



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## Tell Me It Isn't So -- the Mta Is at It Again: a \$20 Million Employee Lounge

STEPHEN M. SALAND October 5, 2009

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\$20 million dollars dedicated for the renovation of the Grand Central Terminal for an employee lounge?! If improvements were needed, \$20 million was not!

I must have misunderstood the media account recently published in the Lower Hudson News. It can't be; it makes no sense. The MTA is broke. We heard that last year when now Lieutenant Governor Richard Ravitch created a plan to tax us into the ground.

It also cannot be true that MTA threw out a paying tenant, Donald Trump's tennis club in fact, so they could use the tennis courts to build the lounge. Truly, who would believe such a story?

Hold on, it gets worse. Trump's club was only paying \$4 per square foot while the going rate for such space in the area was \$99 per square foot. No wonder the MTA is crying poor. Instead of charging more to lease the space, the wizards at the MTA decide they have a better idea.

Make way for the employee lounge.

Who's calling the shots here? Who's making these decisions? Tell us again why the residents and businesses of Dutchess County have been asked to pay more to support the MTA?

I recall being told there was not enough money for operations. I remember hearing the MTA and the Governor state there was not enough money to keep fares down. And then all of

those who voted yes to tax us more said there still wouldn't be enough for an MTA capital plan. A fiscal crisis beckoned – MTA was desperate for money.

Of course they were desperate, they needed a \$20 million lounge for conductors and engineers to rest between shifts. That's MTA's priority?!

In earnest, I hope the MTA has plans to maximize the space at Grand Central. So much more could and should be done to draw in revenue rather than just expend it. While there are those who would defend the MTA's decision to provide an improved space for employees, spending \$20 million in public funding to achieve it is a gross amount and an unreasonable use of tax dollars.

\$18 million is coming from the federal stimulus funds and the MTA is touting 550 construction jobs will be created. Creating jobs is great but how does spending \$20 million on a lounge benefit the public? Using stimulus funds for the creation of new rail lines, adding more cars to the tracks or perhaps making increased or expanding parking at stations – now those things benefit the public. What a crazy notion -- apply common sense to public expenditures. Why start now when the MTA can go unchecked because they have a New York City Governor and a Democrat-controlled Legislature who will vote to just keep taxing us more?

Just as the first installment of the new payroll tax is due on November 2<sup>ND</sup> we have to read that the MTA is again squandering our tax dollars. Stand back John and Jane Q. Public, you're about to be hit with another runaway train.