



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## Weekly Column #1: Governor's Budget Proposal Demands Watchful Eye On Spending

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO January 28, 2016

| ISSUE: **STATE BUDGET, STATE SPENDING, SPENDING CAP, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

During Governor Andrew Cuomo's State of the State address this month, he offered a wide variety of far-reaching proposals and initiatives that are certainly worthy of much consideration and debate in the weeks ahead. While the Governor's proposals aim to address many important issues across the state – from poverty and the plight of small businesses, to improving infrastructure and community revitalization – we still must remain mindful of how the state is spending taxpayer money.

Too many of the Governor's latest proposals appear to be created without clearly revealing where all the money will come from to support these initiatives. That's the biggest unanswered question. I believe it is commendable to foster the kind of public-private partnerships that help leverage larger private investments to improve various regions of our state. But, we still have an obligation to ensure that the state can afford to dedicate these funds to the projects the Governor has proposed.

At the start of this year's Legislative session, the Senate passed a permanent spending cap that requires us to watch how we budget the state's money. We have many priorities that deserve our attention, like economic development, fair school funding, repairing our roads

and bridges, and sustainable employment, but these limited funds must be spent and invested in ways that best serve the interests of our state and its citizens.

I am particularly concerned with the pattern of choosing winners and losers by competitively distributing state money for economic development. While I applaud the Governor's concept of encouraging regions and communities to work creatively and collaboratively in designing comprehensive plans for economic development, I still believe there is a better way to fairly ensure that a greater number of small communities benefit from the state's valuable resources.

State money shouldn't be given away indiscriminately just because a community wants and needs it. But it's just as wrong for these funds to be distributed discriminately by some all-or-nothing process through which the Executive plays judge and jury. Too many communities are left with nothing.

A community – or an airport, according to another of the Governor's initiatives – may not have the best or most creative plan for economic development, but that doesn't mean it's lacking some good ideas that can surely benefit from some state investment. That's why I believe a better method should be constructed to evaluate each community based on its needs, its economic circumstances and its proposed solutions, and then award some funding proportionately based on a rating that includes all those factors. That way, there are opportunities for many more communities to improve their prospects for a better future.

I look forward to examining and debating all these proposals with an open mind as we prepare the state's budget in the weeks ahead, and I am hopeful that some common ground can be reached on the initiatives that will keep New York State moving in the right

direction.

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