

Seeking Meaningful Taxpayer Relief

Recently I’ve discussed with other Town Supervisors across Monroe County, of both parties, a proposal put forth by the governor that could change local government for the worse across New York.

We supervisors support meaningful property tax relief in New York. Do we ever. We’ve been working at it for years, in our own towns, in collaboration with other towns and local governments, putting our principles into practice to share services and increase our operations’ efficiency over time. Not because anyone forced us to, but because if we’re going to maintain services for our residents and respect their pocketbooks, we have to.

It’s because we care about tax relief that we regret Governor Cuomo’s recent proposal to take away town control of town services. The governor’s proposal is ineffective. It’s harmful, misleading and misdirected. It purports to restrain property taxes. It won’t do that. It won’t because it can’t.

It can’t because it doesn’t touch any of the real drivers of high property taxes in New York: unfunded state mandates and state-level policies that force up the cost of local government across the state. The governor’s proposal doesn’t touch these cost-drivers; doesn’t come close; it doesn’t even acknowledge them.

Instead it targets towns. It scapegoats towns for the problem. Yet for every taxpayer, town taxes represent the smallest part of your property tax bill. Most of the property tax you pay is levied by other jurisdictions. In Pittsford, for the most recent year, of every dollar our taxpayers paid in property tax, 8 cents went to the Town. Eight. That’s it. Twenty-four cents went to the County. Sixty-eight cents of every dollar in property tax went for school taxes. These proportions are substantially similar across our towns in Monroe County.

And that’s because, more than any other level of government, school districts and counties bear the burden of unfunded mandates from the State, for which they must come up with the money. That’s mostly what makes the property tax go up. We have to look to the State policies driving up property taxes and reform *them*, not the municipal governments and school districts they afflict. The governor’s proposal has things exactly backward.

For the sake of understanding what’s really at issue here, suppose we could eliminate all town tax entirely. All of it, leaving only the property tax for schools and the County. If that happened, it would still leave every taxpayer holding the bag for about 90% of all the property tax you pay. And it will have done nothing to restrain or change any of the factors that drive costs for our school districts and county administrations higher and higher.

Town governments are not the problem. Local governments across New York have saved taxpayers about \$17 billion by sharing services in the last three years alone. For the towns in Monroe County our history of sharing services is well-documented. It goes back decades. Every one of us you see here today worked together to create a county-wide shared services plan, the

Local Government Tax Efficiency Plan, which the County then submitted to the State in 2015. That plan's in effect now.

The governor's proposal poses harm to our residents. It would force on each town a county-wide plan, subject to a county-wide vote, for providing town services. But each community has its own priorities. Each community has the best understanding of what it needs and how much it's willing to spend. The idea that residents of one town should make decisions for another, in a county-wide vote, is wrong. It's anti-democratic. It will lead to deteriorating quality of life in every town.

The governor's proposal merely seeks to divert public attention from the real problem: the state-level directives and policies that push property taxes ever higher.

Until we're allowed to address the root causes that drive up the cost of government in New York, property taxes in this state will remain among the highest in the nation. If the governor wants real tax relief for our residents, a proposal that ignores the real factors driving up property taxes and deprives our residents of self-government is not the answer.

When one day, as we must hope, our State government finally gets serious about taking on property taxes, it can rely on those of us in local government to show it the way.

So I ask our residents: please, contact State Senator Rich Funke and Assembly Member Joe Errigo and ask them to defeat this harmful, misleading and ineffective proposal from the governor's office.