

# Public needs to take stand on what to cut from state budget

Steve Sink • Business editor • May 23, 2010

According to a "vacation deprivation" survey by Expedia.com, 34 percent of Americans didn't use all of their annual leave last year, losing, on average, three days of vacation.

In Albany, based on how much state lawmakers accomplish, they must be using all the vacation time that the rest of us leave on the table.

People are getting fed up, and not just upstate. I was on Long Island last week for my older daughter's college graduation just as *Newsday*, the local newspaper, reported on a survey it co-sponsored with Hofstra University.

The front-page headline read, "Our State's a Mess," and the story said that only 19 percent of Long Islanders are satisfied with the way things are going in New York versus 74 percent who are dissatisfied.

A shortage of jobs was cited as the most important problem facing the state, with the state budget a close No. 2.

But here's where Long Islanders — and New Yorkers in general, I believe — get tripped up. They're no more willing than the Assembly or Senate to make tough decisions about reining in state spending and, by extension, state taxes.

When asked if they favor cutting spending on education, health care or transportation, laying off state employees or cutting their salaries and benefits, a strong majority on Long Island said "no" to every option.

Lawrence Levy, who heads the National Center for Suburban Studies at Hofstra, said the public's indecisiveness will be seen by Albany "as an excuse to stay the course ... Voters seem to be telling politicians to find an easy way out until better

economic times return."

But, as Levy noted in an opinion piece for *Newsday*, the result almost surely will be that no tough decisions get made and the state continues to rely on borrowing, inflated revenue estimates and one-shot fiscal gimmicks. That approach to budgeting has proved to be a recipe for disaster in Albany, Levy said. Here is where Unshackle Upstate, the reform movement started by business leaders Sandy Parker of Rochester and Andrew Rudnick of Buffalo, has stepped up. Unshackle continues to call for a five-year "rightsizing" of the state budget to reduce spending from a proposed \$134 billion in 2010-11 to \$109 billion by 2015.

As I reported in February, some of the \$12 billion in cuts Unshackle proposes for 2010-11 would be painful — unpaid furloughs for many state employees and an end to STAR property tax rebates, for example.

At least Unshackle takes a position. When will we, the citizens of New York, do the same?

Advertisement



The advertisement features the USA TODAY logo at the top left. Below it, the word "AutoPilot" is written in a large, bold, black font, with a blue airplane icon to its right. A smartphone is shown in the center, displaying the app's interface with various travel-related notifications and news items. To the right of the phone, the text reads "The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®". Below this, it says "Presented by: Hampton" with the Hampton logo. At the bottom right, a blue box contains the text "SEE HOW IT WORKS >>".