



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Cut It Out!

JAMES L. SEWARD June 10, 2010

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As Albany leaders continue to hold up the state budget, the frustration level grows daily. Taxpayers from across the state are sick and tired of the ongoing stalemate and the serious consequences the late state budget has created. I too am disturbed by the disregard to obey the law and convene public, bipartisan conference committees that would allow rank and file lawmakers to negotiate the budget in full view of the public.

While the governor, the assembly speaker and senate majority leader (three New York City Democrats) huddle behind closed doors and piece together a budget, I want to know what real New Yorkers think. That's why I have established an on-line poll called "Cut It Out!:

Citizens Cutting Government Waste.” The initiative lets hardworking taxpayers vote on five potential budget cuts and offer their own ideas on how the state can cut out government spending.

The five items eligible to be voted on in the initial round of on-line balloting are:

- **Eliminate funding for purchase of “conjugal visit trailers” at correctional facilities:** In his proposed budget for 2010-2011, Governor Paterson included a budget item to fund the purchase of two, double-wide trailer units for conjugal visits. At a time when funds for schools, hospitals and state parks are being cut, this type of expenditure for the benefit of convicted criminals, should be blocked. Potential savings: \$778,000;
- **Requiring health care co-pays from prison inmates:** As millions of families struggle to balance the family budget while coping with high health care costs, state prison inmates -- even those with financial means -- are not required to pay anything whatsoever for their taxpayer funded health care. Many other states do require a co-pay from inmates, but New York state law currently prohibits them. By changing this law, and charging inmates a modest co-pay, state taxpayers could save \$5 million annually, while still ensuring that inmates receive proper care. Potential savings: \$5 million;
- **Cutting number of “deputy commissioners” by 50 percent:** New York has one of the most expensive state governments in the nation. In fact, it is currently estimated that we now have at least 175 deputy-level commissioners on the payroll at major state agencies. Eliminating half of these “assistant commissioners” would save millions, and help hold state agency commissioners more accountable for the agencies they are supposed to be running. Potential savings: \$11 million;

- **Cut taxpayer funded taxi rides for non-emergency medical visits:** The state comptroller's office recently unveiled an audit which showed that a Medicaid recipient from Poughkeepsie had received \$300 round-trip taxi rides to visit a family member at a long-term care facility in Albany five days a week. By tightening restrictions on such programs, especially in non-emergency cases and cases where public transportation is already available, state and county taxpayers could save substantial sums. Potential savings: \$8.3 million;

- **Cut taxpayer expenditures caused by welfare and Medicaid fraud:** New York has what many regard as the most expensive and generous welfare and Medicaid programs in the nation. Until they were abolished last year in the governor's budget, anti-fraud safeguards helped save taxpayers tens of millions of dollars each year. By re-implementing safeguards designed to crack down on instances of welfare and Medicaid fraud, significant savings could be achieved, and the integrity of the programs could be strengthened. Potential savings: \$34 million annually.

Each of these items has merit. As a matter of fact, many of the poll respondents have said that all five should be cut from the state budget, and I agree.

The poll responses have also included some extremely constructive ideas that I hope to bring forth during budget negotiations. The use of early retirement incentives to reduce payroll expenses, cutting costly mandates on schools and businesses, and state agency consolidations are just a few suggestions which I too wholeheartedly endorse.

To register your vote go to [Cut It Out!](#)