

GUEST VIEW: Progress was made during recent state Legislature session

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In late June, the state Legislature finished up a lengthy and unpredictable session in Albany with a broad overall agreement on many legislative issues. With such a diverse state, regionally and politically, it was challenging to get all parties to reach an agreement. I'm encouraged that we were able to come to a settlement with the governor and assembly, while still fighting for Western New York.

There's good news on issues so important to Western New Yorkers, such as tax relief, education, and job creation.

Despite efforts to dramatically scale back the property tax cap, not only were we able to keep it intact, but we extended it for four years. Just this year, the property tax cap will save New York taxpayers over a billion dollars.

I believe the state should lead by example. That's why I fought to keep state spending under the same 2 percent growth that applies to local governments and school districts under the property tax cap. This fiscal restraint will save state taxpayers over \$1.5 billion this year alone.

These savings will result in larger property tax relief checks and record funding for STAR and Enhanced Star. Together, these measures deliver major tax relief and provide stability to hard-working families, small businesses, and seniors who — for so many years — have been burdened by runaway government spending.

We also secured a key victory for Western New York children, parents, and teachers through record investments in our schools, libraries, and museums. We delivered an



additional 25 million dollars in state education aid to schools in my district. We also eliminated nearly all of the anti-Upstate, Gap Elimination Adjustment, which will save taxpayers in my district 18 million dollars. Not only did we push back on some of the Governor's extreme education policies, we introduced our own measures to comprehensively review Common Core, release tests to help students and teachers, and ensure tests are age appropriate.

Job creation and economic development is another critical matter for Western New York and has been my top priority. We've taken important steps to strengthen agriculture, redevelop brownfields, reduce energy rates, fund infrastructure, and expand green technology. These are important first steps to rebuilding the Western New York economy.

In other areas, we increased critical services to veterans returning from combat, children without adequate health care, women subjected to rape and domestic violence, victims of mental illness, and individuals and families affected by disabilities. Stricter measures against drug dealers and sex offenders will keep our families and communities safe. For example, years after the Amanda Lynn Wienckowski tragedy — years after intense negotiations — I'm pleased to report that Amanda Lynn's law passed the Senate and Assembly.

But I'm also extremely disappointed in the actions — or inaction — taken by the New York City-dominated Assembly and a downstate liberal Governor on key issues. The governor and assembly walked away from most of our common sense reforms to the unconstitutional SAFE Act. The Governor threatened to shut down government unless legislators accepted his divisive education proposals. He has also vowed to proceed unilaterally on controversial issues like mandating a minimum wage that's unacceptable to our small businesses and non-profits, and appointing a special prosecutor to investigate our police officers.

Despite the progress, I'm not ready to declare victory because we still have a lot of work ahead of us to revitalize Western New York and fight back against the destructive policies of downstate politicians and special interests.

New York State Sen. Robert Ort, R-North Tonawanda, represents the 62nd Senate District, which covers Niagara and Orleans counties and a portion of Monroe County.