

For Planning for Monday, March 23, 2009

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## **WEALTHY NEW YORKERS DECLARE IN LETTER TO GOVERNOR: "WE ARE WILLING AND ABLE TO SHARE IN THE SOLUTION TO OUR STATES BUDGET CRISIS"**

### **Radio and Print Ad Campaign Declares Wealthy New Yorkers Believe in Shared Sacrifice**

ALBANY— In an open letter to the governor and state legislators today, wealthy New Yorkers from around the state said they are ready and willing to pay higher taxes to be part of the budget solution.

Joining with Responsible Wealth, New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness, the Fiscal Policy Institute, the Better Choice Budget Campaign, and the One New York Coalition, the signers of the letter tell the Governor that many of his proposed cuts are "unnecessary" because an increase in the PIT on the wealthy, as was done in 2003, could generate revenue without causing undue harm to the economy.

**Allen R. Bromberger, Esq.** of Perlman & Perlman, LLP stated that, "Economists and experts can and will argue about these issues, but I live in New York, and I love New York, and New York has been good to me. It belongs to all of us – and the wealthy need to pitch in and be part of the budget balancing solution." Mr. Bromberger is a corporate tax attorney who lives on New York's upper west side.

"We are in a financial crisis in this state and nation," said **Chet Opalka, a retired chemist, investor and philanthropist from the Capital District.** "The tax code has treated me and others in my circumstance very well in the past. I believe that it is time for us to step up in this time of need to help relieve some of the load from those who tend to bear the heaviest tax burden. A small percentage increase in taxes for individuals of higher income, while having a modest impact on our quality of life, can have a significant impact on many individuals with more modest means. Coupling our financial support with responsible spending by government will go a long way toward developing the strong economy, quality of life and future that we and future generations of New Yorkers deserve."

The letter comes on the heels of a [New York Times report](#) debunking the popular claim that higher taxes drive away wealthy state residents.

The letter was a joint effort between the organizations listed above and the Responsible Wealth project. "Many of the signers of this letter are members of the Responsible Wealth project. They are people who recognize that New York needs a much more progressive tax structure, and that upper-income folks like themselves need to be a big part of the revenue solution to the current budget crisis. They would rather pay more in taxes than see state services and infrastructure deteriorate. They value the quality of life in New York and are willing to pay more taxes to help preserve it," said **Mike Lapham, director of Responsible Wealth**, a project of the national non-profit United for a Fair Economy. Responsible Wealth is a national network of over 700 business leaders, investors and other wealthy individuals who are concerned about growing economic inequality.

A full page print advertisement of the letter will appear in today's Legislative Gazette. New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness began a two week statewide run of a radio ad calling for wealthy New Yorkers to pay their fair share last Wednesday (listen to the ad at: <http://www.abetterchoiceforny.org>).

Many of the other signers of the letter were concerned that cuts to essential state services would result in a deteriorating quality of life in New York State.

**Elsbeth Gilmore, of Resource Generation, a national organization that works with young people with financial wealth to effect progressive social change** stated that, "As a wealthy, young New Yorker and member of Resource Generation, I am part of a community that wants to be part of solving

the state's budget crisis. I believe that cuts to funding in education, health care and other essential state services will hurt all New Yorkers and diminish the quality of life in NYS. I urge the Governor and the Legislature to ask those with the most means to contribute to solving this budget crisis so we can preserve jobs and maintain spending in the economy to help us get out of this recession.

**Diane Feeney is a Director of the French American Charitable Trust (FACT) and President of FACT Services Co., Inc.** "As an upper-income New Yorker, I support this effort because I believe in doing my fair share to help New York during this budget crisis. As an individual, I support ensuring adequate funding for health care, education, fair wages and a healthy environment for all. It won't happen without some give and take from everyone. This is the time to show wealthy New Yorkers can share in the sacrifice of closing this state's budget gap to prevent damaging cuts to state services," said Feeney.

