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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WSJ.com

NY POLITICS | SEPTEMBER 29, 2010

Upstate Versus Downstate

Traditional Rift Widens in Election Year, and Paladino Hopes to Benefit From It

By [ANDREW GROSSMAN](#)

BUFFALO—The list of grievances is long: New York City legislators scuttled a plan to grant the University at Buffalo more independence. Tolls on the New York State Thruway are too high. And so on.

This election year, the rift between Greater New York and struggling Upstate cities like this one is especially wide, say voters, politicians and businesspeople. That helped Buffalo multimillionaire developer Carl Paladino beat Rick Lazio, a former congressman from Long Island, in the Republican gubernatorial primary. And Upstate enthusiasm could make Mr. Paladino more of a threat to his Democratic rival Andrew Cuomo—a resident of Mount Kisco, in Westchester County—than he might have been in other years.

Recent polls have shown that Upstate voters are more dissatisfied with the way things are going in the state than those in New York City and its suburbs. A Sept. 1 Quinnipiac University survey found 86% of registered voters upstate were either somewhat or very dissatisfied, compared with 73% of those in the city. Six years ago, just over half of both groups were either somewhat or very dissatisfied.

"The entire state, to a greater degree than ever in its history, is controlled by people from New York City," said E.J. McMahon, the director of the Empire Center for New York State Policy, a fiscally conservative think tank. Winning Upstate, though, is crucial for candidates running for statewide office. Hillary Clinton aggressively courted voters above the Tappan Zee Bridge in her successful first run for U.S. Senate in 2000. Republican George Pataki defeated Mr. Cuomo's father, Mario, in 1994 by running up big margins Upstate and staying close to even or ahead in populous New York City suburbs. That offset big losses in the city.

Upstate and the New York City area have always had different politics and economies. The gulf between the two, though, has been growing. While Upstate cities and towns have continued to struggle with the loss of population and once-plentiful manufacturing jobs, the city's economy has proved resilient in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks and the financial crisis. The city, its suburbs and much of the Hudson Valley gained population in the past 10 years, according to the U.S. Census. Most Upstate counties lost people.

Add to that the Democratic takeover of the state Senate in 2008, which gave the largely downstate caucus control of a longtime Upstate Republican stronghold, and many Upstate increasingly see Downstate as the source of their problems.

David Culbertson, the owner of National Pipe & Plastics Inc., a pipe manufacturer in Binghamton, said it's easier doing business at the company's North Carolina facility.

"We have a different kind of business environment Upstate," he said. But "we're using the rules that apply to New York City in this rural environment in Upstate New York."

Mr. Culbertson, who hasn't decided which candidate he'll vote for in the governor's race, and others say their bottom lines suffer because they have to cover costs from taxes and regulations that many businesses Downstate—where incomes are higher and the economy stronger—are able to overcome.

Daniel Dinsmore, a 49-year-old construction worker, tried to start his own business hauling heavy equipment in 1998. Things were going well, he said, until 9/11. Then the economy suffered, and Mr. Dinsmore's costs—insurance, taxes, tolls, maintenance and debt—became unsustainable. He was forced to abandon his business and go back to his old job in 2004, where he makes \$28 an hour. He was being paid \$30 when he left it in 1998.

Mr. Dinsmore is a registered Democrat who said he hasn't voted in recent elections because he has been disillusioned with the candidates. But he plans to vote for Mr. Paladino because he thinks he will pay more attention to Western New York.

"His heart is in Buffalo," he said. "He will certainly do what he can to try to help this area."

Of course, no candidate can win without doing well statewide. So on Tuesday, Mr. Cuomo took his campaign to Buffalo and Syracuse to unveil a jobs plan. Mr. Paladino, meanwhile, has been spending more time in New York City, away from the Upstate Republicans that gave him his win over Mr. Lazio. On Monday, his campaign manager sent reporters a photo of the Republican candidate riding the F train.

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