

Cuomo Contributors Featured on Economic Development Councils

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ALBANY -- Gov. Andrew Cuomo began rolling out his regional economic development councils on Tuesday, appointing a mix of leaders from business, unions, colleges and government to work together to revitalize the state's economy.

Cuomo announced the members of the first three panels for the Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse regions and is expected to detail seven councils for other regions of New York in the coming days.

Each of the 10 councils will develop a strategy for economic development for a specific region and compete for a piece of \$1 billion in economic development incentives.

Cuomo named top business executives and college leaders from each region to serve on the panels, a pattern he's expected to follow when the other councils are named.

"It's going to work bottom up, by you coming up with a vision that is regional in nature," Cuomo said in Buffalo.

For western New York, University at Buffalo president Satish Tripathi and businessman Howard Zemsky will lead the panel. Joel Seligman, president of University of Rochester, and Danny Wegman, CEO of Wegmans Food Markets, will lead the Finger Lakes' panel. Nancy Cantor, Syracuse University's chancellor, and businessman Rob Simpson will lead the Syracuse-area council.

Other panels will include one for the Southern Tier, including Broome, Chemung and Tompkins counties, and one for the Hudson Valley, including Westchester, Rockland, Putnam and Dutchess counties.

Lt. Gov. Robert Duffy is scheduled to be

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Binghamton and New Paltz, Ulster County, on Wednesday to unveil those. Cuomo will be in Long Island.

Since taking office in January, the Democratic governor has sought to bring together various interests in trying to reach a common goal. He successfully tasked union leaders and hospital executives, for example, to find \$2.3 billion in Medicaid savings.

He's trying the same approach for economic development. Local leaders will work with state officials to find the top priorities and strengths of each region.

Bringing together so many leaders -- each panel will have at least 30 members -- has its challenges, some business groups said. Each panel also includes local elected officials.

Mike Durant, state director of the National Federation of Independent Businesses, said Cuomo has shown an ability to get people working together.

"This is his challenge," Durant said. "The success rests upon the ability of all these leaders and the state agencies to be on the same page and work together."

The councils will need to develop five-year plans by Nov. 14.

After that, a statewide panel will determine by year's end how to split up the \$1 billion pot.

Some members of the councils have been Cuomo campaign contributors and have their own business interests. Zemsky, for

example, has pushed for the development of Buffalo's Larkin district and gave at least \$12,500 to the governor's campaign last year.

Wegman donated \$35,000 to Cuomo's campaign, and the supermarket chain has been pushing the state to let grocery stores sell wine. Rochester Business Alliance president Sandy Parker has served on the Committee to Save New York, a business-backed group that aided Cuomo's push to cut state spending this year.

"Through these councils, the governor is giving employers a significant voice in determining the future of our region, a role that is both appropriate and appreciated," Parker said in a statement.

One advocacy group called for greater diversity on the councils, pointing to the western New York region, which they say is too business heavy.

"The council could have been much more diverse and inclusive of the community,

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labor, environmental and small business stakeholders that are directly impacted by economic development decisions," Nathalie Alegre, an organizer with ALIGN: The Alliance for a Greater New York, said in a statement.

Cuomo said during his stop in Buffalo that western New York needs to look forward not to the past. The upstate region has lost population and jobs in recent decades, fueled by a loss of manufacturing jobs.

"There has been too much talk of the old days, and when we had this factory and when we did steel and when we did this. We have to talk more about the future rather than the past. We have to talk more about what we are going to be," he said.