



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Working to Build a Better New York

PATTY RITCHIE January 26, 2015

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Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

For the past several weeks, my colleagues and I have been digging in and getting to work at the Capitol; laying the groundwork for what I know will be a productive Legislative Session that builds upon our prior work to create more—and better—opportunities for the people of our state.

Last week, during his State of the State and Executive Budget presentation, I was pleased to hear Governor Cuomo focus on issues that are priorities for me; namely making critical investments in our education system, supporting small business owners, creating jobs and keeping more money in the pockets of hardworking New Yorkers.

There are few things more important to a child's education than having hardworking, passionate teachers in the classroom and here in Central and Northern New York, we're lucky to have to so many dedicated educators. Throughout the past several years, I've worked hard to recognize their efforts as well as to fight for more funding for our schools. In the four previous State Budgets, I've worked to increase funding by \$33 million more than the Executive Budget for the districts I represent. This year, I look forward to once again building upon what the Governor has proposed to ensure our area's schools have the resources they need. In addition, one of my top priorities this year will once again be working to eliminate the GEA—a budget gimmick introduced before I joined the Senate—which has cost school districts across the state upwards of \$8 billion since its introduction in 2010.

When it comes to support for the middle class, my colleagues in the Senate and I have been at the forefront of fighting to provide people with much-needed tax relief; working to pass the state's 2 percent property tax cap, and more recently, securing a record amount of funding for the STAR property tax savings program. I look forward to discussing the specifics of the Governor's proposed property tax credit program proposal, which he discussed during last week's presentation, as it's critically important that any

enacted property tax relief plan ensures all middle-income families in every region of the state receive relief.

During the Governor's presentation, we heard a great deal about boosting the economy by increasing the state's commitment to job creation and working to support small business owners—two things that are critically important to our region. Going hand in hand with these efforts are plans to increase broadband Internet access; a fundamental business tool that many in the rural regions I represent simply do not have access to. In addition, increasing support for our state's agriculture industry will also be a major piece of the puzzle when it comes to continuing to improve our economy. This year, we are on track to reach record levels of funding for our state's hardworking farmers and agribusinesses. I'm looking forward to building upon what the Governor has proposed in his Executive Budget, and also towards increasing support for the innovative Young Farmers NY program, which was launched by the Senate last year and aims to encourage more young adults to pursue careers in agriculture.

Not only vitally important for the role it plays in our nation's defense, but also for its tremendous economic impact, is Fort Drum. I was extremely pleased to hear the Governor reiterate his support for our troops and the post as a whole. This year, as the military weighs potential cuts, it will be more important than ever that we fight to protect Fort Drum by enhancing the post as the Governor suggested and supporting the soldiers and their families who serve.

In the past several years, we've worked hard to end decades of late and unbalanced budgets, reduce taxes, cut red tape so businesses can grow and create jobs and focus on our schools so students are better equipped with the skills they need to succeed. I know that by working together, we can pass a responsible budget that meets the needs of the people of this state. In the weeks to come, I welcome you to weigh in with your thoughts on how we can improve upon the Governor's spending plan by emailing me at ritchie@nysenate.gov or by calling my office at (315) 782-3418.