



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## Statement From Senator Patty Ritchie on the End of the 2014 Legislative Session

PATTY RITCHIE June 20, 2014

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Since the 2014 Legislative Session began in January, my colleagues and I have been focused on achieving results that make for a better New York for all who call our state home.

Today, I'm pleased to say that by working together, across the political aisle, we have made great strides towards several of my top priorities, including creating jobs, cutting red tape, lowering taxes, improving our schools and fostering new opportunities for people across our state.

Agriculture is the cornerstone of our state's economy, and this year, I was pleased to see approval of my "Young Farmers NY" program; an initiative designed to address the issue of our state's aging farmer population. As Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I firmly believe this new program will encourage more young people to join the ranks of our hardworking farmers and position New York's biggest industry for significant future growth.

I'm also pleased to report that 2014 brought new investments in the futures of our region's young people. This year, schools in the 48<sup>th</sup> Senate District saw the biggest education aid increase in five years. The hike—which was nearly three times the amount originally proposed by the Governor in January—means better schools for our students and more relief for our hardworking taxpayers.

We also took steps throughout the 2014 Legislative Session to boost our economy. This included cutting red tape to allow businesses to grow, enacting major tax cuts to help stimulate the economy and creating jobs. One of the biggest wins for the North Country was receiving approval of my plan to transfer dozens of acres of vacant land at the St. Lawrence Psych Center to the City of Ogdensburg in an effort to redevelop the site and create jobs, while at the same time strengthening and protecting the Psych Center's mission.

Dominating the headlines this year were stories of heartbreak, loss and senseless crime; all related to heroin use. I'm proud to say that working together, the Legislature came to an agreement on a package of legislation aimed at addressing our state's heroin epidemic, including my bill to expand insurance coverage for treating heroin addiction, which was one of the top suggestions identified at the Heroin and Opioid Abuse Forum I sponsored in Watertown last month.

During the 2014 Legislative Session we also ramped up efforts in our fight against the deadly, mosquito-borne EEE virus. Over three years, I've worked to secure a total of \$700,000 in additional state budget funds for EEE prevention; including support this year for programs to educate children and families about the dangers of EEE, free tire recycling events and additional mosquito control efforts. Recently, the Legislature also approved my bill to create the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workgroup for Disease Elimination and Reduction; a group tasked with developing effective vaccines against diseases, including EEE.

In the past several months, much has been achieved. However, it wasn't done alone. I'd like to thank the many constituents who contacted me to weigh in with their thoughts on issues that affect them and ways our region can be improved. With your help, and by working together with my colleagues in a bipartisan way, we have made great strides—and I'm looking forward to doing even more to better both our state and our region.

### **Highlights of the 2014 Legislative Session**

#### ***Creating jobs:***

- \$150 million in new job-creating Regional Economic Development Council awards for Central and Northern New York; bringing the three-year total to \$542.7 million in funding for the two regions—more than any other part of the state.
- Major new tax cuts for manufacturers throughout the state as well as reduced energy taxes to help businesses grow.
- Creation of a “St. Lawrence County Wine Trail,” helping to put North Country wineries on the map and highlighting businesses in an effort to draw in tourists to fuel local economies and create jobs.

#### ***Cutting property taxes:***

- A record amount of funding for the STAR program—\$3.4 billion that includes \$905 million in relief through the Enhanced STAR program for senior citizen homeowners and \$1.5 billion in relief over the next three years from a new property tax freeze program.
- As many as 2.8 million property taxpayers outside New York City will receive direct property tax rebate checks in October as a result of the new property tax rebate program.

***Help for hardworking farmers:***

- Final passage of legislation (S. 5482) to provide low-interest loans to farmers for the installation of drainage systems to increase the availability of tillable farmland or areas for grazing, which will be especially helpful to “muckland” farmers in Oswego County and Central New York.
- “Young Farmers NY,” a plan to address the issue of New York’s aging farmer population that includes farmer innovation grants, student loan forgiveness for college graduates who commit to farming careers, increased funding for the in-school FFA program and also reforms to the Estate Tax to make it easier for families to pass on their farm business to the next generation.
- Final passage of a bipartisan bill (S.7433) that directs the state Agriculture Commissioner to find ways to support aging farmers who want to stay in business.

***A boost for outdoor recreation:***

- Final approval of Senator Ritchie’s bill directing the state to create “gift cards” that can be used for hunting and fishing licenses and other fees; legislation which would promote enjoyment of the outdoors and stimulate the economies of small towns and communities that rely on seasonal hunting and fishing—and the tourism dollars they generate.

***Support for our schools:***

- This year, schools in the 48<sup>th</sup> Senate District received the largest aid hike in five years and nearly three times the increase proposed in January by the Governor.
- In June, Senator Ritchie recognized 65 local educators with her “Golden Apple Award for Teaching Excellence.” In addition, each honoree received \$500 in special funding for classroom enrichment, representing a \$30,000 increase in state education funding for local schools.

***Keeping New York healthy:***

- \$275,000 in State Budget funding to help Oswego County and Central New York prevent the spread of Eastern equine encephalitis, commonly known as EEE. Over three years, Senator Ritchie has secured a total of \$700,000 in additional state budget funds for EEE prevention.
- Final passage of bipartisan legislation (S.2115) to create the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workgroup for Disease Elimination and Reduction within the State Department of Health. The group, comprised of experts in diseases, infection and public health, will be tasked with pushing for the development of effective vaccines against diseases, including EEE, West Nile Virus and Lyme. Included in the new State Budget is \$100,000, secured by Senator Ritchie to fund the new workgroup.

***Fighting back against heroin:***

- As part of the New York State Senate Joint Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction, Senator Ritchie worked alongside her colleagues to examine the issues surrounding the increase in drug abuse in New York State.
- Final passage of Senator Ritchie's bill (S.7912) to expand insurance coverage for treating heroin addiction. The fight to access insurance coverage for treating heroin addiction was one of the top issues identified at the Heroin and Opioid Abuse Forum she hosted in Watertown last month.