



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

## Ortt Seeks U.S. Attorney General's Assistance

ROBERT G. ORTT November 22, 2019

| ISSUE: **JCOPE**

Today, Senator Rob Ortt (R,C,I,Ref-North Tonawanda) requested for U.S. Attorney General William Barr to open an investigation into allegations that the New York State Joint Committee on Public Ethics (JCOPE) may have illegally disclosed details of its deliberations regarding Joseph Percoco to Governor Andrew Cuomo.

Last week, Sen. Ortt sent a letter to Sen. James Skoufis, the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Investigations and Government Operations, urging an investigation into JCOPE and the allegations reported by the Albany Times Union. The paper alleges that the Governor may have violated JCOPE's confidentiality bylaws in order to strong-arm JCOPE members investigating his former top aide, therefore illegally influencing the "independent" investigation. Sen. Skoufis has yet to respond to Sen. Ortt's inquiry.

"This week, we have seen that those in charge of serving as watchdogs for the residents of our state are incapable of putting their political leanings aside and doing the honest work of the people," said Sen. Ortt. "Clearly, there is a reluctance for the inspector general and the Senate Committee on Investigations to publicly investigate their political allies. We need an investigator who will put the residents of our state first and who is not beholden to New York State party bosses. AG Barr and his office would bring an outside perspective to this situation and help provide clarity on this disturbing case."

Earlier this week, JCOPE held an executive meeting in the midst of mounting pressure to release a letter sent to them by the state inspector general as to why the IG's office decided against launching an investigation into the allegations outlined by the Times Union. After three hours of deliberation, JCOPE decided against disclosing any information to the media or the public.

"There is no reason that this report should not be released," said Sen. Ortt. "We should know what the inspector general's investigation entailed and why no further action was taken. It is frustrating that the allegations made by the whistleblower were kept a secret from the public and that the details of the investigation continue to be withheld. This is the complete opposite of the inquiries we are witnessing take place in Washington and it is unacceptable for a government's investigative body to operate in this manner."

Not only is Gov. Cuomo responsible for appointing JCOPE's Executive Director, but he is also responsible for appointing over a third of the board's members as well as the inspector general whose office investigated the allegations before ultimately dismissing them.

"There has been zero transparency provided to the public regarding this matter," said Sen. Ortt. "It is unacceptable that these reported allegations have been swept under the rug, especially with the outcry we are witnessing on the national scale from New York Democrats regarding President Trump. The hypocrisy is astonishing."

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