

# Niagara GOP Sen. Robert Ortt indicted; Dems see opportunity

March 23, 2017 By Michael Gormley [michael.gormley@newsday.com](mailto:michael.gormley@newsday.com)



Republican Sen. Robert Ortt pleaded not guilty on Thursday, March 23, 2017, to giving his wife a no-show job during his tenure as mayor of North Tonawanda. Above, Ortt in Albany on March 17, 2015. (Credit: AP / Mike Groll)

ALBANY — The indictment of a Republican senator as well as the veteran Republican who held the Western New York seat before him has given new ammunition for Democrats hoping to topple the GOP's slim Senate majority.

Sen. Robert Ortt of Niagara County pleaded not guilty Thursday to an indictment by a grand jury that accused him of three felony counts of offering a false record as an official filing. Attorney General Eric Schneiderman accuses him of providing a no-show job to his wife, Meghan, while Ortt was mayor of North Tonawanda. Ortt could face a maximum sentence of up to four years for each count.

Schneiderman said that when Ortt was elected mayor, the job paid \$5,000 less than his salary as clerk/treasurer. That's when, Schneiderman said, Ortt created a scheme that paid his wife \$21,500 from 2010 to 2014.

"I am sickened at the ridiculous and baseless charges that have been put against me," Ortt said after denying the charge in court. He blamed "Schneiderman's partisan agenda."

"I am guilty of nothing," he said.

Schneiderman said Ortt, who was awarded the Bronze Star as an Army lieutenant in Afghanistan, committed "a shameful breach of the public trust . . . No show jobs and secret payments are the lifeblood of public corruption."

Hours later, Schneiderman announced an indictment against Ortt's 62nd District



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predecessor, former state Republican Sen. George Maziarz. Maziarz is accused of five counts of offering a false document.

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Schneiderman accused Maziarz of using his campaign fund as well as money from the Niagara County Republican Committee to pay a former Senate staff member who had left government amid charges of sexual harassment. Schneiderman accuses Maziarz of filing false campaign finance reports to cover up the \$95,000 in payments from 2012-14.

Maziarz denied the charges and declined comment. He left the Senate in 2014.

“This will be dismissed or be an acquittal,” Maziarz’s attorney, Joseph M. LaTona, told reporters.

The indictments renew the focus on anti-corruption legislation, which has gotten little public attention as Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and legislative leaders negotiate policy in the state budget due April 1, said Gerald Benjamin, distinguished professor of political science at the State University of New York at New Paltz.

Ortt won’t lose his chairmanship of the Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Committee or its stipend and won’t be excluded from the Republican majority conference.

Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan (R-East Northport) said he called Ortt and briefly discussed the charges as well as daily legislative business. Flanagan said he offered Ortt and his family his support. Flanagan wouldn’t discuss the charges with reporters.

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