



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James L. Seward

2015 Priorities - Turning NY Into A True Masterpiece

JAMES L. SEWARD January 16, 2015



ONEONTA, 01/15/15 – In media conferences across his district kicking off the 2015 session of the New York State Senate, State Senator James L. Seward (R/C/I-Oneonta) today detailed his legislative priorities designed to meet the most pressing needs of his constituents.

Among Seward's priorities – tax cuts, economic development and job creation initiatives, infrastructure improvements, education aid, safeguards for police, and repealing the NY-SAFE Act.

“A great many strides have been made in New York in recent years but true challenges lie ahead,” said Senator Seward. **“Like an artist, we start with the outline, which we have sketched out over the**

last few years. While the outline is pretty good – four consecutive on-time state budgets, an end to runaway state spending, the lowest middle class taxes in sixty years, and a concentration on economic development – these are just the broad brushstrokes. Now is the time to add some details, and turn New York into a true masterpiece.”

Tax Relief

Holding the line on state spending, providing new property tax rebates and boosting STAR funding to a record level to aid homeowners are among recent accomplishments. Even with these wins, tax relief remains the leading issue for 2015.

“New York is now fourth in population falling behind Florida, Texas and California. People are fleeing our state because they simply cannot afford to stay. We need to cut taxes. While we have reduced property taxes and also approved several new business tax cuts, we need to do more to help every taxpayer.

“One item I will be targeting is the high price we pay at the gas pump which is inflated further by state taxes. New York is tops in the lower forty-eight states when it comes to gasoline costs, thanks in a large part to the 45 cents per gallon we pay in various gas taxes.

“Adding insult to injury, according to a recent state comptroller’s report, only 22-percent of the tax revenue is used to help improve roads and bridges. The rest is siphoned off to fill other state budget holes.

“I will be announcing a special ‘Cut the Gas Tax’ petition drive on my website and will use the support to help spearhead a push to reduce our state’s gasoline tax.”

“This year is also a defining moment for the property tax cap. I helped pass the cap several years ago and this year I will be working to ensure the tax saving measure becomes a permanent fixture. I will also be working to adopt true mandate relief measures. When the tax cap was first approved I called for help for local governments and schools so they could reduce mandated costs and stay under the cap. The governor promised mandate relief but has rejected every proposal that my colleagues and I have put forth.”

Economic Development & Job Creation

In 2014 alone, new proposals were adopted to eliminate the corporate tax on manufacturers, provide a new tax credit for manufacturers, reduce energy taxes, and expand job training programs.

“Along with cutting taxes, we need to ensure that there are true career opportunities here in New York. While several specific taxes were cut last year, that will reduce the cost of doing business and allow many employers to expand, additional steps must be implemented to foster job creation.

“Several measures approved by the senate last year will once again be priorities in 2015. Directing more state economic development funding to small businesses, eliminating unnecessary and costly government regulations, and helping revitalize our downtown ‘Main Street’ areas through improved housing and shopping opportunities are just a few examples.”

Infrastructure Improvements

One of the keys to attracting new employers to New York state is to make sure our infrastructure is ready to accommodate growth.

“Roads, bridges, sewer, and water are the traditional items that come to mind when infrastructure improvements are discussed. Along with these necessary components, we also need to improve broadband access in our rural areas. By making improvements in these areas we will be able to grow jobs and enhance the everyday quality of life of residents.

“For several years, upstate roads were neglected but in the last two state budgets I was able to fight for added CHIPs (Consolidated Highway Improvement Program) funding to help maintain and improve local highways without negatively impacting county budgets. The CHIPs funding and new broadband grants have greatly improved our local infrastructure.

“Now, with recent bank settlements, New York has a little more than \$5 billion in revenue to work with. This is not recurring revenue and should not be dedicated to recurring expenses. However, upgrading our infrastructure would be an ideal way to use this funding to help meet current needs and spark future growth.”

Education

In 2014, I continued to work on behalf of our local schools to ensure they received their fair and equitable share of state aid. Schools classified as “low-wealth, high-need” were of particular concern. I also helped advance important changes to address serious concerns raised about the Common Core program.

“Despite victories on the education front last year, the Gap Elimination Adjustment, also known as the GEA, is still a major obstacle for many schools in my district. Those three letters keep school administrators up at night, and must be dealt with this year.

“I voted against the GEA when it was first instituted and, as a member of the senate Education Committee, have been working to erase this curse on school budgets ever since. The state is reducing the GEA by \$602 million in this year’s budget - the single largest reduction in the GEA since it was implemented. A portion of the bank settlement revenue can be used this year to fully eliminate the GEA.

“I will also continue to advocate for innovative education programs that help give our students the opportunity to succeed. Linking our schools with employers, using technology to connect our high schools to area colleges, and other non-traditional initiatives are working for many schools in my district and I want to help spread the word to others.”

Safeguarding Our Police

The tragic murders of two New York City Police officers underscores the need to reassess our state’s policies in regard to police safety. The senate will be conducting hearings to examine police safety and public protection to provide thorough and balanced review of our criminal justice system.

“I have proudly worked with law enforcement officers at all levels and have been disheartened by the recent violence against officers who sacrifice so much to protect our well-being. We need to take steps to ensure that police officers, who put their lives on the line day in and day out, return home safely at the end of their shifts.”

Repeal the (UN)SAFE-ACT

Two years has passed since the enactment of the governor's NY-SAFE Act, yet there is no tangible evidence that the law has increased safety.

“I voted against the NY-SAFE Act and repealing this flawed policy remains a priority. While law-abiding gun owners have had to deal with new restrictions and costly requirements it has done precious little to make us safer from gun violence. I am co-sponsor of legislation which would repeal the law entirely, and will also be introducing my own bills which will chip away at several of the law’s worst provisions.”

Summary

“We start 2015 with a number of positives. The dysfunction that plagued Albany for some time is gone – replaced by a result oriented attitude. The focus is on issues that people discuss at the dinner table night in and night out – taxes, jobs, education. I will continue to concentrate on these issues moving forward as we work to turn New York State into a true masterpiece.”