



THE BUFFALO NEWS

PRINT THIS

## For a change, letters from the editors of upstate newspapers on what's needed from a new senator

— The Daily News

Updated: 12/31/08 6:50 AM

Early next year, Hillary Rodham Clinton will vacate her Senate position to become secretary of state in the Obama administration. Gov. David A. Paterson will then appoint a Senate replacement. Upstate communities are rightly adamant that the new senator pay attention to their concerns, which often are overshadowed by the political power of New York City and other downstate areas. The Poughkeepsie Journal editorial board reached out to editorialists across upstate to get their thoughts on these issues — and to find out what the new senator needs to know about upstate. Here are those views, also posted at [www.buffalonews.com/upstatefocus](http://www.buffalonews.com/upstatefocus)

...

### Poughkeepsie

No one seems sure if this area is actually “upstate” or “downstate” anymore.

That's because, with each year, the valley has become more like a series of bedroom communities to New York City. Until the housing bust, home prices were skyrocketing and, in many cases, they are still too high for those trying to make a living in the area. For those who have homes, property taxes are a primary concern. So is the lack of consistent public transportation systems, especially in the more rural areas.

Aside from residential developments and farmlands, the valley has pockets of vibrant enclaves, walkable communities dotted by small businesses. The valley's cities can point to successes in their own right, mainly through waterfront revitalization. But they struggle in other ways, with too many low-performing schools and vacant buildings.

The federal government can help by providing more funding for basic infrastructure improvements and by offering more tax incentives and cleanup money to companies willing to convert old, polluting sites into new business ventures.

The valley did effectively deal with a major downsizing of IBM plants in the 1990s. The economy has become more diverse, but good-paying jobs are scarce. Long commutes to better-paying jobs have come at the expense of people truly putting down roots in the place they now call home.

— Poughkeepsie Journal



## **Saranac Lake**

State and federal politicians who aren't from the North Country pay homage to the Adirondack Park fairly often. They sometimes swing up here on campaign tours or for planned events. They may even have a faint understanding of why people choose to live with 30-below-zero mornings, two-foot snow dumpings, critters sniffing around the house and few neighbors.

But these high-flyers rarely comprehend why intelligent people choose to live in a place where, unless you're employed by the state, you're expected to work harder for less money than you would elsewhere; where stores that cater to year-rounders are dwindling but where there's understandable pressure against sprawl retail development; and where the costs of living — health insurance, property taxes, home heating oil and the gas needed to drive between far-flung communities — is particularly high.

Adding living-wage jobs is the constant challenge here, but those have come more from the public sector than the private. Therefore, creativity, pragmatism, humility and hard work are necessary to survival. If one tradition has survived from the 19th-century settling of the Adirondacks, it's cobbling together a living from several jobs, multiple skills (often acquired on the fly out of necessity) and a network of people who know who has what skills and which tools.

But opportunities do exist. While the tourism potential of the Adirondacks is rather well realized, natural resources like timber and hydropower could be used more without raising environmental alarms. The private sector could use a reason to create more sustainable jobs for these sustainable industries here. Given these resources and an able work force of creative pragmatists (plus a couple of small colleges and a couple of rail lines), many in the Adirondacks see this as an excellent place for the growth of green-industry manufacturing.

While locals don't always see the Adirondacks with a preservationist's eye, protecting it is truly close to their hearts; they'd hate for it to be like everywhere else. Balanced thinking goes over best in this special, semi-protected place, where 130,000 people live in a space the size of New Hampshire.

— *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*

## **Batavia**

Genesee, Wyoming and Orleans counties, like other counties of Western New York, have worked hard to minimize the effects of a stagnant — or worse — economy. What the people of these rural counties need in a U. S. senator is someone who understands that they are both connected to and different from neighboring metro areas.

The downsizing of Kodak in Rochester and the auto-related industries in Buffalo meant the disappearance of jobs that people in these outlying counties depended on. Nor were metro area companies expanding and creating new jobs in our rural counties. We lost population as people moved elsewhere to find work. The loss of jobs meant less spending power and that, in turn, hurt retailers who are also now competing with “big box” retailers. So to some extent, what helps Erie and Monroe counties will also help Genesee, Wyoming and Orleans counties.

