

# Can a Hudson Valley delegation succeed?

Nancy Cutler

## PERSPECTIVE

### The delegation

There they were, eight state senators, standing together for a picture. Four Democrats and four Republicans who represent the Hudson Valley had gathered the not for some glad-handing awards ceremony or groundbreaking "photo op," but of their own volition.

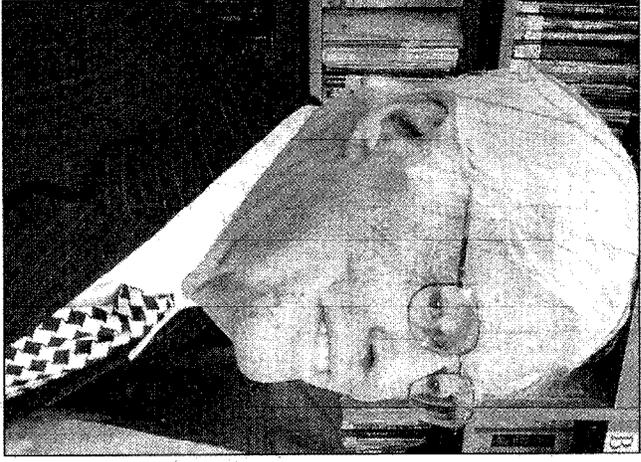
They had just completed a second meeting of the newly formed New York State Senate Hudson Valley Delegation, which draws together the region's senators to talk about issues that affect their connected districts.

A photo op was thrown in at the end, of course, because this was a moment to document, and that is what politicians do. But the idea of a Hudson Valley delegation is a smart one. In theory, senators can unite to influence decisions in Albany that have an impact on their Hudson Valley constituents.

Whether the leadership in Albany will actually "hear" a local delegation is another matter. Albany's not a place known for ideas bubbling up to leadership — it's still a three-men-in-a-room kind of place where closed doors are hallmarks of major decisions. And will the delegation's bipartisan spirit stick, especially under the pressure of the party politics that rule the Senate? We can hope.

The New York State Senate Hudson Valley Delegation, led by co-chairmen Sen. Jeffrey Klein, D-Bronx, and Sen. Thomas Morahan, R-New City, includes senators from Rockland, Westchester, Orange, Putnam and Dutchess counties. Also attending a meeting last week:

- Sen. John Bonacic, R-Mount Hope, Orange County
- Sen. Ruth Hassell-Thompson, D-Mount Vernon
- Sen. Vincent Leibel, R-Patterson
- Sen. Suzi Oppenheimer, D-Manaronek
- Sen. Stephen Saland, R-Poughkeepsie
- Sen. Andrea Stewart-Cousins, D-Yorkers



Senate Deputy Majority Leader Jeffrey Klein, left, D-Bronx, and Sen. Thomas Morahan, R-New City, are co-chairmen of the state Senate Hudson Valley Delegation, which draws together the senators to talk about issues in their connected districts.

File photos/The Journal News

The senators seem to understand that people are fed up. "We've got to stop this 'gotcha' politics," Senate Deputy Majority Leader Jeffrey Klein, D-Bronx, said after Thursday's meeting. He and Sen. Thomas Morahan, R-New City, are the Hudson Valley delegation co-chairmen. The two said their constituents have made it clear that they don't care about party allegiance or Albany's

warped protocol; they want things fixed, from the deficit to skyrocketing property taxes to the financial drain called the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

### An easy target

For Hudson Valley senators, the MTA is the low-hanging fruit. It's easy to work up a froth over the payroll tax that's been imposed on every suburban business, nonprofit and school district.

(The latter is supposed to be reimbursed, by a state with a multibillion-dollar deficit.) Last week, the members met with MTA Chairman Jay Walder, who is some 45 days into the job, to talk about the "efficiency and credibility of the MTA," said Morahan, who hosted the confab in his Nanuet office.

The team also addressed equity. Many northern suburbs feel that they contribute far more to the MTA than

they receive back in services. Two Hudson Valley counties, Rockland and Orange, together put in some \$80 million more than they get back in services.

Those two counties are among four known as "quarter pounders," because they only have a quarter of a vote on the MTA board of directors.

lief from MTA contributions. They won assurances for more financial accountability and overall fairness for suburbanites, but it will take more than meetings with the MTA to accomplish that.

### Beyond MTA

State lawmakers return to Albany this week to tackle Gov. David Paterson's deficit reduction plan — or produce their own plan. There was no singular delegation position on solving New York's swelling deficit, but the local delegation at least skipped the partisan finger-pointing. "Everybody's going to have some pain," Morahan said.

Other regional issues include Stewart International Airport; the Tappan Zee Bridge/Interstate 287 Project; and legislation to check school property taxes, such as a cap on annual increases. Klein summed up the real topic for their suburban constituents: "Property taxes, property taxes, property taxes."

The Hudson Valley, in many ways, is neither fish nor fowl — its issues don't match New York City's, nor do its needs jibe with upstate. Can Hudson Valley delegator make a difference? We'll have to see how far this brand of bipartisanship can take us.

The writer is Rockland opinion editor.