

## Upstate business group hands out grades for state lawmakers

By Jill Terreri • Albany Bureau • August 30, 2010, 8:20 pm

**ROCHESTER** -- A pro-business lobbying group on Monday offered a preview of the lawmakers they could target this year, releasing a scorecard of state legislators based upon votes and legislation they had sponsored.

Unshackle Upstate, which is affiliated with the Rochester Business Alliance but also funded by chambers of commerce in Buffalo, Syracuse, Plattsburgh and Binghamton, is trying to make an impact in the outcome of state Legislature races this year. It has pledged to get heavily involved in between two and five races, spending money and campaigning for selected candidates.

The group will likely target races in the Senate, where Democrats hold a slim 32-29 majority, Unshackle Executive Director Brian Sampson said Monday during a visit to the Democrat and Chronicle editorial board. The small group of races that the organization will focus on will be released after the primary, Sept. 14.

"It's not going to change overnight," he said, remarking on his group's hope of remaking the state Legislature. "It's literally two or three seats at a time."

Democrats fared worse in the organization's rankings than their Republican colleagues. The rankings leaned in large part on votes on the state budget, which the organization opposed but was supported by the Democratic-controlled Legislature. The budget included about \$1 billion in new taxes and fees and limits some economic-development programs and incentives.

Other bills that the group used in its scorecard were any that spent money or raised taxes, a farm labor bill, a ban on hydraulic fracturing and a reform bill for industrial development agencies, among others. It supports hydraulic fracturing and opposes a farm bill that would have provided additional compensation and rights to workers.

The scorecard should be used as tool for voters,

said RBA CEO Sandy Parker, although she cautioned that it was just one tool that will be used for Unshackle's endorsements. Other factors will be a candidate's historic support for the organization's agenda, input from the candidate's local chamber of commerce, in-person interviews and a candidate questionnaire.

Though Unshackle is focused on upstate, Parker said it's likely the group will broaden its agenda to the rest of the state after this campaign cycle, as it has partnerships with business groups in Westchester, Long Island and New York City.

Unshackle's hope is that it will be able to invest about \$250,000 in the targeted races, though their campaign committee has raised just more than \$54,600. Asked about the apparent lack of funding, Sampson said funds from other business groups in the state may be able to be invested in these races as well.

The highest-ranking senators were the retiring Dale Volker, a Republican from Depew, Erie County, and Betty Little, a Republican from the northeast corner of the state.

Highest-ranking Assembly members were Republicans Stephen Hawley, of Batavia, Genesee County, and Jane Corwin, of Clarence, Erie County.

Rankings on the two legislative leaders in each house are forthcoming.

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Assemblyman David Gantt, D-Rochester, received 2 points out of 100, ranking him 84th out of the 150-member Assembly. Some members -- among them, Democratic attorney general candidates Eric Schneiderman, a senator, and Richard Brodsky, an assemblyman -- received negative ratings.

Gantt took a diplomatic approach to the rankings, saying that he hadn't seen the legislation they were based on but that the group has a right to compile a scorecard.

"We agree on some issues and we disagree on others," he said. "I feel very comfortable with the way I voted."

### **On the Web**

The Unshackle Upstate scorecard is available at:  
[unshackleupstate.com/scorecard-new/](http://unshackleupstate.com/scorecard-new/)