



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

David J. Valesky

New Law Will Give Communities Voices

DAVID J. VALESKY September 1, 2009

| ISSUE: **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENERGY, LOCAL GOVERNMENT, UTILITIES**

NYRI. Those four letters will forever evoke feelings of anger and frustration throughout communities in Madison and Oneida counties. Though the upside of the NYRI fight and subsequent victory was the successful coalescence of residents to fight for their homes and communities, none of us want to be forced to go through that battle again.

I vehemently opposed the NYRI project and did what I could as a state senator to help by pressuring the Public Service Commission and other agencies. But the best help I could provide groups like CARI and STOP NYRI was financial, and I was pleased to help direct state funds to that effort. Though my fellow state legislators and our federal representatives provided resources to help fund the defeat, much of the burden fell on organizers and residents to raise money.

It became resoundingly clear that, without a dependable revenue stream and substantial financial backing to hire lawyers, consultants, expert witnesses and more, the groups could not succeed against the deep pockets of powerful investment firms.

And that is just plain wrong.

As a result, my colleague, Assemblywoman RoAnn Destito and I introduced legislation that was signed into law this week that evens the playing field by giving communities the financial resources to have a loud voice in proposed power line projects like NYRI.

Now, application fees that the power companies pay to the state will be put in a special fund earmarked for affected municipalities. Depending on the size and scope of the proposed project, the fund can contain up to \$450,000. That way, the real stakeholders—municipalities and the people who live there—have a solid and predictable financial pool from which to draw.

Concerned residents can spend less time raising money and more time organizing, educating and advocating. And that's the way it should be.

This law provides more than a bank account. It provides protection for our communities from insidious projects like NYRI that have the potential to singlehandedly decimate our communities, decrease our property values, dissect our protected land, and increase Upstate utility rates.

As we've seen time and time again through history, and most recently with the defeat of the NYRI project, it is possible for David to defeat Goliath--we just need a big enough rock.