Rural counties are also concerned about access to health care, services to the aging, transportation, schools and taxes. A U. S. senator representing all of New York State must recognize that a “one size fits all” approach to these challenges will leave rural counties out of the solutions.

What most sets Genesee, Orleans and Wyoming counties apart from their neighbors, though, is their concern about agriculture. The dairy and vegetable crop operations of all three of these counties are suffering from labor shortages. Many farmers have turned to foreign workers to fill the jobs that U. S. workers either can't or won't take — they are, after all, skilled jobs. But the United States does not have a consistent, workable system for accommodating foreign workers. The need is great for guest worker legislation. And reasonable milk and other crop policies.

Our next senator needs to understand that agriculture underpins our economy — regionally and statewide both —

and that when farmers suffer economically, so do the businesses and stores where they are customers. Farmers may not make up a large share of the population, but a large share of the population depends on their success.

Mostly, what our next senator needs to do is get out into the state and talk with the people in counties large and small. Listen to them. Understand their concerns. Then work with them.

### **Binghamton**

Early in the 20th century, our area was known as the Valley of Opportunity, and waves of immigrants from Europe enriched it with their ethnic foods, customs, churches and labor. By the middle of the century, thanks to high-tech industry and Cold War military contracts, people liked to boast that the community was “recession-proof.”

But when the Cold War ended and those contracts dried up, the local economy went into a tailspin that predated that of other upstate communities. Population decline ensued. We've been managing to get by with what remains of IBM, a strong Lockheed-Martin facility, some new high-tech companies and increased health care employment, but like everyone else we could use more jobs — and like everyone else we're handicapped in that regard by a highly dysfunctional state government.

We have a superb educational foundation on which to build. We have great amenities. We are blessed with a wonderful natural environment. We're sitting atop the Marcellus Shale formation, a vast mother lode of natural gas which could enrich many a citizen, and we're trying to safeguard the environment in the effort to extract that resource.

— *Press & Sun-Bulletin*

### **Buffalo**

Western New York, as a region, has struggled for decades with a near-stagnant economy that bottomed in the early 1980s and has left an intertwined legacy of dwindling population, decreasing opportunity, disappearing industry and a shrinking tax base. It includes Niagara Falls and its hydropower, but pays some of the highest electricity rates in the nation.

Buffalo, its major city and a treasure trove of American architecture and history, borders Lake Erie, but waterfront redevelopment has been painfully slow in coming. Property tax issues, part of the heavy tax burden carried by all New Yorkers, have hit this area especially hard. And the troubles of the American automobile industry hang heavily over this region, home to major General Motors, Ford and auto parts plants.

The region, frozen out of all the major power posts in state government, needs another champion in the U. S. Senate. There are international issues — foremost, a nearly stalled effort to expand the main Niagara River border crossing — that need to be addressed aggressively at the federal level, along with transportation and research needs that could bolster the area's major bets on medical research, cultural tourism development and the growth of the University at Buffalo as a flagship SUNY system research university. And issues involving the Great Lakes, from ecology protection to clean water initiatives, are critically important to this region.

All need concentrated effort and demonstrated leadership, if the westernmost region of this state is to regain its historic role as an economic driver for New York State by capitalizing on its abundance of fresh water, its geographic link to the economic center of neighboring Canada and the acknowledged skill and productivity of a work force that desperately needs more work.

— *The Buffalo News*

### **Elmira**

Upstate residents in New York's Southern Tier really haven't had a regional champion of their own in the U. S. Senate since Rep. Charles Goodell of Jamestown served nearly 28 months of the unexpired term of Sen. Robert F.

Kennedy after he was assassinated in 1968.

Since Goodell, Southern Tier voters have had to rely heavily on their representatives in the U. S. House to fight for their chief interests, including job development, new highways, better airports and bus stations, agribusiness legislation and flood-control projects. But during that time, residents also have been lucky to have had a series of U. S. senators who, while not from the area, understood the need to help upstaters battle the devastating loss of manufacturing jobs and population weakening the region.

