



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

## From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

JACK M. MARTINS August 20, 2014

| ISSUE: **BUDGET**

### Planting Trees

Every once in a while some really bad ideas rear their ugly little heads and there are indeed some hideous ones skulking about Albany right about now.

By now you may have heard that BNP Paribas bank has agreed to pay New York State a little over \$3.6 billion dollars in penalties for engaging in illegal transactions with countries under U.S. sanctions. While that certainly was a dumb move on the part of BNP, the suggestions on how to spend that windfall are even more foolish. Naturally, the special interest groups that circle our state capitol like so many piranha are responsible for most of these. While I could go into great and tedious detail, suffice to say they would actually dump this “one shot” money into ongoing programs that would then require more taxpayer funds to sustain them. Hence we would essentially use the money to dig us deeper into a hole but, hey – the ideas sound really great from a podium.

Instead, these should be invested in a more sober, forward looking fashion albeit not nearly as seductive. I strongly believe that a good portion of that money must be reinvested in New York’s crumbling infrastructure. This plan will create thousands of new jobs by committing to major new projects. From rebuilding local roads and bridges, to enhancing local college campuses, to key environmental initiatives, such as clean water projects and

sewer upgrades in communities right here on Long Island, our goal is to provide both short and long-term economic benefits throughout the state.

So what's the shared common theme? The \$3.6 billion should benefit not only us but future generations for years to come. I know I've already written it in this column many times, but it's a proverb worth repeating: A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in.

Today we live beneath the shade of trees planted by our forefathers. Many of the amenities that have served for generations as economic engines for our region are showing the wear and tear and obsolescence of their age and it is up to us to maintain and rebuild them not just for the jobs and opportunities they'll create now, but for the continued prosperity they'll ensure for our children and future generations.

Can anyone doubt the incalculable benefit we have derived as a region from construction of the Long Island Railroad, the Long Island Expressway, or the New York City subway system? Each of these, and so many more projects, have directly contributed to the success and opportunities we have in the metropolitan area. For so many of us, they have always just been there almost as an afterthought, but the investment in their construction was not easy and required great forethought. We must show that same forethought now.

Indeed, a responsible government is one that looks to the well-being of future generations by alleviating problems wherever and whenever possible. It simply cannot stick its legislative head in the sand and wait for those problems to go away, because in reality, they never do. The same is true in our personal lives. One of the surest signs of maturity is recognizing that problems don't just disappear. You (emphasis on you) have to go about the tedious business of solving them yourself because if left alone they tend to worsen exponentially, compounded by the passing of the years. Isn't it time government showed

that same kind of maturity? I think so.

You already well know that the Senate has worked with Governor Cuomo these last four years to finally get our state finances back in shape and maybe this windfall settlement is some sort of cosmic payoff for our good work. I don't know. I do know that many would have us squander it and we can't afford to. These opportunities are few and far between and government has to be "grown up" even if some of her more infantile members don't want to be. Like I said earlier, my proposals may not sound as seductive as those who would go to town with the money, but then again, you elected me to be sensible.

Hopefully, my colleagues in Albany will agree to plant some trees.