

# Area speaking with one voice on priorities for state funding

Last week I traveled to Albany with other members of the Rochester Community Coalition. Our purpose was to meet with state leaders and Rochester-area state legislators to discuss four projects we'd like to see funded in the 2011 state budget.

Regular readers of this column might wonder: How can I, as the leader of the Rochester Business Alliance and a co-founder of Unshackle Upstate, be on one hand calling for cuts in state spending and then turn around and ask for state money?

The answer is simple: Cutting spending will get our economy only so far. Even Gov. Andrew Cuomo said it two weeks ago when he was at Nazareth College to drum up support for his budget proposal: We have to grow our way out of these economic doldrums. And in my mind, the best way to do that is to invest in projects that will create good jobs.

As we presented our four-project list, we made it clear that we fully recognize that New York state is in financial crisis and that any state spending must hold up to intensive scrutiny. But we said we also know that our elected officials recognize that strategic investment in economic development is essential to revitalizing our state. So we think this list, which identifies projects we believe have the greatest potential for job creation, will help our leaders set priorities for making the necessary investments to get New York back in business.

The Rochester Community Coalition, now in its fourth year, includes representatives from business, labor, education, city and county government and nonprofits. What makes this group unique is that despite our very different viewpoints and constituencies, we can come together and develop a project agenda that we can wholeheartedly and unanimously support.



## ON BUSINESS

Sandra Parker

gional earning potential.

Also on the list is \$33 million to create the Health Sciences Center for Computational Innovation at the University of Rochester. This investment would go toward a potential public-private partnership that could reshape the delivery of health care by combining IBM's high-performance computing resources and the University of Rochester's biomedical research enterprise. The center would create the nation's largest and most powerful computer systems dedicated to health research, positioning Upstate New York as a hub of health innovation and technology development, Seligman said. It also has a significant economic development component—creating more than 180 scientific and research jobs and potentially generating more than \$200 million in total research growth over 10 years.

Third is \$5 million over four years to expand a Rochester After-School Initiative, a collaboration among the city of Rochester, the Rochester City School District, the United Way and the Community Foundation to help young people find safe and constructive options, develop social skills, establish mentor relationships and provide access to academic enrichment. The investment will be used to bolster this program and develop a long-term implementation strategy, as well as to enable the program to serve an additional 625 youths annually, to reduce youth crime and improve graduation rates.

Among those on the Albany trip with me were Jennifer Leonard, president of the Rochester Area Community Foundation; Joel Seligman, president of the University of Rochester; William Destler, president of Rochester Institute of Technology; Ken Warner, executive director of Unions and Businesses United in Construction; and Dave Young, president of the Rochester Building & Construction Trades Council. It was a day packed with meetings, including time with Lt. Gov. Robert Duffy, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos, members of the governor's economic development team and our local representatives.

What's on the list? Two projects that would develop job-creating centers at our major universities, one that would overhaul infrastructure to facilitate economic growth and one that would expand a youth development program.

Topping the list is \$25 million for the Institute for Sustainability at Rochester Institute of Technology, an investment essential to completing a total public-private partnership fundraising goal of \$107 million.

This institute will be essential in establishing our region as a global hub for the green-technology economy, which Destler said would have "a catalytic effect on the region as well as the state." As an added, essential benefit, it is expected to create 100 professional and technical positions at RIT, produce 160 construction jobs over two years and have \$650 million in re-

lating the fourth item is state support for a project that will overhaul the expressway corridor from the Genesee River to the I-390/I-590 interchange. The state has already committed \$22 million to what is estimated to be a \$100 million project. We're asking the state to keep the project on its list of priorities for federal transportation funding. This road work is needed to support and accommodate increased traffic from planned growth of UR, RIT and Monroe Community College, as well as from projects along Mt. Hope Avenue and East Henrietta Road.

The Center for Governmental Research estimated recently that this infrastructure will be instrumental in institutional growth and business development that could add more than 20,000 jobs (both direct and indirect) to the region over the next 20 years. Construction of this project will create more than 850 jobs (both direct and indirect) and \$42 million in labor income.

Despite the state's budget difficulties, our list was well received by government officials who said they were happy to see a united community agenda. Stay tuned, as we will keep pushing ahead and will encourage you to join. The next step is inviting members of the public to contact their legislators to express support for the coalition's agenda.

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