



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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It seems like everybody loves to beat up on New York. It was no different as presidential candidate Ted Cruz recently took a jab at New Yorkers for having what he referred to as “New York values.” When asked to explain he looked smugly into the camera and said that most people outside of New York knew what he was talking about. Once again, the implication is that we New Yorkers are somehow out of step or morally defective in some way. I guess we should be used to it by now as people from all walks of life pull those kinds of comments out of their hats whenever they want middle-America to reject somebody or something from our neck of the woods. Heck, I’ve gone on vacation and met that attitude among people I didn’t even know. This time was particularly disheartening because it’s just another sign that divisive bitterness may continue to dominate Washington D.C.

You see, blame who you will, President Obama or Congress, but most people agree that Washington’s true legacy the last eight years has been one of division and rancor. I think it’s safe to say that our country’s never been so deeply divided at any time in the last century. Maybe it’s social media and the always hungry 24-hour news cycle of talking heads and cable pundits in search of ratings. They’ve promulgated a brand of relentless left and right extremism that’s placed a figurative stranglehold on our national psyche and prevents any progress. Unfortunately, too many leaders in Washington would rather embrace the “us vs. them” political war that ensures their re-election while they forgo their duties as legislators.

Frankly, we don't have that luxury back home. The business of governing on state and local levels requires action. Don't get me wrong, things get pretty heated here too. But spend all your time thwarting each other and kids don't receive educations, trains don't run, roads don't get paved, and garbage isn't picked up. You do that long enough and eventually voters throw everyone out on their collective ears. While it's true that we spend an awful lot of time meeting, cajoling and even arguing in an effort to win each other over, in the end we have no choice but to move forward on things we can agree on.

In fact, these past five years in Albany have been productive ones. My colleagues and I in a Republican Senate, working with a Democrat Governor and Assembly, have passed five consecutive, on-time budgets which controlled spending and closed billions of dollars in budget gaps without raising a single tax or fee. We passed an historic property tax cap, increased school aid, restored STAR rebates, and reduced state income taxes to the lowest they've been in 60 years. We navigated our state out of an ugly recession, launched major infrastructure projects and put New Yorkers back to work, all while maintaining the values that our respective parties hold dear. We did because of each other, not in spite of each other.

Why it's so difficult to do something similar in our nation's capital, I don't know. But if getting things done is one of those "New York values," then Washington could certainly use some of it. In either event, we can all agree that Ted Cruz certainly can.