and local governments will have the ability to fund local needs.

“My bill to prohibit state mandates unless they are fully funded has passed the senate on multiple occasions; the assembly and governor need to join us in ending costly mandates that leave local governments holding the bag.”

Emergency Response & Relief

With severe weather striking on a much more regular basis, added steps need to be taken to shore up our infrastructure, improve our emergency response, and enhance our ability to rebuild. Targeted grants for homeowners and businesses, appliance replacement rebate programs, and, most importantly, state assistance to cover the local share of public disaster response and recovery costs are examples of assistance Senator Seward has already helped secure. To go further, a legislative package to meet immediate needs while also guiding New York’s long-term recovery and mitigation efforts has been introduced. The goal is to better prepare and avoid major destruction when possible and devise a new playbook to respond when needed.

“In recent years, I have spent a great deal of time touring areas of my district devastated by storms, floods, and other natural disasters. An updated response playbook is needed that will meet the immediate needs of homeowners and municipalities that are left trying to pick up the pieces.

“Additionally, income tax credits for those who suffer damage will help with the cost of recovery. Imagine you lost your home and everything you own, and then to compound matters, you receive a tax bill for that destroyed property. Rebuilding a home is a monumental task and families and individuals need all the help they can get so they can remain here. Allowing municipalities to evaluate badly damaged property and offer a reduced tax assessment is a real difference maker.”

Broadband Funding

Reliable, affordable broadband service is extremely important for economic development, education, and quality of life.

“Connect-NY grants have helped expand broadband reach, infusing \$56 million into our local infrastructure over the last couple of years, but there is still a long way to go before residents and businesses are truly on-line.

“Broadband funding has to be a budget priority. Along with direct funding, incentives for utility companies to expand need to be made available. I have co-sponsored legislation which would provide a tax credit for expenses incurred in expanding broadband services in rural or underserved areas.

Education

School districts, especially those classified as “low-wealth, high need” struggle to maintain education programs that meet the needs of their students. Now a new complication, the Common Core Learning Standards, have made it even more difficult for our schools.

“Many schools in my district are struggling because they do not have the tax base to draw from; the wealth level is much lower than some downstate, suburban districts. I have successfully brought that fight to Albany and in recent years, results are evident. In 2013, the

vast majority of new education aid, almost \$1 billion, went to low and average wealth schools that need help the most.

“Next up, we must do away with the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) which has put upstate schools in a deep budgetary hole. Eliminate the GEA is the mantra I hear from virtually every school superintendent in my senate district.

“A new obstacle, the Common Core Learning Standards and related testing, is also plaguing our schools. I have taken part in a number of forums at schools throughout my district as well as formal senate education committee hearings that have clearly illustrated the need for immediate changes as well as long-term fixes to the poorly conceived curriculum.

“We need to hit the pause button and get it right. Greater professional involvement through staff development and community participation - keeping parents up to speed, are steps that must be taken if we are to make certain students are receiving the education they need and deserve.”

Summary

“We start 2014 from a better financial position than in the recent past. We have a budget surplus not a deficit. We also have a positive track record of working cooperatively, producing three straight on-time budgets, a streak I expect to continue.

“Our priorities are starting to become Albany’s priorities – cutting taxes, offering new career opportunities, and providing our young people with the tools they need to thrive. I look forward to building on our momentum, answering to real people, meeting real needs, and producing real results.”