



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michael H. Ranzenhofer

Invest in Infrastructure Projects with \$5 Billion Windfall

MICHAEL H. RANZENHOFER January 21, 2015

| ISSUE: **EDUCATION, TRANSPORTATION**

Look for...

Senator Mike Ranzenhofer's
Monthly Column

...In your local newspaper
the third week of every month

By: Michael H. Ranzenhofer

Later today, Governor Andrew Cuomo will present his 2015 State of the State Address, along with the release of the 2015-16 Executive Budget. In the coming days and weeks, I will be going over the Executive Budget proposal with a fine-tooth comb. Generally, my priorities are pushing for more broad-based tax relief, spending restraint and initiatives to spur

private-sector job creation.

The budget won't be the only agenda item for this year's Legislative Session. The State Legislature must answer another important question: What should New York do with the over \$5 billion windfall from numerous bank settlements?

These settlement funds present us with an unprecedented opportunity to keep New York State moving forward, and we cannot afford to allow it to be squandered. These funds should be strategically invested to address several major issues.

One major issue is New York's crumbling infrastructure. There are 114,709 miles of roads and 17,442 bridges in our State. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers, 23 percent of those major roads are in poor condition, and about 12 percent of bridges are considered structurally deficient. That is why a significant amount of the \$5 billion windfall should go to repairing our local roads and bridges.

Committing most of the settlement funds for critical infrastructure improvements will help create thousands of jobs, as well as short and long-term economic benefits. Addressing this problem sooner, rather than later, will help to prevent future budget shortfalls due to the expensive nature of these projects. Lastly, these projects will keep motorists and their passengers safe, and save them money on costly vehicle repairs.

The definition of infrastructure should extend beyond roads and bridges. I would support expanding broadband internet access in rural communities. Local college campuses and environmental initiatives, such as clean water projects and sewer upgrades, should be considered too.

Overall, it is important that funds for these types of projects be regionally balanced all across the State. Given the one-time, non-recurring nature of the settlement funds, these proposals avoid wasteful, new and recurring expenditures.

Another major issue which could be addressed with the settlement funds is accelerating the complete abolishment of the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA). The GEA– a multi-year, multi-billion dollar budget-cutting scheme enacted by New York City Democrats– has negatively impacted school districts and property taxpayers.

Last year's final budget included \$602 million to help diminish the GEA's impact. Fulfilling the commitment to eliminate the \$1 billion left of this unfair draconian measure would provide critical resources to school districts, allowing them a possible option to freeze or reduce school taxes for the upcoming year.

Whether making strategic investments in our infrastructure or schools, these settlement funds should be delivered promptly to taxpayers, ensuring a brighter future for all Western New Yorkers!

Senator Ranzenhofer's monthly column appeared in the Amherst and Clarence Bees on January 21st.