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Golisano gives Unshackle Upstate a boost

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Thomas Golisano may be busy moving to Florida while going on dates with former tennis great Monica Seles, but he isn't exactly winding down his political efforts.

Not only has Golisano been a key player in this week's upheaval in the state Senate, but he also is adding his clout to the Unshackle Upstate pro-business and low-tax movement. The founder of Paychex Inc. joined business leaders at a news conference in Buffalo on Thursday to officially join Unshackle, which described the three-time independent candidate for governor as "a long-standing and outspoken advocate for reform."

The advocacy group will push even harder now against Albany's "tax-and-spend" policies, said Brian Sampson, Unshackle's executive director. Sampson said the No. 1 goal of the group is relief for taxpayers, both individuals and businesses.

Golisano's involvement was unveiled on a day when there was another key personnel move involving upstate economic development. Robert Wilmers, CEO of M&T Bank, announced his resignation as chairman of Empire State Development Corp., the economic arm of state government.

Wilmers' role will be filled by Dennis Mullen, who last weekend was elevated by Gov. David Paterson to be president and CEO of the economic agency. Mullen will now hold all three titles pending approval by the state Legislature.

Wilmers said he was leaving Empire State Development because "the ongoing crisis in the financial sector and in the overall economy has imposed a burden of work that I did not anticipate."

Paterson said the agency, during Wilmers' one year as chairman, had succeeded through its programs in retaining about 12,500 jobs and creating more than 6,000 jobs statewide.

Mullen, a veteran Rochester executive, will be the most powerful economic official in the state. Rochester-area business leaders have said they were pleased by Mullen's rise because of his understanding of upstate's challenges and his determination to work for the region's revitalization.

Those are goals that Unshackle Upstate has, too, and Sandy Parker, CEO of the Rochester Business Alliance, said Thursday that Golisano will pitch in to hold New York's elected leaders accountable "and demand they pursue reform initiatives that cut government spending, reduce the cost of doing business and provide relief to taxpayers."