



Assemblyman
**JOSEPH D.
MORELLE**

Reports to the People

December 2011

Dear Neighbor,

“Change” may be an overused word, but when describing this past year in New York state government it may actually be an understatement.

New Yorkers in 2011 saw an historic shift in Albany in which Governor Cuomo and the state legislature began in earnest to reverse the fiscal and economic trends that have robbed our state of the dynamism that once earned it the title as the Empire State.

A balanced budget with no tax increases; new ethics legislation; a property tax cap; a new, region-based economic development and job growth policy: These were the hallmarks of a year that stands as perhaps the most exciting and productive I’ve experienced as your representative in the Assembly.

Of course, 2011 must also be viewed as only the beginning. Long-term structural budget deficits and job losses can only be combated by equally long-term commitment to a new and better course. It is most encouraging to see that Governor Cuomo has that commitment, and I look forward to joining him in this ongoing effort as 2012 begins.

With the holidays and the change of calendar just ahead, I want to take this opportunity to review the highlights of 2011 and preview what 2012 may bring.

I hope you will find this newsletter informative. As always, do not hesitate to contact me at 585-467-0410 or morellj@assembly.state.ny.us.

My best wishes to you and your family for a wonderful holiday season and happy New Year!

Warmest personal regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joe". Below the signature, the name "Joe" is printed in a small, black, sans-serif font.

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Governor Cuomo signs landmark autism bill



Joe looks on as Governor Cuomo signs Joe's autism health care bill into law.

For nearly two years I have worked with advocacy groups and my colleagues in both houses of the state legislature to correct a serious flaw in our health care system, one that has exacted a high price emotionally and financially on thousands of families in New York dealing with an autism diagnosis.

Under existing rules, health care providers have too often been able to deny payment for autism treatments, forcing parents to either bear the cost of therapy or forgo it entirely. This has become an increasingly acute problem as the

number of autism cases has grown. Some experts estimate that as many as 1 in 110 children are affected; in New York, more than 30,000 children and young adults have been diagnosed.

I sponsored legislation in 2011 requiring health carriers to provide coverage for autism patients, and on Nov. 1 I was proud to stand with Governor Cuomo and advocates as he signed it into law. While the fight is not over, we have moved a significant step closer to health care equality for those on the autism spectrum.

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In a year of many changes in Albany, this stands as one of the most memorable and important for me and, most of all, for the children and parents whose health and well-being will be better served and protected from now on.

I am grateful to the governor, fellow lawmakers and the parents and health care advocates whose partnership was absolutely essential in writing this success story.

Reform and Accountability



Joe receives one of the pens used by Governor Cuomo to sign New York's first property tax cap into law. At right is the Ostrander family of Irondequoit, whose home was the local setting for the tax cap signing.

State budget set stage for New York's fiscal recovery

A state budget is more than a spending plan. It's a statement about priorities and the discipline leaders are willing to demonstrate in achieving those priorities.

For the first time in three years I supported a state budget because it reflected the proper priorities and discipline by cutting spending, refusing to raise taxes and arriving on the governor's desk by the April 1 deadline.

In the process, a projected \$10 billion deficit was eliminated even as future deficits were greatly reduced.

The budget also reined in Albany's bureaucratic growth by consolidating agencies, and it meaningfully tackled the cost of Medicaid by reducing that program's expenses by more than \$2 billion.

As we begin discussions for the 2012-13 budget – and in every year beyond – we must maintain our renewed commitment to fiscal responsibility.

In these hard times New York's families have made do with less; state government should do the same.

Property tax cap good first step, but mandate relief must follow

For years, studies have confirmed what New Yorkers are already painfully aware of: Our state has the highest combined tax burden in the nation.

The most regressive and damaging of all taxes are those levied on homes and other property. And when property taxes are measured against the value of a home, 15 of the counties with the worst property tax burdens are in New York State.

To address this, Governor Cuomo promised to enact the state's first tax cap, and in 2011 he did so.

Tax cuts for working New Yorkers, new jobs for the future

In a special session held in December, the legislature and Governor Cuomo approved tax cuts and infrastructure investments that will reduce taxes for millions of working New Yorkers and create thousands of jobs.

The New York Works Agenda represents a breakthrough both fiscal and political, avoiding partisan gridlock and confronting many of our state's long-standing problems.

By repairing roads, bridges and parks we build the foundation for future growth and add badly needed jobs to the economy; by creating a fairer tax rate structure we give middle-class families the relief they need; and we generate nearly \$2 billion in new revenue for state coffers.

At a critical time for our state, I believe this agreement is yet another important victory for all New Yorkers.

I have sponsored legislation allowing the governor to repeal unfunded mandates.

The cap, which can be overridden by local referendum, holds local property tax increases to either 2 percent or the rate of inflation, depending on which is lower.

With the tax cap in place, however, we must now adopt mandate relief in order to help localities control their costs.

That is why I have sponsored legislation allowing the governor to repeal or revise unfunded mandates in those instances where they place unfair and unsustainable demands on governments and taxpayers.

Tax and mandate reforms are essential to making New York more affordable for families and new businesses, and we still have much work to do to accomplish that goal.

Looking Forward

Regional councils hold promise of new jobs and prosperity

As promised, New York is moving ahead with plans to revitalize New York's economy on a region-by-region basis. Led by Lt. Governor Bob Duffy, the program involves councils that will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses inherent to each of our state's distinct regions.

Locally, the Finger Lakes council recently identified 10 projects that may compete for a share of \$1 billion in state seed funding.

These include RIT's Golisano Institute for Sustainability and the U of R's Center for Computational Innovation, and they represent precisely the private-public partnership we need to restart the state's economic engine and create new jobs for this generation and the next.



Joe recently moderated a discussion at Eastman Kodak regarding the need for greater public and private sector investment in innovative businesses.

Katie's Law a top priority

In 2009, I met Jayanne Sepich, a woman whose daughter, Katie, was raped and murdered by a criminal who escaped justice for three years.

As a result of that tragedy, Jayanne has led the national effort to pass laws allowing DNA samples to be taken from individuals arrested for violent felonies. Currently, New York only allows DNA sampling upon conviction.

I introduced "Katie's Law" because I believe it will aid law enforcement and bring justice for families awaiting resolution of cold cases.

I still believe this, and that's why I am committed to passing "Katie's Law" in 2012.

Independent districting can't wait

In this season of reform, one outstanding challenge that remains is independent legislative redistricting.

The present process puts too much power in the hands of lawmakers and party leaders, resulting in an entrenched and self-serving political culture.

As has been proposed, we need a bipartisan commission whose members haven't served as elected officials or lobbyists for at least four years.

Using census data and public input, commissioners will draw districts reflecting the interests of all New Yorkers.

This must be accomplished before we remake federal and state legislature districts in the year ahead.

In the Community



Joe joins philanthropist Larry Kessler and John McGrath of Easter Seals New York at the recent opening of Easter Seals' Kessler Center at the former St. Margaret Mary's school in Irondequoit.



After a year of sometimes controversial changes, work on 590 in Irondequoit and Sea Breeze will wind to a close at the end of 2011 with final drainage, guardrail and sign upgrades.