



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George M. Borrello

Senator Borrello and Assemblywoman Byrnes Host Small Business Roundtable in Livingston County

GEORGE M. BORRELLO December 3, 2021

| ISSUE: **SMALL BUSINESS, ECONOMIC GROWTH, COVID-19**



DANSVILLE – Senator George Borrello and Assemblywoman Marjorie Byrnes hosted a “Legislative Small Business Roundtable” in Dansville this morning to gather input from a diversity of small businesses on the challenges they face as state and local economies work to recover from the financial hardships of the past two years. Representatives from the region’s hospitality, manufacturing, health care and insurance/financial sectors participated in the forum.

“With the 2022 Legislative Session set to begin in just over a month, Assemblywoman Byrnes and I felt it was important to hear from our small businesses and get a read on how they are doing as our economy strives to recover. Small businesses employ more than half of New Yorkers, so it is critically important that we listen to them and work in partnership to help them succeed and thrive. When they do well, New

York State does well.”

“Our state’s success is dependent on businesses thriving, not just surviving. Today’s event was critical to understanding the current challenges facing a wide variety of businesses. I’m grateful for the discussion and look forward to using the information as we return to Albany in January.”

A focal point of the discussion were persistent staffing shortages in a number of industries, which several participants cited.

“We have a major labor shortage in our state despite the fact that New York still has one of the worst unemployment numbers in the nation at a recession-level rate of 6.8% while the national average is just 4.6%. That is a clear sign that our economic recovery is being severely hindered by bad government policy out of Albany.”

Joe Bucci from American Rock Salt noted that their business has been challenged by an ongoing lack of workers that pre-dates the pandemic. He said that schools need to devote more focus to the career opportunities in technical fields and the skilled trades.

Mr. Bucci said, “If you gave kids a taste of the trades, you may find that you’ve got kids with four-year college degrees who will graduate and then open their plumbing business or welding business. Our system doesn’t allow us to do that.”

Senator Borrello said, “Workforce development and the need for more robust career and technical education options in middle and high schools is something I’ve been advocating for years. There is tremendous demand for people in the skilled trades – electricians, plumbers, welders, HVAC technicians, just to name a few. Employers are desperate for workers in these fields, and the pay is excellent and, with experience, can easily reach into the six figures.”

“For decades, our schools worked to funnel most students into the four-year college career path, without educating them about the opportunities offered by technical and trades careers. The current labor shortage in the skilled trades is the consequence of that,” said Senator Borrello. “That has begun changing and there is a stronger emphasis on exposing students to the trades, as well as new STEM and technical curriculums. However, it is clear from the comments we heard today, more needs to be done.”

Another topic of interest was rising energy costs and the bottom-line impact they are having on many businesses. Senator Borrello noted that the aggressive climate goals of the state’s Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (Climate Act), and proposals like the Climate and Community Investment Act (CCIA) are poised to raise energy costs within the state even further.

Senator Borrello explained that the CCIA would add a new 55 cent-per-gallon tax on New Yorkers at the gas pump. In addition, this bill would raise the cost of natural gas for residential home heating by 25 percent. These added costs at a time when gas prices are already at a seven-year high would be crippling to small businesses as well as family budgets.

Mr. Bucci said, because our labor costs are fixed, “We aren’t just competing for work here in Livingston County. Our competition is in Pennsylvania, Maine, Vermont and other New England states. The only

way we can be competitive, because the wages we can't necessarily control because we are a union company – is in our energy costs, so we have a big concern about that [rising energy costs].

Challenges around the legalization and the eventual sale of marijuana in New York State were also cited as areas of concern for several of the businesses represented. Senator Borrello and Assemblywoman Byrnes noted the disparities in the rules pertaining to consumption of marijuana and those for alcohol, stressing that it is a major public safety issue for hospitality businesses, employers and local government.

Participants also voiced concern over steep increases in unemployment insurance rates, which are eating into their bottom line. Several voiced their opinions, with Senator Borrello and Assemblywoman Byrnes concurring, that the state shouldn't be burdening employers with the responsibility for replenishing the state's depleted Unemployment Insurance Fund, as the massive layoffs were the result of government-mandated shutdowns.

“This discussion provided some valuable insights into the challenges small businesses are facing and areas where they need more cooperation from the state. This input will help us shape our 2022 agenda and target our advocacy on the issues of greatest concern. The future of small business will determine the future of New York State, which is why I am grateful to all our stakeholders for participating in this discussion.”