



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Chris Jacobs

## Jacobs Calls for Removal of Grand Island Tolls

SENATOR CHRIS JACOBS March 7, 2017

| ISSUE: **LOCAL ROADS BRIDGES TRANSPORTATION, TOURISM, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**



(Buffalo, NY) – New York State Senator Chris Jacobs (60<sup>th</sup> SD) today announced the introduction of legislation (S4834) calling for the removal of the northbound and southbound tolls at the Grand Island Bridges. Citing a long list of reasons justifying the removing of the tolls, Jacobs said the time for action on this issue is now.

“Grand Island residents have lived with the traffic congestion, increased air pollution and safety risks associated with these tolls for far too long now, not to mention the financial inequity of having to pay a toll to get back and forth to and from their homes,” said Jacobs.

“At a time when our State is talking about spending tens of millions of dollars to promote our tourism industry, we can’t ignore the need to also eliminate these tolls which are barriers to enhancing our economy and quality of life,” Jacobs added.

Joining Senator Jacobs was Assemblyman Angelo Morinello (145<sup>th</sup> AD) who has sponsored similar legislation in the State Assembly.

“It’s time that we make a change to the toll situation on Grand Island,” said Assemblyman Morinello. “We must either progress with the technology of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and implement high-speed readers to alleviate the excessive traffic congestion, or eliminate the tolls entirely. Residents of Grand Island often experience excessive wait times at toll booths on their way home from work. This is a major inconvenience that negatively affects their daily lives. We must put an end to this unfair and unnecessary impracticality. With the growing investment into Niagara Falls, we are sure to see even more visitors than before, so it is important to resolve this congestion issue sooner rather than later.”

Details of the Buffalo Billion Phase II include a request for \$20 million to build a new welcome center for tourists on Grand Island, an investment that Jacobs said cannot be fully maximized with the toll booths remaining in place.

“Spending \$20 million to build a new welcome center without addressing the traffic and congestion issues would prevent a new welcome center from becoming the regional resource and economic catalyst it’s intended to be,” Jacobs said.

Adding to the call to eliminate the toll barriers were representatives of the two major tourism organizations in the region. Noting that their communities are primary destinations on the rise, Visit Buffalo Niagara and the Niagara County Tourism and Convention Corporation expressed their desire to see the Thruway Authority take action.

“The Grand Island toll booths have long been a hindrance for locals and visitors alike,” Visit Buffalo Niagara President and CEO Patrick Kaler said. “We welcome Sen. Jacobs’ and Assemblyman Morinello’s call to remove the toll booths as it will improve the visitor experience for motorists utilizing the foremost connection between Buffalo and Niagara Falls.”

Andrea Czopp, Director of Communications for the Niagara Tourism & Convention Center said, “For the past two years, Niagara Falls has seen record visitation numbers and with all of the new developments that are continuing, we anticipate that these numbers will continue to increase. Increased tourism numbers also means increased traffic volume. On many summer weekends the traffic backups are extreme. Removing the tolls will not only help improve traffic flow, but will also eliminate the unwelcoming stigma that goes along with them. We are extremely grateful to Senator Jacobs, Assemblyman Morinello and the many other local leaders who are working to address this issue.”

The New York State Thruway Authority has two bridge systems under its operations, The Tappan Zee bridge, connecting Rockland and Westchester Counties downstate, and Grand Island. Last month, as part of his commitment to fighting for equality in state resources and services for upstate New York, Senator Jacobs called on the Thruway Authority to implement a cashless toll system at the Grand Island crossings similar to one in use at the Tappan Zee. The state of the art technology allows motorists to pay their tolls while maintaining highway speeds, eliminating the need for toll plazas.

“Our number one priority is to eliminate the tolls, but I am not backing down from my call for cashless tolling here on Grand Island,” said Jacobs. “Absent their outright elimination, the only reasonable alternative is cashless tolling which addresses many of the issues alleviated through removal. We are stepping up our calls to action and giving the Thruway Authority viable options to restore equality and improve travel between Erie and Niagara

Counties,” the Senator concluded.