Other wealthy New Yorkers signed on because they are concerned that the tax system in our state could be more fair and equitable. They further believe during tough economic times all New Yorkers need to pitch in and do their fair share.

"If I have learned anything in all my years it is that when times are tough we should all be asked to sacrifice," said **Michael Loeb. Mr. Loeb started his career at the Brillo Manufacturing Company,** founded by his father. He left the family business for book publishing, working for Viking-Penguin and ending his long career at art book publisher Harry and Abrams. "Right now wealthy New Yorkers are paying less of their overall income in state and local taxes than working families pay, which is just wrong. As an upper-income New Yorker, I am willing and able to pay more in income taxes to make sure we don't have to cut vital programs and services.

**Don and Doris Shaffer** believe, "A graduated progressive income tax structure is not just the right and fair thing to do— it's also an essential part of the social contract which asks for contributions to society based on ability to pay. An additional 1-3 % at the top bracket presents very little burden to upper income earners like us— but since it will mean less cuts in state aid to education and health and other essential social services it adds a great deal to the quality of life in our city and state," said Shaffer. Don Shaffer ran a successful insurance business in New York for decades, then became an attorney. His wife Doris is Professor Emeritus from Nassau Community College.

Representatives of organizations that rely on charitable contributions as well as state funding to provide critical services were grateful for the support. They are concerned as the legislature will be making some tough decisions in the days ahead and will need to temper spending cuts with revenue increases.

"It is refreshing to see that many wealthy New Yorkers are more than willing to see their taxes raised in order to avert cuts in essential state services. They are willing to step up and share in the solution to this budget crisis. Given this fact, and that the overwhelming majority of the public support these upper income tax increases, we ask the Governor and the Legislature to do the right thing and ask the wealthiest among us to contribute to solving this crisis," **said Ron Deutsch, Executive Director, New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness.**

**Shelly Nortz, Deputy Executive Director for Policy with Coalition for the Homeless:** "As an agency that relies on charitable contributions and philanthropy for more than half of our annual revenue, we know that New Yorkers with means care about sustaining and increasing programs serving the neediest among us, and are willing to provide their fair share to help us all avoid harmful state budget cuts to homeless services, education, and healthcare. We are most grateful for their support and generosity."

**Michael Stoller, Executive Director, Human Services Council of NYC:** "We are not crying wolf, the sky really is falling. The not-for-profit service provider community has seen a significant loss in private dollars and cannot sustain the withdrawal of public funds. Agencies will be forced to turn clients away at a time when the level of need is increasing dramatically. Our state should act responsibly by enacting fair share tax reform so that funds are available for vital programs for our poor, elderly, youth, homeless, and disabled."

**Justin Cunningham, Executive Director, Statewide Senior Action Council:** "As Governor Paterson and the state legislature decide which vital support services should be taken away from the poorest, most vulnerable New Yorkers, it is only fair to question what sacrifices the wealthiest, least vulnerable New Yorkers will be required to make. This is why Statewide Senior Action Council endorses the Fair Share Tax Reform Act. In a time of shared crisis we need shared sacrifice."

**Billy Easton, Executive Director of the Alliance for Education:** "As New Yorkers, we all want what is best for our state in these challenging times and all New Yorkers need to pull together to do our part. Higher income New Yorkers will not leave our state if they are asked to give back a little more in order to protect the quality of our schools and our communities. The Governor is proposing to make no down payment on Campaign for Fiscal Equity school funding this year, the legislature must reject this outrageous proposal and adopt Fair Share Tax Reform. The signers of this letter have shown all us that Fair Share Tax Reform provides a fair and sensible solution for our school children and all New Yorkers."

"We applaud these wealthy New Yorkers who have joined us in publicly supporting an increase in the personal income tax. With civil legal services programs facing a 70-80% cut in two of three main funding sources at the very moment that low income New Yorkers faced with job loss, foreclosure, loss of health and other critical benefits are flooding our offices, we believe it is an essential step towards maintaining access to justice in our state," said **Kristin Brown Lilley, Legislative Director for Empire Justice Center.**