



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James L. Seward

## Budget Fiasco Persists

JAMES L. SEWARD May 13, 2010

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As the calendar pages continue to turn and a state budget remains in limbo, the level of concern continues to rise. Individuals from all walks of life call my office, send letters and e-mails, or simply stop me on the street to ask about the status of the state's fiscal plan. Their concern is warranted. As the budget stalemate extends from days to weeks to months, the negative effects extend to more and more families and business across the state.

As I have already noted, the construction industry was one of the earliest victims. Thousands of hardworking men and women who repair and rebuild our highways, bridges and roads have lost their jobs because funding for already approved projects is being withheld. It is peak construction season, yet companies are being forced to lay off workers, jeopardizing their livelihood and everyone's public safety.

Capital projects at SUNY campuses across our state are also on hold thanks to inaction in Albany. The improvement projects are important to the local economy and also play a vital role in upgrading our public university system. By offering state of the art facilities, the stature of SUNY schools rises, allowing them to attract the academic cream of the crop. Unfortunately, the budget impasse may mean our SUNY schools are unable to live up to their potential, and in turn, our students will lag.

Our local school districts are also facing a major dilemma. Voters are going to the polls this week to decide on school budgets. Unfortunately, because there is no state budget in place, the aid figures school administrators are using to piece together their spending plans are only a guess. In reality, school officials have no idea exactly how much state aid they will receive. It is unfair to both the schools and taxpayers.

While I have tried to limit the finger pointing, in regard to the budget standoff, it is clear where the blame must fall. The governor and legislative leaders are all from the same party and all from the same region of the state – Democrats from New York City.

When the so-called power brokers blew by the April 1st budget deadline, they spouted off about on-going negotiations. But instead of holding any bi-partisan, public meetings, they retreated behind closed doors for secret meetings and inside deal making. Low and behold! There is still no budget, and no evidence to show that any progress is being made. Instead we have been treated to weekly emergency extenders to keep government functioning.

These last several weeks have demonstrated that there are no discussions, there is no budget imminent and the Democratic leadership in the Senate and Assembly is refusing to make the tough spending reductions necessary to balance the budget. All we have are empty promises that budget talks are moving forward.

This just two years after historic reforms were enacted to end this type of surreptitious behavior. The goal of the 2007 budget reform law was to produce an on-time, publicly negotiated budget. The law was ignored last year and the result was a budget that included the largest tax increase on record, took spending to an all time high, eliminated property tax rebate checks, and hiked taxes on utility bills, health care, and just about everything else.

The ink on the plan was barely dry when it was put to a vote, with no input from rank and file lawmakers. That same unjust strategy is being employed again this year, and the final results will be just as damaging. I am working to make Albany more accountable to you, but legislative bosses don't feel they have to play by the rules.

New York needs a balanced budget that cuts state spending, lowers property taxes, and includes business incentives to help grow our economy. By opening up the process and following the law we can produce a plan that achieves these goals.