

NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Our state government: lots of dollars, little sense

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Has New York state government helped address your costs of living over the past six years? Has it made your life easier?

According to a recent poll, only 37 percent of registered voters thought the state was on the right track, while 52 percent said they believed it was headed in the wrong direction. In response to a prompt asking if the “2024 New York State legislative session did or did not succeed in passing laws that improve the quality of life in New York,” only 17 percent of respondents said they believed it did.

This sentiment was broadly shared across the political spectrum: Only 26 percent of Democrats, 7 percent of Republicans, and 12 percent of Independents/Others said they believed laws were passed this session that improved our quality of life. It is especially concerning that New Yorkers do not feel that state government is improving their lives when you consider how much money our state spends.

When the state last had a divided government, in 2018, with the governor’s mansion and the Assembly controlled by Democrats and the State Senate controlled by Republicans, in partnership with a handful of Democrats, the state budget was \$168 billion. This year, under one-party control, the spending plan totaled \$237 billion — an increase of roughly 40 percent over six years, far exceeding the 26 percent increase in the Consumer Price Index for the same period. The budget passed in 2018 under divided government was the eighth one in a row that adhered to a 2 percent spending increase cap, but Albany no longer seems to concern itself with such fiscal restraint. Yet does anyone believe that New Yorkers received a quality return on their additional investment of more than \$60 billion since 2018?

To be clear, there are areas where state spending is a crucial investment in our future — education, clean water and air, and infrastructure, to name a few. But it is troubling that despite Gov. Kathy Hochul’s initially proposing such a costly budget, we still had to rally with local schools in Nassau County to restore their state funding, and the State Legislature had to fight to restore clean-water infrastructure funding, which had been championed by the State Senate Republican Conference when it controlled the chamber. Meanwhile, New York City has received a

bailout of \$3.4 billion over the past two years for the self-inflicted migrant crisis that will only serve as a Band-Aid, without fixing the problem.

Regarding crime and public safety, an issue on the minds of many New Yorkers, the legislative supermajorities still refuse to take meaningful action to fix the failed cashless bail laws they enacted. In polling numbers that nearly mirror voters' feelings on this year's legislative session, only 17 percent of New Yorkers say they believe crime has improved in the past year. Common-sense legislation I carry with Assemblyman Ed Ra to grant judges discretion to consider dangerousness when determining whether to hold a defendant pretrial was voted down in the Senate Codes Committee along party lines, and the Legislature refused to take up a comprehensive package of bills to combat antisemitism, including several of my own and Assemblymen Ari Brown's and Ra's bills. Further, while Assemblyman Jake Blumencranz and I succeeded in forcing the legislative supermajorities to address the issue of illegal squatters, instead of including the language we had proposed, Albany passed a watered-down version that has left gaps in the law.

This is not to say that the state has failed to make progress on any issue. In the final days of the session, we passed a bill to help protect children's mental health from addictive feeds on social media, which I was proud to cosponsor. However, I believe most New Yorkers would agree that Albany hasn't done enough to stem the consistent outmigration our state is experiencing — driven largely by our affordability crisis. As a small-business owner and a mother of four, I know the importance of budgeting and spending within my means. Yet when I proposed an amendment on the Senate floor to keep utility costs under control by placing a moratorium on any new costs or regulations until a thorough cost-impact study is completed, my amendment was voted down along party lines.

At some point, Albany needs to realize that simply spending more money won't solve our problems, and that using a little sense will go further than even billions of dollars.

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