

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Association of Towns of the State of New York (518 465-7933)
New York State Association of Counties (518 465-1473)
New York State Conference of Mayors (518 463-1185)
New York State School Boards Association (518 783-0200)
Business Council of New York State, Inc. (518 465-7511)

For Release: August 31, 2006

Local Elected Officials, Business Leaders Ask Gubernatorial Candidates To Oppose Anti-Taxpayer Changes to the Taylor Law

A broad coalition of local government leaders and the business community is asking New York's gubernatorial candidates to defend property taxpayers by condemning this year's "flood of amendments" to the law that governs public employer/employee relations in the state.

The letter to Democrats Eliot Spitzer and Tom Suozzi, and Republican John Faso said the Legislature passed more than a dozen bills that would strengthen the negotiating power of public-sector unions – while taking no action to defend taxpayers' rights at the bargaining table. The letter was signed by leaders of the Association of Towns of New York State, New York State Association of Counties, New York State Conference of Mayors, New York State School Boards Association, and the Business Council of New York State Inc.

"One-sided changes to the Taylor Law will drive up taxes by making it harder for local governments – and the state itself – to control costs," the local-government and business groups said. "Such changes also threaten the quality of public services in New York. Efficient local government suffers when Albany ties local officials' hands at the bargaining table. We can't help but wonder why these changes are necessary."

The letter called on all the candidates to urge the Legislature, "publicly and in the strongest possible terms," not to override Governor Pataki's vetoes of S.3178 and other Taylor Law changes. The local government and business leaders asked candidates to support reform of binding arbitration, which drives up the cost of police and fire services for localities throughout the state. They also urged reform of the Triborough Amendment to the Taylor Law, which guarantees continuation of benefits and some salary increases after the expiration of a contract.

Rather than enacting only union-sponsored changes to the Taylor Law, the Legislature should conduct "a broader review of the statute that gives proper consideration to the taxpayers, and to local elected officials' needs for reasonable managerial authority," the groups said.

##

(The following is the text of the letter sent Aug. 31, 2006, to Eliot Spitzer, John Faso and Tom Suozzi)

Dear (name):

You have spoken frequently about the high and rising burden of property taxes in New York State. State mandates from Albany are a major reason our local taxes are the highest in the nation. Many of those rules relate to the bargaining relationship between public employers and public employee unions, as governed by the Taylor Law.

We recognize the need for a balance between the negotiating power of public employers and that of public employees. This year, however, the Legislature's actions skewed that balance by approving a flood of amendments to the Taylor Law – more than a dozen bills, in fact, that would strengthen the bargaining power of public-sector unions to the detriment of public employers and taxpayers. Not a single major bill, among the hundreds that emerged from this year's session, would enhance the Taylor Law's protections for the taxpaying public. Taxpayers deserve at least equal consideration from the Legislature when the public employee unions lobby for more bargaining power. Clearly, that did not happen this year.

Among the most objectionable bills passed by the Legislature this year are S. 3177 and S. 3178. Each would reward public-sector unions for refusal to agree to new contracts with local governments, school districts or the state itself. We are also concerned about the precedent that would be set by S.6758, the proposal to add an estimated 52,000 home-based day-care providers to the state payroll. One-sided changes to the Taylor Law will drive up taxes by making it harder for local governments – and the state itself – to control costs. Such changes make it more costly to provide public services, thus raising the threat of reductions in those essential services. Efficient local government suffers when Albany ties local officials' hands at the bargaining table. We can't help but wonder why these changes are necessary.

Many state legislators have pointed to property tax relief as a top priority. Local officials are doing all they can, in the face of serious fiscal challenges, to avoid further overburdening their property taxpayers. But making it harder for localities to manage their largest cost center – employee pay and benefits – only makes property-tax increases more likely.

Fortunately, Governor Pataki has vetoed several of the bills that we believe would do the most damage to the public employer-employee relationship. Several other bills, however, have yet to reach the Governor's desk. And there is always the possibility that the Legislature will consider overriding some or all of the Taylor Law-related mandates that the Governor rejects.

The undersigned groups, representing a broad coalition of local governments and the business community, are united in our opposition to this year's one-sided approach to revising the Taylor Law. We urge you to add your voice in opposition, and in support of the taxpayers as well. More specifically, we respectfully request that you:

- Express your support for Governor Pataki's vetoes of S.3178 and other Taylor Law-related bills;
- Urge both houses of the Legislature, publicly and in the strongest possible terms, not to override those vetoes;
- Support local taxpayers through the reform of existing Taylor Law provisions relating to binding arbitration and the Triborough Amendment; and
- Oppose one-sided changes to the Taylor Law absent a broader review of the statute that gives proper consideration to the taxpayers and to local elected officials' needs for reasonable managerial authority.

We appreciate the comments you have already made about potential changes to the Taylor Law, and look forward to your response.

(Signed)

G. Jeffrey Haber
Executive Director
Association of Towns of the State of New York

Peter Baynes
Executive Director
New York State Conference of Mayors
and Other Municipal Officials

Stephen J. Acquario
Executive Director
New York State Association of Counties

Timothy G. Kremer
Executive Director
New York State School Boards Association

Daniel B. Walsh
President
Business Council of New York State, Inc.