



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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New Year Presents New Challenges for NY

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The New Year is just a few days away and with it the start of the 2020 legislative session. There are a number of critical issues on the agenda, which will require careful consideration by the legislature and governor.

One of the first items to tackle is a looming budget deficit. Mid-year projections show that despite the strong economy, the state is facing its worst fiscal problems since 2010. A dramatic rise in the cost of Medicaid makes up the largest portion of a projected \$6 billion

shortfall. It is time to examine how the state delivers Medicaid services and why our per-capita costs are so high. In the end, we must work together to find ways to close the deficit without adding to the tax burden New York residents already face.

The deficit is also a clear indication that the state simply cannot afford to take on costly new programs, including the proposed New York Health Act, a state-run single-payer health insurance plan. The estimated \$160 billion dollar cost of implementing the program would equate to an approximate 178% tax increase, the largest hike in history.

In addition to the cost, I am concerned about creating a huge new bureaucracy and radically changing our current health system. As the ranking member of the Senate's Health Committee, I have attended hearings across the state on this issue. I agree we must work to ensure that all New Yorkers have access to quality, affordable health care, but a government run, taxpayer funded system is not the answer.

Another issue the legislature is likely to consider in 2020 is the legalization of recreational marijuana. The idea has been debated for several years and proponents will work hard to make it a reality in the New Year.

Public health and public safety should be determining factors as this issue is considered. The Health Department has acknowledged the possibility of an increase in impaired driving and car crashes if marijuana becomes legal. As a former State Trooper and Sheriff of Erie County, insufficient research to support legalization and unanswered questions about regulation and enforcement remain a concern.

I also expect the Legislature to act on a number of recommendations for dealing with the heroin and opioid crisis. Among the ideas under consideration is to create so-called safe injection sites to allow those addicted to heroin and other drugs to use while under medical

supervision. Supporters suggest these sites will save lives, but there are legitimate concerns. Do safe injection sites violate federal law and will they attract not only drug users, but also drug dealers to the host community? I will urge my colleagues to examine these questions carefully before acting on the recommendation.

I am committed to facing these and other challenges as your representative in the New York State Senate. I wish you and your family a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year.