



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Small Business Could Point Way to Stronger Upstate

GEORGE WINNER December 16, 2009

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Many of us have been clamoring throughout the past year for New York government to take a more aggressive approach and make a stronger investment in turning around the economy of upstate New York.

I won't take the chance here to retell the story of upstate New York's economic decline over the past decade – there's going to be plenty of opportunities for that as we move through the 2010 legislative session beginning in early January. Suffice it to say here that as President

Obama and his administration seek to refocus the national economic renewal effort, New York government should do no less than to take steps of its own to take advantage of any and every opportunity to truly begin an aggressive, meaningful effort to rebuild the upstate economy.

The depth of commitment Albany's current leaders will ultimately demonstrate toward the upstate region remains to be seen – and we have plenty of reason to be skeptical in a government currently under one-party, one-region control – but there many of us who have every determination to find a way to rebuild and rejuvenate the upstate region.

At the very least, we will keep raising the question: what is New York going to do to jump-start the upstate economy?

There's no shortage of blueprints pointing the way and recommending actions on how to move forward. In fact, a state task force first commissioned by Governor David Paterson last July, the Small Business Task Force, recently issued its final report providing recommendations for improving the state's economy by strengthening its critical underpinning of small businesses. The full report can be found [online](#).

Small businesses account for 98 percent – yes, nearly all – of New York's private employers and provide the jobs for 55 percent of the state's active private-sector labor force. So it's just common sense to recognize that encouraging small business activity must be part of any effort to turn around the upstate economy.

A few years ago, when I first introduced legislation to reform New York's Empire Zone program, I noted that it wasn't as effective as it could be to encourage economic growth in rural, upstate New York because it didn't focus enough on small business development. It was ignoring real opportunities to build a solid, sustainable foundation of small businesses.

Jobs are jobs, and I believed we could make New York's investment in Empire Zones produce much more for upstate, rural economic growth. A cluster of small businesses can be an economic lifeline for a rural community.

That remains true. So I certainly welcome the final report of the Small Business Task Force, which includes recommendations to:

- increase access to capital through initiatives like the creation of a new Small Business Revolving Loan Fund and a state-supported Seed Capital Fund;
- reduce red tape and provide regulatory reform through efforts like the development of an online permitting and licensing process;
- provide new tools and techniques for business growth including an increase in on-the-job training opportunities; and
- improve the access that small business owners have to potentially beneficial state resources.

This effort has included the launching of the following two useful, online guides: 1.) the Directory of Small Business Programs, which describes 143 state programs currently operating through 28 different state agencies aimed at helping New Yorkers start and grow their small businesses, and 2.) the Directory of Small Business Alternative Lending Programs, which seeks to connect small business owners with alternative banks and credit unions currently making loans.

These free, online publications can be found [here](#).

So there are blueprints before us, now the challenge remains to finally convince Albany's leaders to act.

