

May 24, 2009

## State business groups unite on tax reform

Upstate and downstate aren't exactly two peas in a pod.

Many of the 11 million people who live in New York City and on Long Island don't think there's much of a world west of the Hudson. I was one of them for 21 years.

And I'm always mildly surprised when I find a Rochester-area adult who's never set foot in any of the five boroughs. After all, this greatest of cities is within our own state.

For all our indifference to each other, upstate and downstate do have something in common: shared misery. Whether business or individual, we all pay ridiculously high taxes that make it next to impossible to be economically competitive.

But here's something to be encouraged about: Late last week, Rochester Business Alliance CEO Sandy Parker was meeting with her counterparts from Long Island, Westchester County and the Hudson Valley.

Their goal: "Business needs to become unified around the key issues and become a single voice," Parker said.

Earlier in the week, some of the major business organizations around the state gathered in Albany to unveil a powerful agenda. Their proposals include revamping public employee pensions to make them less costly, enacting growth caps on state government spending and local property taxes, and making it easier for citizens to force local government consolidation.

If some or all became reality, New York would become a much more business-friendly place because the cost of government wouldn't be so oppressive.

Despite the Legislature's absurd 9 percent increase in state spending this year, the prospect for tax and spending caps isn't good.

But there has been a lot of positive reaction to Attorney General Andrew Cuomo's bill to make government consolidation easier.

And though pension reform might appear unlikely because of the power of public employee unions, Parker said the fact that the proposal applies only to future employees — not current ones — gives it a fighting chance.

Maybe it gives all of us a fighting chance, too.

## Additional Facts

Good week

1. General Motors +31.2%
2. IEC Electronics +20.7%
3. Stantec Inc. +9.4%