

Why Employers Should Support Mayoral Accountability

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Over the past months, forums, polls and meetings have been conducted to discuss Mayoral

Accountability of the Rochester City School District (RCSD). Rochester Business Alliance has been an active participant in many of these events, and supports the city in this effort. Why? Because we are an organization of employers, and ensuring the success of city students is essential to the development of our region's future workforce. Currently, the district graduates only about 46 percent of its students, despite per pupil expenditures that exceed tuition costs at some leading local colleges.

We believe that the status quo is something our community simply cannot afford. And we believe that the accountability, administrative efficiency and academic achievement goals outlined in the city's proposal will lead to improved student and system performance.

On accountability: The mayor has pledged to significantly improve student attendance, test scores and graduation rates within a five-year pilot period. Under state law, the city is required to provide \$119 million annually – or roughly three-fourths of the city tax levy – to the school district. Aligning accountability for spending with the official responsible for city finances would improve accountability to taxpayers.

On administrative efficiency: The school district has its own departments for purchasing, facilities management, transportation and many other operations that duplicate city government functions. Consolidating these functions under the city would give the mayor authority to reduce duplication and ensure the most efficient use of resources.

On academic achievement: Improving academic achievement is the most important reason to support a change in city school oversight. While not a “quick fix,” mayoral oversight has made a positive difference in other districts nationwide. Among the “Big 5” urban districts in our state, New York City – the one district with city government oversight – has the

highest graduation rates, and the best math and literacy achievement scores.

The Rochester Business Alliance is joining with city school district parents, faith-based community leaders, trade unions and others to support Mayoral Accountability. Stay tuned for more information on community-wide efforts to support school reform.

Under the leadership of Gov. David Paterson, Assemblyman David Gantt (D-Rochester) and Assemblyman Joe Morelle (D-Irondequoit), a bill to enact this measure will be introduced in the state Legislature in the coming weeks. The Rochester Senate delegation has yet to announce their support. RBA will be launching a Voter Voice e-advocacy campaign, which will allow area residents to send letters urging the Senate to pass this legislation.

Please visit the Public Policy section of our website in the coming weeks for updates and information on how to ask your Senator to support this important issue. For more information and resources on Mayoral Accountability, click here or go to our Public Policy section on our website and click on “Issues.” ★

Update on Local, State and Federal Initiatives

Unshackle Upstate

Unshackle Upstate has a plan to change the history of politics in New York. This November, the governor, attorney general, comptroller and all 212 seats in the legislature will be up for re-election. It's the perfect time for all of us to make our voices heard, to press the issues and to let our elected officials know that we are fed up with their tax-and-spend tactics, and that to earn our vote, they must change.

Earlier this year, Unshackle Upstate declared Nov. 2, 2010 as Judgment Day for all state lawmakers. If legislators choose not to listen to the largest special interest group in the state – hardworking taxpayers and job creators – then voters will act accordingly at the polls on Election Day.

As part of this campaign, Unshackle Upstate will be keeping a Scorecard to monitor and report on legislators' voting records on

various issues critical to the state economy and job growth. The Scorecard will help constituents hold elected officials accountable.

In 2010, businesses and taxpayers need to stand firm and demand that our issues are heard and addressed. To join us in our fight to lower taxes, create jobs and improve the state's failing economy, please click here and become a member of the Unshackle Army.

For more information on Unshackle Upstate and the Judgment Day campaign, please visit www.unshackleupstate.com.

Immigration Reform

Following passage of the health care law, many expect President Obama to tackle his other campaign promise – comprehensive immigration reform. Sen. Schumer (D-N.Y.) is drafting immigration legislation and recently released a blueprint that provides further details.

While a bill has yet

to be formalized, Schumer says the plan will include a biometric “fraud-proof” Social Security card, enhanced border security, a “tough but fair” system that allows current illegal immigrants to obtain citizenship, and green cards for educated individuals that have received a graduate degree in technology, engineering, science or math from a university in our country.

It remains to be seen whether Congress will take on this sensitive topic in 2010. Rochester Business Alliance will closely monitor the immigration debate and will continue to update our members on issues of particular significance to employers.

For further information, please contact Chris Wiest at (585)256-4626. ★