In the past 20 years, senators such as Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Al D'Amato, Chuck Schumer and, most recently, Hillary Clinton have made sure they were senators for all of New York. Without their support over the years, it's doubtful that Interstate 86 would be as far along as it is. Their help, along with that of past House members such as Stan Lundine, Amo Houghton and Randy Kuhl, also has figured into projects at the Elmira Corning Regional Airport and downtown transportation centers in Elmira and planned for Corning.

Their backing has helped businesses such as the Sikorsky-owned Black Hawk helicopter assembly facility at Schweizer Aircraft at the regional airport in Big Flats. When the Clemens Center's recent renovation fell into financial turmoil, Schumer and Clinton teamed up in the Senate with Kuhl in the House to get behind a \$500,000 federal allocation to finish the Elmira performing arts center's project. Both senators spent considerable time in Elmira and built strong contacts in the Southern Tier that helped them understand the importance of the renovation to the Southern Tier.

It's that kind of care and knowledge of a region's needs — from jobs to transportation to quality of life — that we need in the U. S. senator who replaces Clinton. The string of U. S. senators serving New York since the 1980s has kept a close eye on upstate, and from the next senator that attention will be necessary to ensuring this region doesn't become a political orphan.

— *Star-Gazette*

## **Plattsburgh**

The North Country, as we call everything north of Glens Falls, is about as dissimilar to New York City as it could be. The greatest fear we as a region have is that, in addressing problems in New York City, a senator will think an effective move has been made to address ours.

We have no mass transit, many more trees than people, limited appeal to outside developers and great appeal to wealthy downstaters who want to buy our prime property at inflated prices for vacation homes, exaggerating our assessment and taxes. The North Country has done very well over the past couple of decades, considering that it has so many disadvantages to industrial development — few people, limited cultural assets and cloudy prospects for next-generation job opportunities. In spite of this, it does surprisingly well at preparing its young for employment in a variety of fields thanks to insightful two- and four-year colleges. It has done a remarkable job of attracting industries, mostly from neighboring Quebec and Montreal, that want a presence in the United States.

We lost Plattsburgh Air Force Base in 1995, which was a tremendous blow to our region, but we were resourceful enough to turn that loss into a significant permanent gain by creating new jobs with effective selling of the base land and assets. Still, we need help. We need to be given the same — or at least proportional — help by the government as the areas geographically below us.

Our farmers, our tourism directors, our border workers and our economic-development specialists all need as much concern for their efforts as the more populous downstaters need (and usually get) for theirs. We desperately need a complete broadband network and continued progress toward full air service to fortify our link with the rest of the state.

— *Press-Republican*

## **Rochester**

The upcoming congressional session is critically important to New York's future. With the state continually losing population, taxes and fees headed upward and budget gaps on the state and local levels all getting wider, New York will need strong representation on Capitol Hill. As far as the Rochester region is concerned, we need jobs. We needed them before Sens. Charles Schumer and Hillary Clinton were elected to their first terms, and we still need them. This region is transitioning from manufacturing to a knowledge-based economy driven by the health and education sectors.

What, if any, opportunities are there? Clinton saw opportunities to make the Rochester region the nation's next alternative energy capital. Is Caroline Kennedy prepared to continue pushing that vision? How about Erie Canal development? It's been talked about for years as an upstate economic development tool. We need a senator who can go to Washington and make things happen for upstate New York — soon.

— *Democrat and Chronicle*

### **Syracuse**

In Central New York, each winter we compete for honors as America's snowiest city. Like all New Yorkers, we enjoy the four seasons. And unlike some New Yorkers, we also enjoy a moderate cost of living, including affordable housing.

The Syracuse area has not been immune to the economic recession — nor have we been hit as hard as some regions. Our jobless rate is below the national average, and housing prices actually crept up this past year. Manufacturing jobs have been drying up, but when Syracuse China finally announced its closing the other day, it was the last ceramic flatware manufacturer in the nation.

