

Biz Council's Trickle Down Effect

Adam Sichko
Reporter



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The Business Council of New York State endorsed Democrat Andrew Cuomo for governor on Wednesday.

The move will impact the campaign and the thinking of other business organizations as they, too, prepare endorsements in the race for governor—and decide whether to back Republican businessman Carl Paladino over Cuomo.

The Business Council is arguably the most prominent business group in the state, particularly upstate. It's run by many of the major corporations in the state, and this is the first year it's made endorsements.

While the endorsement may not carry any weight with voters, it certainly will make waves in the state's business community.

Given that, the lobby's endorsement will likely enable Cuomo to chip away at some of the support base Paladino, a Buffalo developer, has built upstate.

It could also be useful in trying to demonstrate that a broad range of interests in the state want him to be governor.

The endorsement also illustrates that for business groups, the key calculus in this election could be which candidate has a better chance of executing his vision and securing votes from legislators, more so than what policy positions the candidates take.

Cuomo is the polished political veteran, currently the state's attorney general. Paladino embraces his style as a brash and unvarnished candidate in his first run for office—and he's made a range of controversial, headline-grabbing statements throughout the campaign.

"Paladino has come out with broad, sweeping statements. He even extremely said he'll cut spending by 20 percent. The question you have to ask is, politically, how can he do that?" said Sandra Parker. She runs the Rochester Business Alliance, a 2,200-member lobby that endorsed Cuomo late last month.

"But I know some of my counterparts aren't certain yet in terms of where their endorsements will be," Parker said. "I've had conversations with very successful businessmen here who really think they'll cast their vote for Paladino. So there's still a lot of question marks."

In fact, the biggest advantage of The Business Council's endorsement may be the ensuing effort to convince other business lobbies to back the Cuomo campaign.

"If we can encourage more business leaders and business organizations to support Andrew Cuomo, that would be helpful," said Ken Adams, president and CEO of The Business Council.

Adams said Cuomo will "change the business of doing business in New York."

Cuomo certainly won't be banking on heavy financial support from the lobby. The lobby's political committee has just \$42,000 in its bank account—which pales in comparison to influential labor unions such as New York State United Teachers, which is sitting on \$7.2 million of unspent funds.

(Cuomo doesn't appear to need the money, either. He has \$19 million of unspent campaign funds).

Paladino's campaign manager dismissed the endorsement, calling it the equivalent of "asking the Boston Strangler to massage your neck."

"Their membership includes small businesses, but it is controlled by Albany insiders, big-business lobbyists and trade associations who have a vested interest in the status quo," said Michael Caputo, campaign manager for Paladino.

Caputo said the endorsement wouldn't haunt the business lobby if Paladino wins the Nov. 2 elections.

"Carl has a lot of respect for The Business Council, and he looks forward to working with them when he becomes governor," Caputo said.

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