



Governor's Press Release, January 23, 2008

GOVERNOR SPITZER ANNOUNCES MEMBERS OF NEW COMMISSION ON PROPERTY TAX RELIEF

Governor Eliot Spitzer today announced the signing of an Executive Order creating the New York State Commission on Property Tax Relief. This bipartisan commission, which will have Moreland Act powers, will examine the root causes of high property taxes, identify ways to make the State's property tax system fairer, and develop a fair and effective school property tax cap to hold the line on property tax growth.

"Ever-growing local property taxes impose a tremendous burden on New York taxpayers, force seniors out of their homes, drive our young people out of our state, and discourage the formation and expansion of businesses," said Governor Spitzer. "Our efforts to address this crisis – including unprecedented increases in State education aid and more than \$5 billion in STAR school tax relief – have not slowed the growth in local property taxes. We need to explore new approaches, including reducing unfunded mandates and placing a cap on the growth of school property taxes. The creation of this Commission is the first step in this process."

The Commission will be chaired by Nassau County Executive Thomas R. Suozzi who has been outspoken on the issue of property tax relief. The Commission's members are Nicholas J. Pirro, former Onondaga County Executive; Paul A. Tokasz, former member of the State Assembly; Basil A. Paterson, former Secretary of State and former State Senator; Merryl H. Tisch, member, State Board of Regents; Shirley Strum Kenny, President, SUNY Stony Brook; and Michael Solomon, Director, Merrill Lynch & Co.

Nassau County Executive Thomas R. Suozzi said: "New Yorkers pay the highest property taxes in

the nation, a burden our residents and businesses can no longer bear. We need to take a comprehensive look at the root causes and recommend ways to reduce them. I commend Governor Spitzer for making this issue a top priority, and I appreciate the confidence he has placed in me by asking me to chair the Commission. I look forward to the challenge and to working with all the distinguished Commission members on an issue I have spent much of my career in public service tackling."

Under the Executive Order, the Commission will study, examine, investigate, review and make recommendations in the following areas:

- the root causes of New York's high property tax burden, including the expenditures of local governments and school districts, unfunded mandates imposed by the State, and other factors driving the growth of local property tax levies;
- the effectiveness of the various state mechanisms to provide property tax relief to different classes of taxpayers;
- the effectiveness of property tax caps as a mechanism to control growth in school district tax levies, the experience of other states in implementing such caps, and the potential impact of such caps on educational achievement;
- the most effective approach to imposing a limit on school property tax growth in New York State without adversely impacting the ability of school districts to provide a quality education to all schoolchildren;
- the impact of increased state financial support and state taxpayer relief and rebate programs on local school district budgets and tax levies; and

- the extent of public involvement in the development and approval of school and other local government budgets.

The Commission is to make preliminary recommendations for a statutory school property tax cap by May 15, 2008, and report its final recommendations by December 1, 2008. John Reid, Deputy Director of State Operations and Executive Director of the Commission on Higher Education, will serve as Executive Director of the Commission. The announcement today in the Red Room at the State Capitol was one of three events today where the Governor stressed the importance of the Commission to address the property tax relief concerns for all New Yorkers.

Commission Members:

Thomas R. Suozzi is in his second term as Nassau County Executive. He is known as a government reformer and he has also worked as an attorney, certified public accountant, and former Mayor of Glen Cove for eight years. Mr. Suozzi continues to work to bring strong management, fiscal discipline, compassion, and vision to Nassau County. Under Mr. Suozzi, Nassau has its lowest crime rate in 30 years and is the safest place in the nation with over a million people. The parks system is making a comeback, and for the first time in the county's history voters approved \$150 million in bonds to preserve open space.

