



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George D. Maziarz

Golisano, Maziarz Team Up To Battle Bridge Commission

GEORGE D. MAZIARZ February 6, 2009



Western New York businessman and government reform advocate Tom Golisano and State Senator George Maziarz today announced they were teaming up in an effort to bring public accountability and transparency to the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission. As part of that effort, Golisano announced that his Responsible New York organization would fund a lawsuit to compel the Bridge Commission to adhere to state freedom of information and sunshine laws.

“Transparency is essential to making our government work and for the Bridge Commission to think their operations should be kept from the public is appalling,” said Golisano. “In this day and age, public entities cannot simply be allowed to operate in the shadows, away from public accountability and transparency. Therefore, I am proud to stand here with Senator Maziarz and announce that Responsible New York will take the Bridge Commission to court and force them to do the right thing.”

Senator Maziarz said he welcomed the support of Golisano to the cause and regrets that the issue is headed to court.

“I am sadly disappointed that the commissioners continue to believe that closed doors and backroom deals are acceptable,” said Maziarz. “Each of the U.S. commissioners serves at the will of the Governor and from everything I have seen, Governor Paterson believes in open government. That is why in addition to this lawsuit, I am also calling on the governor to replace all of the U.S. commissioners.

“Right now, the Bridge Commission refuses to announce when their meetings are being held even though every state agency in New York must give public notice. They refuse to convene the meetings in public, even though public agencies must. They do not allow for any measure of public participation at their meetings. This is just not acceptable.”

Maziarz and Golisano pointed out that while the agency likes to claim they are not subject to any of the open government requirements, there is both an opinion from Robert Freeman, the expert on open meetings law and federal statute that says otherwise.

“In addition, the state comptroller audited the Bridge Commission in 1995 which clearly shows at some level they accept the need for public accountability,” said Golisano. “And considering it’s been 14 years, perhaps the comptroller should visit the commission again.

“I also found one last interesting fact,” said Maziarz. “While the commissioners on one hand claim to be above the jurisdiction of New York State government, the commission has official, specially-issued New York license plates for nine vehicles. I guess they’ll take state perks, not just state oversight.”