



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John J. Flanagan

A Special Message from Senate Majority Leader John J. Flanagan On the State of Our State

JOHN J. FLANAGAN January 3, 2018

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As Majority Leader, I have the great honor and distinct privilege of leading the New York State Senate.

I'm excited about the opportunity we have this year to revitalize our state and make life a little better for working- and middle-class families.

In Washington, Democrats and Republicans battle each other with predictable ferocity -- sometimes producing gridlock and dysfunction, and sometimes producing policies that are counterproductive for many New Yorkers.

Here in New York, we've taken a vastly different approach.

We're working across the aisle to find common ground, partnering with Upstate and suburban Democrats to move our state forward.

When it comes to the important issues that matter to hardworking taxpayers and their families, there is no question we're getting results.

- This year, an historic \$4.2 Billion middle class income tax cut we authored and enacted into law will be delivered -- on time and as promised.
- The property tax cap we put in place in 2011 has protected taxpayers from \$23 billion in higher taxes, and continues to provide certainty to seniors and homeowners.
- We passed an historic Women's Equality Agenda that ensures equal pay for women, while also combating discrimination, harassment, and violence against women.
- As part of last year's budget, we won passage of a record \$2.5 billion for clean water initiatives throughout the state. Many of those projects are now underway.

Despite our steady and unmistakable progress, there is more to be done. Much more.

When you build a new home, you start with a detailed blueprint.

This year we will propose a comprehensive blueprint designed to rebuild New York.

It's called the "Blueprint for a Stronger New York," and this dynamic, forward-looking agenda will guide our conference during the upcoming budget and legislative session.

The proposals contained within our agenda are based on input from regular, hardworking New Yorkers from every corner of the state, and it includes three main components.

First, AFFORDABILITY.

That starts with balancing this year's budget with no new taxes. New Yorkers pay too much in taxes already and raising taxes cannot-- and should not-- be the answer.

We face a budget gap of several billion dollars. But instead of raising taxes to close this gap -- something that many short-sighted politicians want -- we believe spending restraint should be a top priority.

Our self-imposed 2 percent spending cap has already saved our state \$41 billion. It's time for the Governor and Assembly Democrats to join with us in making that spending cap permanent.

Doing so will help to ensure a balanced, fiscally responsible budget that protects taxpayers this year, and every year.

Similarly, the state's 2 percent property tax cap has been a resounding success, saving taxpayers \$23 billion in just six years. Let's make it permanent and cement those gains for current and future taxpayers.

We know that families, seniors, and businesses are all struggling with the soaring cost of energy. Much of that struggle is due to high energy taxes. And, while our Conference has already successfully eliminated the 18-a energy surcharge imposed by the Senate Democrats several years ago, I am now proposing that we go even further.

Let's actually cut energy taxes to help cash-strapped families pay their bills and plan for the future. Doing so could make a real difference for families and seniors throughout our state.

In addition, our Senate Majority will advance legislation to protect hardworking New Yorkers from the negative impacts of recently-enacted federal tax law changes.

Next, we're focused on OPPORTUNITY.

I believe it's time to take an honest look at the state's economic climate and remove the unnecessary obstacles to growth and success.

We must end the out-migration of New Yorkers, and we must stop the exodus of businesses that once provided New Yorkers with jobs, economic security and the hope of a better future.

We need to make New York State an advocate for businesses, not an adversary.

Far too many small businesses are buried under a mountain of red tape and regulations that make it difficult to create new job opportunities and hire additional workers. If we are ever going to reach our full potential as a state, that needs to change.

This year, our Conference will propose a comprehensive regulatory reform package to address this critical issue.

We also need to reduce taxes on small businesses to make our state more competitive.

Next, we must conduct a top-to-bottom review of the State's overall economic development strategy:

- Start-up NY.

- The tens of millions of dollars the Executive spends on advertising.
- The lack of accountability for major deals and projects that fail miserably when it comes to creating jobs.

All of it.

There can be no sacred cows.

Our attitude moving forward must be: “If it doesn’t create jobs, we’re not doing it.”

Investing in job creation is and will continue to be a priority, but we can’t throw good money after bad.

Finally, we will focus on SECURITY.

Senate Republicans know that if you... your family... and your community... aren’t safe and secure, nothing else matters.

That's why we will advance a comprehensive effort to keep New Yorkers safe from:

- Gangs and gang violence;
- Heroin and opioid abuse;
- Terrorism; and
- Crimes against women and children.

We will start by targeting the rise of horrific gang violence -- first with an aggressive effort to combat gang recruitment of our young people, and also by giving law enforcement and prosecutors the tools they need to lock up dangerous gang members.

We will vigorously reject the notion that heinous acts of terrorism represent "the new normal" in our society, and will redouble our efforts to ensure that federal, state, and local authorities are doing everything humanly possible to keep New Yorkers safe from terrorist attacks.

We will advance measures designed to make New York a national leader in the fight against heroin and opioid addiction. Our Joint Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction has shined a bright light on this problem, but there is still so much more to be done.

That's why we will once again be recommending a record level of funding to expand treatment opportunities for those who are addicted, and to help support smart initiatives that can help prevent addiction in the first place. But we will also be leading the charge to get the State Assembly to join us in getting tough on the big-time dealers who are preying on our kids.

And, we will work to do even more to protect women and children from violence and sexual predators, and to stop the scourge of sexual harassment that has plagued our society for far too long.

These are all issues that transcend whatever geographic, demographic and political differences that New Yorkers may have.

And these are all issues that demand better than the predictable partisan politics that Americans have grown tired of.

Affordability. Opportunity. Security.

That's a "Blueprint for a Stronger New York."

It's time to focus on what's really important - getting back to basics and getting the job done.

I hope you will join me in this fight.

In the meantime, have a safe, healthy, and prosperous new year.