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Seward: Consolidate agencies, cut taxes

State senator also seeks freeze on state purchase of land for recreation

By JENNIFER BOGDAN, Observer-Dispatch

HERKIMER —

Consolidating state agencies, freezing the state's purchase of recreational land and creating tax cuts for small businesses are all part of Sen. James Seward's equation for eliminating the state's debt and growing its economy.

Seward, R-Milford, spoke about those initiatives as part of his 2010 legislative agenda he announced at the Herkimer County office building Friday morning.

“Upstate, in particular, has been victimized by higher taxes and out of control state spending,” Seward said. “However, commonsense spending reductions, real property tax relief and targeted support for small businesses can help put New York back on track.”

Among Seward's other goals:

- Slicing property taxes and reinstating the STAR rebate check program.
- Enforcing state laws allowing for the collection of cigarette taxes from Indian-owned businesses.
- Increasing Medicaid fraud detection.
- Advocating for comprehensive ethics reform in the state Legislature.

Seward said although some of his plans for reigning in spending, including instating a moratorium on the purchase of recreational spaces such as those in the Adirondack Park may not be popular with all, the cutbacks are necessary in a time of fiscal crisis.

“To preserve open space and environmentally sensitive areas it's important for the state to make such purchases, but can't that be postponed until better economic times?” Seward said.

No, it can't wait, said John Sheehan, communications director for the Adirondack Council, a non-profit that advocates for the preservation of the Adirondack Park.

“It's a terrible idea and one that has to be eliminated immediately,” Sheehan said, adding that protecting the land is vital to tourism in the North Country. “The state has consistently broken into the environmental protection funds and raided them unmercifully.”

As for Seward's goals of attracting more commerce to the state, business owners said they'd be grateful for any help they could receive.

Still, Sam Geloso, owner of Mohawk Valley Florist in Herkimer, said while Seward's plan is admirable, its execution could be challenging.

“We all have different needs,” Geloso said. “It's a really difficult task to decide who deserves what. I believe that as business people it's up to us to sharpen our pencils and make the changes.”