



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

## Ortt: State Budget Delivers for Western New York

ROBERT G. ORTT April 1, 2015

| ISSUE: **AGRICULTURE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION, SMALL BUSINESS, CONTINUING EDUCATION**



### *Senator Points to Education, Economy and Veterans' Services*

Senator Rob Ortt (R,C,I – North Tonawanda) today announced passage of the 2015-16 New York State Budget, which includes several of Ortt's Western New York priorities. Ortt pointed to key measures to strengthen education, economic development, and veterans' services.

"This budget will help create jobs, fund education, and relieve local taxpayers," said Ortt. "That's what matters most to me – improving our ailing economy, upgrading our infrastructure, increasing aid to local schools that have been constrained by budget cuts, and helping our working class families, farms, and small businesses overburdened with taxes and

regulations.”

## **INVESTING IN EDUCATION**

The budget was on-time, for the fifth consecutive year, which helps maintain the state’s high credit score. It was also held under the spending cap that applies to school districts and local governments. Ortt noted that despite high-profile education negotiations, he was pleased with the finished product.

“This budget increases state education aid by over \$1.4 billion across the state to bring total state education spending in my district to over \$457 million,” Ortt said. “It eliminates most of the disastrous Gap Elimination Adjustment, which will save our local schools nearly \$18 million. We’re helping our students by reducing over-testing and protecting our kids by kicking convicted, violent offenders out of the classroom.”

Ortt also discussed the importance of several education components that did not make it into the final budget.

“I also think it was important to take a stand against some of the Governor’s more extreme proposals base teacher performance evaluations 50 percent on testing or refuse necessary funding increases without dramatic overhauls of the system. It was also critical to fight back against a progressive agenda that wanted to provide tax-payer tuition assistance to illegal immigrants, while so many hard-working New York families struggle to put themselves or their children through college.”

## **IMPROVING OUR ECONOMY**

Ortt prioritized upstate infrastructure needs entering budget negotiations. He was optimistic regarding the budget's investments in Upstate transportation, including \$50 million for CHIPS funding, \$250 million for Department of Transportation needs, and \$25 million for Upstate transit networks such as the NFTA.

He pointed to several additional measures that he believes will strengthen the Western New York economy, including extension of the Brownfield Tax Credit Program, agriculture assistance, infrastructure investments, as well as measures to help small businesses.

"The Western New York economy is unique from other areas of the state, so I fought hard to make sure our concerns were not only heard, but addressed," said Ortt. "I would argue that most recent economic development projects we've seen across our region can be attributed to the brownfield tax credit, which is why its ten year extension is so important. With low property values and high cleanup costs, the tax credit helps revitalize properties that otherwise would generally remain contaminated and abandoned.

"The other key element of local economic development is assisting our small business community," Ortt said. "These businesses operate on the margins and have been struggling to adjust to the state's recent increase in the minimum wage. They simply cannot afford another New York City driven effort to raise the minimum wage without killing Western New York jobs."

As the region's leading industry, Ortt also worked to ensure that Niagara, Orleans, and Monroe County agriculture continues to thrive. The final budget includes millions in additional funding for growing apple, berry, dairy, hops and barley, Christmas tree, wine and grape, and maple producers.

“Key to this year’s budget is record funding and a market-driven approach to not only sustain, but to invigorate agriculture, said Ortt. “We provide key research, cost-cutting, and education programs to increase supply. Additionally, through dedicated advertising and expanding markets, we will also stimulate demand. These measures will help our family farms by helping to ensure that agricultural products are grown locally and demanded globally, for generations to come.”

### **EXPANDING SERVICES FOR VETERANS**

Ortt, a member of the Army National Guard who served in Afghanistan, also laid out veterans’ priorities and millions in additional funding for service members.

“My greatest honor was fighting for my country as a member of the Army National Guard,” said Ortt. “It’s now my honor to fight for our heroic men and women who served our country as a State Senator.”

This year’s budget expands the Joseph P. Dywer program across the state and will provide peer-to-peer counseling services in Niagara County. It also invests significant research and development for post-traumatic stress treatment and support affecting soldiers who have returned from service. Due to the unique challenges many veterans face, the budget also sets aside important services to veterans needing legal support.