



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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One Week To Go

GEORGE WINNER October 25, 2010

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If you consider the 2010 election season in terms of horse racing – and I’ve been reading more than a few critics this election season lamenting that America’s political discourse has become little more than sports entertainment in too many races – then voters have reached the home stretch. It’s time to cross the finish line.

It’s time to decide.

So while it's hard in these final days to cut through the negative advertising and all the rest, here's my own issues scorecard on what I hope will guide voters' decisions on November 2nd :

-- The property tax burden. One fundamental, undeniable fact is this: we cannot hope to turn around our communities for the good of future generations if we do not remove counties including Chemung, Steuben and so many others across the upstate region from the list of the counties with the highest property tax burdens in the nation. It's the fundamental issue facing families struggling to make ends meet and impacting the ability of local leaders to fully invest in economic opportunities. Late last week, Chemung County Executive Tom Santulli highlighted a new public outreach campaign being undertaken by the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC) calling attention to this fact: nine New York State mandates consume 90% of the local property tax levy statewide. County leaders argue that state mandates are the reason so many upstate New York residents face the highest property taxes in the nation. You can read more on the NYSAC website, www.nysac.org.

-- Medicaid reform. I hesitate to have to beat the drum again on Medicaid reform, but in addition to Medicaid being listed No. 1 on NYSAC's list of the nine most onerous state mandates, it's also the single-largest state government expenditure. In other words, if you consider out-of-control state spending to be one of this year's most critical issues, then you better pay attention to how your candidates for public office think about the issue of Medicaid reform. It's become simple and straightforward: until New York government gets truly serious about reining in the cost of Medicaid, any talk about tax relief, more effective government, economic development, and all the rest is nothing more than whistling in the wind.

-- Upstate economic development. This issue is directly dependent on the other two outlined above. If taxpayer dollars continue to be gobbled up at such an alarming, out-of-control rate at the state and local levels by state mandates, especially Medicaid, it's tough to make any serious strides on opening more and more doors to economic opportunity across the upstate region. But regardless, it doesn't diminish the need for a strong commitment to the upstate economy, strong ideas about how to go about it, and a fundamental belief and understanding that government has a high responsibility to help create an economic climate that encourages private-sector job growth.

If enough of this year's candidates demonstrate a concern with this scorecard and, even more importantly, if enough of the candidates who demonstrate the experience and a strong set of ideas on what needs to be done are elected to office, then 2011 shapes up as a productive, meaningful year in New York government.

We're about to find out.