



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George Winner

Why No Public Negotiations?

GEORGE WINNER March 16, 2010

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We're beginning to hear the rumblings about a late state budget, which is exactly why many of us, over the past several weeks, have been calling for public negotiations over the final 2010-2011 state budget.

The fact is that legislative leaders are violating key elements of the state's "Budget Reform Act of 2007," which I myself helped develop and co-sponsored.

The 2007 budget reform law established legal guidelines and timetables for the appointment of joint legislative budget conference committees to conduct public budget negotiations – all of which were ignored by legislative leaders last year and are being ignored again.

Joint conference committees, conducted in public, have been used effectively in the past to spark action and settle differences on controversial and challenging issues.

The Legislature is required to hold joint budget conference committees to provide a full public airing of the challenges and choices we're facing, and it should -- maybe this year more than ever before.

The public deserves to hear this year's debates: What about more aggressive Medicaid oversight? Will upstate roads and bridges be addressed fairly and equitably in this year's budget? Will there be a new Jobs Plan? Will school resource officers be eliminated? What's in store for the future of the New York Wine & Grape Foundation? What about the future of New York's system of state parks?

These historic and far-reaching decisions can't be made behind closed doors, with no public hearings or meaningful public discussion over the consequences.