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Lawmakers must finally act in taxpayers' interests

By Andrew Rudnick
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As the new decade begins, the Buffalo Niagara Partnership's 2,500 members want to see something new and revolutionary in Albany—true leadership. Imagine that?

It's been forever since the people of New York could count on their elected officials to make reasoned, logical decisions in the best interests of anyone but themselves, but if there were ever a time for that to happen, this is it.

Decades of reckless spending and catering to special interests, combined with a failure to pursue effective economic development strategies, have left our state particularly vulnerable to global recession. The 2009-10 state budget exacerbated those policy failures by increasing long unsustainable spending and taxation. Spending totaled some \$132 billion, up nearly 9 percent from a year ago, and taxes and fees increased by \$8 billion. Is the well dry yet?

Without further steps to stem its financial hemorrhage, the state will be \$500 million in debt when its fiscal year ends on March 31, with a looming \$9 billion hole for fiscal 2010-11.

New York is certainly not the only state that has been rocked by the recession, but its failure to rebound has everything to do with poor management by elected officials. With the start of the 2010-11 budget process fast approaching, the time has come for state officials to do right by their constituents. This is the time to pledge the budget and other legislation will *not* increase taxes and fees, assessments and debt.

Before all of our children and everyone else leave New York, we must change the laws that hinder growth to give our region a fighting chance in the global economy. Common sense, not political power broking, must prevail to reduce the cost of living and doing business in New York.

The partnership will continue to advocate aggressively until the business climate improves, and the cost of living, working and running a business in New York is dramatically lowered. Hopefully, that will be in our lifetimes.

We will also work to push our 2010 regional agenda, led by legislation to advance the UB 2020 plan. Fueled by a broader approach that would give tuition and strategic-partnership flexibility to all eight SUNY doctoral degree-

granting institutions, this key regional growth opportunity can now generate far more statewide support.

In addition — and perhaps most importantly, given the state's fiscal crisis— the SUNY legislation is budget neutral. Again, passage of these reforms will spark an economic resurgence urgently needed in Buffalo Niagara via job creation, a bigger and better skilled work force, the proliferation of new research and development and an infusion of new capital investment.

We have no choice but to continue this fight, and will be watching closely to make sure our elected officials put their public duties before their 2010 political ambitions. We will be keeping tabs and taking names — and we will remember in November.

Andrew Rudnick is president and CEO of the Buffalo Niagara Partnership.

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