

Gannet Newspapers Questionnaire

Q: Most studies show the state has the highest property-tax burden in the country. What is your plan to control property taxes in New York?

One, eliminate the biggest expense that property taxes pay for, the county/NYC contribution to Medicaid, which the state should pick up. That is standard in the rest of the country. Medicaid is over half the county budget in most counties. The best way to do this and save money for the county – both in taxes and as an employer – is by adopting a single payer Medicare for All health care system. The state's recent study found that such a system would save New Yorkers about \$28 billion a year by 2019 compared to the individual mandate system passed by Congress.

Two, comply with the statutory requirement for state revenue sharing with local government. Started by Gov. Rockefeller, Section 54 of the State Finance law recognized that the state income tax was a more progressive way to raise revenue than local governments that only have the regressive property and sales tax. I would increase state revenue sharing by 400% by requiring the state to meet the statutory requirement to provide 8% of its revenues to local government.

Three, have revenue sharing from the more progressive state and federal income taxes pay most of the cost of funding schools, instead of the regressive local property tax.

Four, target property tax relief to New Yorkers that most need it. The Star program should be reformed into an expanded property tax circuit breaker, helping low and middle income residents rather than primarily going to the wealthy under the present system.

Q: Frustration with state government is at an all-time high. For years, good-government advocates have argued for tighter campaign-finance laws and ethics oversight while decrying the strong influence of special-interest groups and lobbyists. What will your administration do to address these issues successfully?

While I support strong ethics and campaign finance reform, far more fundamental changes are needed to create a democratic state government that is responsive to the residents of New York.

First, we need to adopt proportional representation for legislative bodies and instant runoff voting for single Executive positions (e.g., Governor, Comptroller, US Senate, etc.). The US is one of the last few of the world's democracies that still uses the 18th century winner-take-all, single-member-district system to elect its legislative bodies. This creates two center-right political parties that are both controlled by wealthy corporate elites.

Our single-member-district, winner-take-all election system entrenches the two-party system because it motivates defensive voting for the lesser evil against what you fear most. Most state legislative district are one-party districts controlled by the majority party in that district, leading to non-competitive elections that yield representation for the minority party or parties. The election doesn't really count since in the vast majority of cases you know that the majority party in that district will win the election.

Most democracies elect their legislative bodies through a proportional representation system that allocates seats based on the percentage of votes the various parties receive. This creates a legislative body that is reflective of the political makeup of the voters. It creates a multi-party system that motivates real discussion, compromise, and consensus-building, unlike the two-party system in which one side's gain is the other's loss, which yields the partisan bickering and deadlock that we see today.

In instant runoff voting for executive offices, a majority of votes is required to win. Voters rank each candidate in order of preference. If no candidate wins a majority in the first round, the lowest ranked candidate is eliminated and their next ranked candidate gets their vote. This process continues until one candidate has a majority.

Second, democratize the legislative rules and eliminate the patronage funds that leaders use to control rank and file members. Encourage rank and file members of the state legislature to act as legislators and not cede all power to the majority leader / speaker. The power of the leaders should be reduced by requiring equal staffing and resources for each legislator. Member items, which are used to reward or punish individual legislators, should be eliminated. Members, not the speaker, should decide committee assignments and chairs and have the right to run hearings and move legislation democratically without requiring permission of the leaders

I support a public campaign financing. I would prohibit businesses or individuals doing business with the state to make campaign contributions. I would make all open government rules apply to the state legislature as well as the executive branch. I would largely eliminate legislators' ability to receive outside income and require full disclosure of any exceptions allowed (e.g., a farmer should be allowed to continue farming, a doctor to continue helping patients).

Q: The executive and Legislature have had difficulty agreeing when it comes to approving major agenda items over the years. How do you plan to engage state lawmakers and have them to take up your proposals?

If the Green candidates win, the mandate will be clear and powerful. Legislators will know the Greens can run against them on that mandate in two short years. As governor, I will tell the public what I'm doing and why and what the special interests are doing to obstruct the agenda and why. The campaign for change must get stronger the day after the election. We want voters engaged year round, not just on election day.

