



## Small Business Group: Get Engaged in State Affairs

Posted By [Gerald McKinstry](#)

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With the state in a fiscal mess, taxpayers and business owners must engage lawmakers because special interests and unions already have their ear, the head of a small business group said Thursday.

And 2010 is an election year.

Because New York is taxing and spending so much and the current system is unsustainable, anyone dealing with those rising expenses has to get involved and lobby state leaders, Michael Elmendorf II, state director of the National Federation of Independent Business, said before a crowd of roughly 50 small business owners.

"All of us need to come together so we can make more noise than that crew," Elmendorf said of powerful unions and special interests that donate large sums to campaigns through political action committees. "We've got to wake these people up and if we can't wake them up, we've got to throw them out. ... This is the time for people to get engaged and try to fix this. If we're not engaged we're going to lose."

Elmendorf, who was a senior staffer with Gov. George Pataki's administration for 11 years, was the keynote speaker at The Westchester County Association's Lunch and Learn series at Sam's of Gedney Way.

He panned state spending, overly optimistic revenue projections and "a lot of bad policy decisions" that are bankrupting New York. He also challenged the logic of imposing more taxes — on sodas, payroll, energy and healthcare among others — when the economy is in tatters and taxpayers are struggling.

The silver lining: the situation is so dire that difficult decisions can no longer be put off, he said.

"They've run out of tricks," Elmendorf said. "It's gotten so bad that the state is running out of cash. We have an opportunity to turn this crisis into an opportunity."

Property tax and spending caps would help as would pension reform, he said.

While Elmendorf levied a good dose of criticism at leaders, he praised Democratic Gov. David Paterson's goal of cutting spending.

"We like a lot of what he's trying to do," Elmendorf said, adding that many unions that are working against the governor did the same to Pataki. "He's been right that the problem is about spending."

Richard Cohen, a partner with Lowey Dannenberg Cohen & Hart, a White Plains-based law firm, agreed with the message — taxes in this state and county are just too high and pushing people away.

"It's what we're feeling every day," Cohen said, citing property taxes and an MTA payroll tax. "It's spot on."