



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

## Republican Leaders Ortt and Barclay: Reopen State Government to the People

ROBERT G. ORTT April 30, 2021

| ISSUE: **NEW YORK STATE CAPITOL**



ALBANY, NY -- Senate Republican Leader Rob Ortt and Assembly Republican Leader Will Barclay today penned a letter to State Office of General Services (OGS) Commissioner RoAnn M. Destito requesting a plan to safely reopen the New York State Capitol and surrounding areas to the general public. The State Capitol has been closed to visitors since last March, and the Empire State Plaza has been covered with fences and other heavy barricades for months.

“As the infection rate goes down and the vaccination rate goes up, COVID-related restrictions in place at our Capitol and Empire State Plaza have become clearly outdated and unnecessary in many cases. It is well past time for leaders in Albany to commit to safely reopening the seat of our state government for the sake of the people we were elected to represent. The pandemic and the scandals that cast a dark cloud over the State Capitol have also exposed many flaws in the functioning of our democratic process this past year. I believe any efforts to reopen the Capitol to visitors -- and make the surrounding area as welcoming to New Yorkers as possible -- would go a long way toward restoring transparency and accountability to a state government desperately in need of both,” said Leader Ortt.

“When state government is functioning as it should, the public has a presence and a voice in everything we do. The precautionary measures resulting from the COVID crisis severely restricted the people’s ability to participate in the daily operations at the Capitol.

Fortunately, the worst of the pandemic is behind us and numbers are trending in a positive direction. It’s time to move on from the dark corridors, empty hallways, obstructive fencing and barricades. Businesses and public venues are safely reopening. The State Capitol and Empire State Plaza should be included in that process and once again welcome New Yorkers to the center of state government,” said Leader Barclay.

Over the past several months, many COVID-related restrictions have been lifted by the Executive and Legislature after the urging of Senate and Assembly Republicans. Large indoor venues, such as Madison Square Garden and the Barclays Center, have also been reopened for weeks under updated state guidelines.

Additionally, fences and other barriers placed by OGS at places around the Capitol and Empire State Plaza have been seriously harmful to the foot traffic of local residents in recent months. Removing these taxpayer-funded obstructions around the Capitol and plaza would enhance the quality of life and immediately make the constitutionally-guaranteed

democratic process more accessible to many New Yorkers.

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