

Business coalition turns to politics

Unshackle Upstate to take on special interest groups

By Jill Terreri • jtterreri@democratandchronicle.com • February 26, 2010, 5:55 pm

ROCHESTER -- Saying it no longer wants to be "drowned out" by special interests in Albany, a coalition of **business** groups vowed Thursday to get more involved this election year.

Representatives of Unshackle Upstate, which includes business groups from around New York, said they would be active in two or three state Legislature races.

"This is the first time that the business community is prepared to be competitive with some of the other special interest groups," said Sandy Parker, CEO of the Rochester Business Alliance, a member of Unshackle Upstate. "We've been drowned out in other races, absolutely - we admit that."

Neither Parker nor Brian Sampson, **executive** director of Unshackle Upstate, would say how much money they plan to raise or how much money they have raised so far. They said they are completing paperwork to form a committee. They also have not determined which races they will focus on.

The state Board of Elections has no record of their political action committee, UPAC.

To judge which candidates they will support, Unshackle drafted a "scorecard" with items important to their members. The coalition supports, for example, amendments to the Taylor Law, which governs collective bargaining between public **employees** and governments in New York. The amendments would put time limits on union protections, a change coalition members said would give unions an incentive to settle contracts.

Unshackle also supports caps on property **taxes** and spending. It opposes paid family leave, prevailing wages for workers on industrial development agency projects, and new mandates on farm owners for dealing with their workers.

Unshackle also is zeroing in on **property taxes**, long a complaint of upstate residents.

Other than getting involved in select races, Unshackle plans to get more voters to the polls, and has started using social media to drum up support. Its Facebook fan page has more than 3,700 members.

Money often determines whose voice is loudest in Albany.

In 2008, the New York Public Interest Research Group ranked big spenders in Albany. Verizon spent the most on lobbying and campaign contributions, at \$3.4 million, while the union New York State United Teachers ranked second at \$2.8 million.

Other organizations with significant spending on lobbying, campaign donations, or both, were **Columbia University's** trustees, the Greater New York Hospital Association, the Healthcare Association of New York State, the Medical Society of the State of New York, the Trial Lawyers Association and the engineering firm O'Brien and Gere, which has offices across the country.

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