The region's upside includes a diverse economic base, a plentiful supply of fresh water, a skilled and well-educated work force, good schools, easy transportation, diverse cultural assets and a fine quality of life. But challenges are interrelated. Even modest living costs are beyond the reach of Syracusans living in some of the nation's poorest census tracts. Syracuse has preserved key parts of its architectural heritage, but its aging infrastructure needs repair, starting with its schools. Although small businesses and some high-tech firms are making it, the days of the mammoth GE and Carrier plants are long gone. The region's largest employer today is a hospital center and medical school.

So a rational system of health care research and delivery is important to this region, along with support for its institutions of higher learning. Federal investment in Central New York's infrastructure, education, economic development and health care can bolster the region's self-sufficiency and spur growth.

— *The Post-Standard*

### **Utica**

November unemployment figures pretty much sum up problems facing the Mohawk Valley. The statewide unemployment rate averaged 5.9 percent; the Utica-Rome area's rate for the same period was 6 percent. The "people-leaving-home" syndrome often used to describe the upstate exodus has taken a heavy toll here, largely due to thousands of jobs lost over the past 20 years. That includes the closing of Griffiss Air Force Base in 1995, which cost the area more than 5,000 jobs. The former base has been redeveloped to some extent, but as the current unemployment rate would suggest, recovery is not just around the corner.

Hillary Clinton, our previous downstate U. S. senator who really wasn't from downstate, didn't understand this. Nor was fixing New York her main mission. During her 2000 campaign, she pledged to help create 200,000 jobs upstate, but fell far short of that goal. We've actually lost jobs since.

The economy isn't our only problem. Another ongoing issue deals with land and tax issues surrounding the Oneida Indian Nation. These issues are complex, and while some are under state control, others have federal concerns. Ditto a 1,200-megawatt power line that would cut a swath through our region to serve downstate energy needs.

While a comprehensive state energy policy could help determine such things in the future, U. S. energy corridors also figure prominently into plans. That requires close federal scrutiny.

We need a U. S. senator who clearly understand these issues — not someone born into the right political family or someone with mere name recognition. We need a U. S. senator who understands that while upstate New York might not offer the glitz and glamour of midtown Manhattan, it's a beloved home to millions of people who have deep roots here, and who have grown tired of watching their children and grandchildren move away for lack of opportunity.

— *The Observer-Dispatch*

## **Watertown**

Northern New York has enjoyed a strong connection with its current U. S. senators. Both Charles E. Schumer and Hillary Rodham Clinton have taken pains to learn about the North Country — its special qualities, needs, challenges and aspirations. And they have worked hard on our behalf.

If we had the chance to tell our next senator what he or she needs to know about Northern New York, Fort Drum would head the list. The post has been essential to the region's economy, but there is more to it than that. Northern New Yorkers take great pride in having the 10th Mountain Division as part of our community. We expect our next senator to understand the nation's defense needs and to work cooperatively with Congressman John M. McHugh and local leaders on behalf of the post and its families.

The dairy industry has long been the backbone of the local economy. But it is a tough industry; farmers' prosperity depends on fair milk prices. Locally, we need more milk processing plants and opportunities to convert the raw material of local dairies into a variety of products. Our next senator must understand the economics of dairy farming and look for ways to help our hardworking farmers.

Water issues concerning Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River are important to us. When there was talk about widening the St. Lawrence Seaway to accommodate huge oceangoing vessels a few years ago, our senators stood with other representatives against the plans that would have compromised the river's environment, beauty and shoreline.

Our newest senator must know about invasive species, water levels, Great Lakes issues and how to help bring closure to a regulatory plan for the St. Lawrence River.

We have a close relationship with Canada and want to keep it that way. It is essential to maintain an open border between Northern New York and Canada, to ensure efficient border crossings for the sake of commerce, tourism and U. S.-Canadian friendship. Under the guise of national security, border police and border policies must not impede travel unnecessarily.

As with other parts of upstate New York, economic development is essential. The next senator must help create a healthy atmosphere for investment in Northern New York so that our young people will find ample opportunity locally for generations to come.

— *Watertown Daily Times*

### **Find this article at:**

<http://www.buffalonews.com/248/story/536722.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

□ 2008 The Buffalo News.