

## Business call to action

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Topics: [Taxes](#), [Government](#)



Gary Murphy with his wife runs Maid Brigade, a home and office cleaning franchise in Valhalla. In the last year they have become political activists. Murphy this spring went to Albany and to Washington with lobbying and protest groups. These days he loads a bullhorn, podium and generator in his SUV for political rallies. "I'm fed up," he said.

Sherry Bruck is creative director and co-owner of Harquin Creative Group in Pelham with her husband. They have cut what was already a bare-bones budget at their marketing company to survive the recession. Now she wants action and "creative thinking" from state officials in Albany to keep businesses like hers from "jumping state lines" to thrive in a new economy. "Enough already," she said.

Peter Herrero Jr. is president of New York Hospitality Group in White Plains. In 2009, his restaurant and catering company paid \$49,000 in additional state-imposed fees and taxes, a more than 1 percent cost increase on his bottom line. "I love New York," he said. "But the problem is, I don't feel loved back."

### **Seeking climate change**

Murphy, Bruck and Herrero are among the small-business owners who have joined two separate campaigns launched this month in Westchester and statewide by business groups to educate New Yorkers about the spend-and-borrow excesses of the state and to make their collective voices heard by legislators in Albany.

Both campaigns are spurred by the pain of high taxes and their impact on businesses and property owners in New York. Leaders of both campaigns say the anti-business climate emanating from Albany

must change if New York is to be competitive in retaining companies and attracting new businesses to the now-tottering Empire State.

The Westchester County Association aims to sign up 1,000 supporters in its Call to Action campaign, a grassroots education and political lobbying initiative in which the WCA has joined forces in advocating for business with the Long Island Association, Rochester-based Unshackle Upstate and the National Federation of Independent Business. The movement's website is [www.CalltoActionCampaign.org](http://www.CalltoActionCampaign.org). The group will rally May 20 at the Hilton Rye Town in Rye Brook.

"It's no longer acceptable, the culture of spending and the way New York has spent," WCA Chairman Alfred DelBello said at the recent campaign launch. He said high taxes have had a "tremendous" impact on business and have driven the loss of 1.5 million citizens from the state over eight years. In Westchester, once an attractive choice for companies moving their corporate headquarters, "We don't even know how many businesses we lose because they don't even come in the door anymore," he said.

The Business Council of New York State Inc. and its president, Kenneth Adams, chose Westchester as the launch site this month for its web-based campaign, [EnoughAlreadyNY.org](http://EnoughAlreadyNY.org). There small-business owners and other New Yorkers are invited to share their stories of how they've been affected by tax hikes, the recession and state fiscal practices. Web visitors can submit their ideas to reduce state spending and to resolve the state's budget crisis and other issues.

Adams noted "a growing sense of frustration" among small-business owners that state legislators are not hearing their concerns about the effect of high taxes on business growth and survival. In the "disconnect" between Albany and the private sector, the Legislature is "getting in the way" of private-sector job growth "just when we need it most for the recovery of New York state," he said.

When promoting the state as a good place to do business, "Right now we don't have a story to tell," Adams said. "There hasn't been any good news out of Albany for the business community in some time, so there's no good reason to bring business here. We need a new story and a positive story and Albany is not providing that now."

#### **'Devastated families'**

Peter Herrero hosted the Business Council event at his Sam's of Gedney Way restaurant in White Plains. "We've known there's been a problem in New York for years," he said. "But the last 18 months have been devastating for the small businesses."

Herrero said his hospitality group was down 21 percent in revenue last year. At his Great American BBQ Co. division, "Corporate barbecues took the biggest hit," he said. "That was tremendous. How do you lay people off and then have a morale-building company picnic in the parking lot?"

Herrero said his company work force, currently at about 100 employees, has been reduced by at least 10

percent “and their incomes have been frozen. We’ve laid people off. We’ve cut hours. We’re having people contribute to health care that we’ve never done before and I never wanted it.”

The company’s contributions to workers’ 401(k) plans also have been frozen. “It’s devastated families,” he said.

To those business struggles the state last year added a floor tax on liquor inventories and raised the corporate tax from \$100 to \$3,000.

Like Herrero, Gary Murphy wonders why the state has not done as small businesses have done to cut spending in the recession. At Maid Brigade, the 45-employee business his wife, Robin, started in 1996, “When you have doctors and lawyers who’ve been with us 10 to 12 years cutting and saving” on cleaning services, “I need to cut back,” he said. “In one way, we became a better business two or three years ago with a gun to our head.”

Regarding his turn to activism, “Blame it on Bill Mooney,” the WCA president who organized the Call to Action campaign, Murphy said. “Blame it on the economy.”

Murphy saw the power of group lobbying when he joined the WCA. Opposed to Democrats’ health care reform legislation and its pay-or-play insurance requirement for companies with more than 50 employees, the Murphys joined the Tea Party movement. Murphy said he was “shocked” to meet business owners, financial planners, a former criminal lawyer and litigators in the “tremendously diverse” group. A White Plains Tea Party banner, with its “Don’t Tread on Me” rattlesnake emblem, hangs prominently from their office building opposite the Valhalla Metro-North train platform.

“Two years ago, I was worrying about my daughters’ karate class and whether I was going to get 20-yard line or 30-yard line seats,” Murphy said. “Now I’m full-out just being involved in replacing these candidates who won’t change.

“We’ve been funding a lot of stuff for a long time and I’m fed up, I really am. I’m going out on my feet, not on my knees.”

## Why not unite?

Westchester’s two largest business membership groups, the Westchester County Association and The Business Council of Westchester, within days of each other launched separate campaigns and websites to influence and change state fiscal practices in Albany.

Why not join forces?

“It would be great if all the business groups in New York could be united on these issues, similar to what the unions are doing,” said WCA President William Mooney. “Business has always been fragmented and that’s why we don’t get as much accomplished as some groups.”

Marsha Gordon, president and CEO of The Business Council of Westchester, said the county organization was involved as a business partner of The Business Council of New York State in its state wide Enough Already web campaign.

Regarding the WCA’s Call to Action movement, she said, “We’re both getting out the same message and it’s OK for legislators to be hearing that message from different parts and different parts of constituencies giving the same message.”

At the Enough Already campaign launch in White Plains, Kenneth Adams, president of the state Business Council, said of the business community, “We’ve been splintered and separated to a voice here and a voice there but we haven’t been unified” and speaking in one collective voice “as we need to.”