



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

## Sen. Griffo statement on state budget

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO April 1, 2019



“I am disappointed in this year’s budget. Downstate Democrats crafted this spending plan and had the opportunity to show New Yorkers that they understood why so many residents flee our state each year, why so many businesses close and why so many schools and municipalities suffer from financial hardships. Instead, they negotiated a budget that does nothing but affirm New York’s status as one of the highest-taxing states in the nation and tells overburdened Upstate New Yorkers struggling to stay afloat that New York is not interested in growing jobs, providing tax relief or making our state more affordable.

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After winning control of the Senate in November, Democrat Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said that 'we're not interested in' raising taxes on New Yorkers. However, here we are in April and taxes, as a result of this budget, will increase over \$1 billion in this year alone and are scheduled to increase \$4.55 billion next year. It seems that Senate Democrats have picked up right where they left off in 2009-10, when they raised taxes and fees 124 times, totaling \$14 billion in just two years. The fiscally irresponsible trend continues today with the passage of this budget and a myriad of new taxes and fees including:

- A new tax on prescription drugs and medications, which would harm seniors and our most vulnerable populations.
- A new commuter tax that will hurt motorists driving into New York City.
- A new tax on driving that will devastate Upstate New York's tourism industry.
- A new tax on real estate transactions.
- A new grocery bag tax, which will require anyone who needs food or other basic necessities to dig a little deeper into their pockets.
- A planned taxpayer-funded political campaign system, AKA 'welfare for politicians, through actions to be implemented by a commission that will ultimately require taxpayer dollars to fund negative campaign mailers and robocalls.

I have advocated for parity in our state. This budget, however, fails to accomplish that and prioritizes downstate and New York City needs over those of upstate. For example, a new tax on Internet purchases will drive \$320 million to New York City and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority while upstate will get \$160 million. The MTA also will receive \$100 million to pave the way for the implementation of a new commuter tax while Consolidated

Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS) funding will not be increased and \$65 million secured by Senate Republicans in previous years to help municipalities with extreme winter recovery will not be included in this year's budget. Even further, a special investment in education will be made to Yonkers Public Schools, a downstate district, when there are other districts that are struggling in New York State and an overall investment in education fell short of its promised goals.

Despite many assurances by the Governor and Democrats in the Legislature, the budget also fails to reject various unfunded mandates and most notably excludes adequate funding needed to implement the state's early voting mandate. The New York State Board of Elections estimates that early voting will cost \$175 million, a number far greater than the \$25 million local governments will receive from the state. Aid to Municipalities (AIM) also will be cut by \$59 million. These reckless actions and others like them will put additional pressure on towns, villages, and counties to raise taxes or cut essential services.

I have been troubled by the inclusion of policy in past budgets and this year is no different. There were a number of Democrat-driven policies and priorities included in the final budget such as fully funding an initiative to provide free college tuition for illegal immigrants while rejecting an increase in Tuition Assistance Program funding that would help middle-class families afford college. The budget also allows for a Criminals Bill of Rights which ends cashless bail for everything shy of the most severe violent felony, imposes a fee on bags at stores, authorizes the Governor to make prison closures and features the reduction of misdemeanor and certain felonies to protect illegal immigrants. As I have said in the past, these issues and others should be vetted independently and transparently outside of the budget.

In short, this budget is unacceptable and is an assault on all Upstate New Yorkers. We must do better. We had the opportunity to do so earlier this year as part of the 'Real Solutions'

budget proposal Republicans advanced in the Senate. This was fiscally responsible plan that would have reduced taxes, rebuilt our state's economy and created new and unprecedented opportunities for small businesses, workers, students and middle-class families. It would have ensured geographic balance and parity throughout our state. Unfortunately, the New York City and downstate Democrats who control state government weren't interested and now we are facing the consequences."