

TIMES HERALD-RECORD

MY VIEW

A representative must be more than an elected official

By John Bonacic

The dictionary defines "representative" as one who "stands up or acts for another or others." "Elected officials" vote on the matters that come before them. A "representative," however, gives voice to his or her constituency. That voice must express not only the easy decisions put forward by the constituency, but also the difficult ones.

I attend somewhere around 500 public events a year across four counties in my Senate district. I participate in another approximately 1,000 meetings per year in my offices. When you hear a message from one or two people at a handful of events each year, you listen, but you can't assume that represents the views of your entire constituency. However, when you hear a message over and over again and you agree with the view yourself, you have an obligation to give voice to that

message. That is the job of a representative.

The message I have heard from across our region: We need reform and change in the way Albany is run.

Last month, it was revealed that the Senate majority leader's business dealings are under FBI scrutiny. Part of that investigation appears to relate to the majority leader's decision to provide a \$500,000 grant to a for-profit company whose officer (through another company) apparently paid the majority leader's private consulting firm several hundred thousand dollars.

Such action may or may not be criminal, but it creates a bad perception. The fact that more than a half-dozen other state lawmakers have become convicted lawbreakers in the past few years also does not help the perception problem Albany faces. In the end, when the public loses faith in its government, indeed, all is lost.

Based on what my constituents are telling me, and based on the circumstances, I decided to become the only senator in the state to publicly express my view that a change in the leadership in the Senate and Assembly is needed. I know there are many good elected officials in the Legislature who want change and reform, but for a variety of reasons have not stepped forward - yet.

I hear from many constituents that they do not like the level of power put into the hands of the legislative leaders. I do not like it myself. I do not like having to ask one person, over and over again, for the money I think my district needs.

In the end, a representative must be more than just "an elected official." A representative is obliged to do what he thinks is right, even when it may cause some personal or political inconvenience.

Representatives must serve with an agenda. My agenda is simple: Fight to end school property taxes, work to make sure our hospitals are state-of-the-art, help our children prepare for the jobs of the 21st century to be created in New York and, yes, fight for change and reform in the way our government is run.

I hear the people of our district loud and clear. Those

are your priorities. Those are the things I will continue to be saying in the state Senate. I am honored to serve as an elected official in the state Senate. I hope you consider me to be your representative as well.

John Bonacic represents the 42nd state Senate district, which includes all or parts of Delaware, Orange, Sullivan and Ulster counties.