

Syracuse Post-Standard Questionnaire

Campaign message (maximum 75 words)

Tax the rich for a Green New Deal of full employment, single-payer health care, fully-funded public schools, tuition-free SUNY, and renewable energy. It's my prosperity plan vs. the austerity plans of both Cuomo and Paladino who want to cut public services in order to keep tax breaks for the rich. My progressive tax reforms will erase the state deficit, cut taxes for 95% of New Yorkers, and raise \$25 billion for the Green New Deal.

Question 1

Gov. David Paterson employed new tactics this year when he wanted the legislature to approve his budget. He squeezed his controversial year-long budget proposals into the weekly emergency bills the legislature was passing to keep basic government services going, essentially threatening to shut down state government if he did not get his way. Would you do that? What would you do differently?

The Governor and the party leaders in the legislature have too much power over the budget process. The rank-and-file legislators need to be empowered by democratic legislative rules that give them all equal staff and funding, eliminate member items, and enable them to elect committees and their chairs and move legislation by a democratic process without the veto of the party leaders. The legislature now evades its prime responsibility of passing a sound budget. They delay and delay – all the while raising funds from special interests – to create a sense of crisis that allows for last minute horse trading to go on in secret in the back rooms. I think the Governor was right this year in how he used the extender process due to the refusal of the legislature to deal with the budget. It is certainly not a resolution that benefits the state however. I support the creation of joint budget conference committees that have real power and responsibility to resolve differences between the two chambers – not the window dressing committee conferences of recent years.

Question 2

Paterson, some legislators and candidates have supported a property tax cap, which would limit the amount of money raised by local governments. Would you commit to capping state taxes? If not, why not?

I oppose capping local property or state taxes as inflexible, one-size-fits-all gimmicks that handcuff lawmakers. I support a progressive tax structure that shifts the burden from the working and middle classes to the very wealthy. Specifically, to relieve property taxes, the state should takeover the local contribution to Medicaid, which accounts for 45% of county property taxes. To eliminate the projected \$9 billion state deficit, the state should keep the Stock Transfer Tax it now rebates to Wall St. (\$16 billion), restore the 1972 progressive income tax structure (\$8 billion additional revenue, tax cuts for 95% of New Yorkers), and impose a 50% tax on the \$20 billion in cash bonuses that bailed-out Wall St. bankers paid themselves last year (\$10 billion). That's \$34 billion additional revenue. Subtract the projected \$9 billion deficit and it leaves \$25 billion for a Green New Deal of public jobs for the unemployed, single-payer health care, fully-funded public schools and colleges, and a clean energy transition.

Question 3

What would you do to stop double dipping, padding and other gimmicks public employees use to boost their pensions? Would you take back pension benefits already granted to current employees?

Unlike Cuomo and Paladino, I will not scapegoat rank-and-file unionized state workers, whose average pension is under \$16,000 a year, for the state's fiscal woes. However, I will go after exorbitant pensions for management-level state employees and the padding and double-dipping of a minority of workers who have taken advantage of rules that need to be changed to prevent these abuses. Double-dipping (receiving state pensions and salaries simultaneously) should be prohibited by law. Padding by working lots of overtime in the last years before retirement should likewise be prohibited. Pensions should be based contributions and accrual over a workers' whole career, not the top three years of salary. I would seek to take back pension benefits only if they were obtained by breaking rules existing at the time.