



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

## NYS Senate Republican Conference Demands Democrats Address Rural Broadband Issues on The Heels of NYC Focused Internet Bill

ROBERT G. ORTT October 8, 2020

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Albany, NY - New York State Senate Republican Leader Rob Ortt, and Senators Pam Helming, George Borrello, and Patty Ritchie today demanded that the Senate Democrat Majority take immediate action to provide internet access not only for downstate students, but for neglected rural students without broadband access.

Thanks to a **Democrat broadband tax**, taxpayers in rural areas have no internet access at all, forcing students to find central locations like library parking lots to study remotely during the pandemic even as New York's chilly fall weather sets in.

The New York City dominated Senate Majority failed to heed the Republican call to repeal the Democrat tax that stalled broadband expansion in these areas, and has done nothing to improve access upstate. Democrats recently **introduced a bill** to provide WiFi in New York City homeless shelters, where downstate students also lack access.

"Democrats have ignored our calls over and over again to repeal their broadband tax that's stopped the expansion of broadband into rural areas. While it's laudable that they now want to deliver WiFi to homeless students in New York City, Democrats need to understand that students in low-income rural areas are falling behind without this critical tool during a pandemic that's forced them to learn remotely or in hybrid models. Rural broadband access and the repeal of the Democrat tax must be prioritized so that Upstate students are not left behind," said Senate Republican Leader Ortt.

"We must bridge the digital divide for all students, not just some. It shouldn't matter if you are a homeless student in New York City learning remotely or a student upstate whose family desperately needs broadband. We cannot leave our children behind at this critical time. Unfortunately, Senate Democrats have turned their backs on rural students by implementing a tax on broadband and severely hindering expansion in rural areas," said Senator Borrello.

"It's long past time to act. We must rescind the Democrat broadband tax to deliver access to Upstate and ensure every student, regardless of where they live, can learn," Borrello added.

In July, Senator Borrello and Senator Pam Helming **introduced legislation** to repeal the Democrat broadband tax, and expand vital access as promised by the Governor years earlier. Democrats have not taken action on the bill.

“Upstate was promised full broadband access, but as soon as the New York City Democrats took control of the Senate they passed a tax that disrupted expansion. This tax must be repealed immediately. No part of our state should be an afterthought, but that’s what rural students, farmers, and small business owners are to the Democrat Majority,” said Senator Helming.

“From the North Country to New York City, all students, in all corners of our state, need access to high-speed internet in order to succeed academically,” said Senator Ritchie. “Nearly every day, my office receives calls from families whose children are struggling because they live in an area where high-speed internet isn’t available. We need to immediately repeal this tax that’s hindering broadband expansion in an effort to provide Upstate students, families and businesses with the high-speed internet access they need to thrive in today’s world.”

Broadband access had been moving ahead until Democrats took the Majority two years ago and passed into law the new tax which is now hindering broadband installation. v

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