I would use the power of Governor to convene the legislature in extraordinary session on a full time basis until their work was concluded.

At the same time, legislators are entitled to respect as individuals elected to represent their communities. My support for democratization of the legislative rules so that power is equally distributed and one member, one vote is the reality would be well-received by the rank-and-file majority of legislators and would demonstrate my respect for their important role. Their advice and consent would be solicited. I would listen to them. I would negotiate with them in a publicly transparent way.

I would encourage true joint conference committees with members from both houses to help resolve differences over legislative proposals. These committees must be real, not the window dressing of the recent joint budget conference committees.

Q: The upstate region has been losing jobs and population to other states at a steady, if not accelerated pace. What is the cause of this? How would you turn around the upstate economy?

We must first recognize that the trickle down economics of providing tax cuts to the rich and hand outs to large businesses over the last thirty years has utterly failed to help the upstate economy. Yet this continues to be the principal agenda of the two major parties.

Giving the rich more money in the form of tax cuts doesn't work because they don't invest long term to create new means of production and employment. Instead, they speculate on Wall Street to rearrange ownership of existing means of production.

Because of its abundance of clean water, Upstate New York is well positioned to profit from the adverse impacts of global warming and declining oil if it focuses on and leads the development a sustainable, green economy. The public sector has to step up make this happen, not with still more corporate welfare tax breaks and subsidies, but with public investment in a green industrial policy of investing in renewable energy, mass transit, green buildings, organic agriculture, and clean manufacturing. These are the new means of production needed for a sustainable green economic recovery and future.

In addition to public spending with private contractors to build this sustainable green economy, we need public investment by a state bank like North Dakota has. We need a public bank because the Wall Street banks are not investing long term in the creation of tangible assets upstate, but only willing to invest short term in paper assets in global financial markets. When the big banks do lend to us upstate they require collateral, which only serves to mortgage our regional assets to global financial institutions and siphon increasing portions of our income away as interest. We need a public bank to make equity investments in the real economy producing goods and services instead of Wall Street's debt leveraging in the financial economy that extracts interest and rent from us.

We can raise the funds needs to finance such investments by reversing thirty years of tax cuts for the rich in NY. Going back to the more state income tax brackets of 1972 would raise an additional \$8 billion, while giving 95% of us a tax cut. We can raise another \$16 billion by halting the rebate of the Stock Transfer Tax to Wall Street speculators. Imposing a 50% tax on the bonuses bankers' are giving themselves from the trillions of federal tax dollars and obligations used to bail them out would raise another \$10 billion. After covering the projected state deficit of \$9 billion, we would have a \$25 billion surplus to fund this Green New Deal.

We need democratic control of economic development. We need to eliminate the crony capitalism system used by the IDAs, ESDC, and hundreds of state authorities to reward campaign contributors. Rather than trying to outbid other communities with tax breaks to lure business here while we undermine the tax base that funds our infrastructure, schools, and other public resources and services, we should invest in locally owned businesses, particularly cooperatives. If we own our own jobs

through worker- and consumer-owned cooperatives, they are not going to relocate to cheap labor, low tax, no regulation states or countries.

Q: Most recently, Gov. David Paterson used a unique power of the governor's office to pass large portions of his budget through the use of emergency-appropriation measures. If the Legislature dawdles on approving a budget, is this a tool you would use?

Yes. The legislature too often evades its prime responsibility of passing a sound budget. They prefer to delay and delay – all the while raising funds from special interests – to create a sense of crisis that allows for last minute horse trading to go on in secret in the back room.

I support moving back the start of the state fiscal year to give state lawmakers more time to review and respond to the budget proposed by the Governor. It is difficult to review, amend, and adopt a \$136 billion spending plan in 9 weeks. However, the legislature must also worker harder during these months – not just coming to Albany twice a week. And they must be able to multi-task, dealing responsibility with legislative proposals while also negotiating the budget. Too often lawmakers tell constituents that they can't deal with important bills until the budget is resolved. And then when the budget is finally resolved, they say it is too late to deal with anything other than a few key bills. This is wrong. I will force them to stay in Albany until all such matters are resolved.