Dr. Shirley Strum Kenny is the President of Stony Brook University. After a distinguished career as a literary scholar, teacher, and academic administrator, she came to Stony Brook as its fourth President in 1994. Since then, she has worked to strengthen the core academic and research operations of the University, fostered close links with business and industry, and established new working relationships with the Long Island community. Concerned about the state of undergraduate education at major research universities, Dr. Kenny headed a national initiative to address the issue. She launched and chaired the Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University with funding from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Dr. Kenny holds bachelor's degrees in English and Journalism from the University of Texas, an M.A. from the University of Minnesota, a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, and honorary doctorates from the University of Rochester, and

Chonnam National, Dongguk, and Ajou Universities in Korea.

Basil A. Paterson is a partner in the law firm of Meyer, Suozzi, English & Klein, P.C. Mr. Paterson has served as New York's Secretary of State and as New York City Deputy Mayor for Labor Relations and Personnel. He has also served as a New York State Senator, and as a Commissioner of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. Mr. Paterson chaired the New York City Mayor's Judiciary Committee for four years; chaired the Governor's Judicial Screening Panel for the Second Department for eight years, and served on the Commission on Judicial Nomination for twelve years. He is presently the Chairperson of the KeySpan Foundation Board of Directors. He received a Bachelor of Science degree from St. John's College and a Juris Doctor degree from St. John's Law School.

Nicholas J. Pirro served as Onondaga County Executive for 20 years, retiring at the end of 2007. He has been credited for fiscally conservative policies aimed at reducing taxes and government spending, while improving services. Mr. Pirro began his career in public service in 1965 when he was appointed to the Onondaga County Board of Supervisors (now the Onondaga County Legislature). He was elected Onondaga County Executive in 1987 and was instrumental in many landmark initiatives during his career, including the establishment of the Onondaga Community College Campus, reestablishing the City-County Drug Abuse Commission, implementing a 911 Emergency Communications System, and initiating a county-wide recycling program. He also helped create the Onondaga County Public Library System, the Rosamond Gifford Zoo at Burnet Park, the Center for Forensic Sciences, and the County's Veteran's Cemetery. Mr. Pirro was elected by his peers to serve as President of the New York State Association of Counties for 2000-01.

Michael Solomon is a municipal finance professional having provided investment banking and advisory services to state and local governments for over 20 years. He is employed in the Public Finance department at Merrill Lynch & Co. headquartered in lower Manhattan. In his work for the state of Michigan, he helped to create the nation's first revolving fund program for school construction, which was recognized by the Bond Buyer as the Midwest Deal of the Year for 2007. In addition, Solomon's experi-

ence with education includes providing short term funding for the operating budgets on over 400 school districts in Michigan and working with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in developing its new educational funding entity, the Massachusetts School Building Authority, which fundamentally transformed how the commonwealth funds its financial support to school districts. Mr. Solomon graduated from SUNY Albany with a degree in Financial Management Systems. He is a native of Oceanside, Long Island and now resides in Bedford, NY.

Merryl H. Tisch has been a member of the New York State Board of Regents since April 1996, and has served as Vice Chancellor of the Board since April 2007. From 1977-1984 she taught first grade at the Ramaz School and Bnail Jeshurun School in New York City. She serves as the New York City Mayor's appointee to the Commission on the Status of Women and the Mayor's representative to the Tenement Museum of the City of New York. Regent Tisch also serves UJA-Federation of New York as a member of the Board of Trustees, member of the Executive Committee, member of the Planning and Allocation Committee, and Chair of the Government Relations Committee. She is President of the Metropolitan New York Coordinating Council on Poverty. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from Barnard College, a Master of Arts degree in Education from New York University and an Ed.D. from Teacher's College, Columbia University.

Paul A. Tokasz is a partner in the government affairs and media relations firm of Patricia Lynch Associates and the former Majority Leader of the New York State Assembly. Mr. Tokasz has a long and distinguished career of more than three decades in public service. Prior to being appointed Majority Leader, Mr. Tokasz served as Chairman of the Assembly Committee on Tourism, Arts and Sports Development. Serving in that role from 1997, he proved to be a strong advocate for arts and tourism. He received his Bachelors of Arts Degree in History from Hobart College and furthered his education at Buffalo State College where he obtained his Master's Degree in Education.

Special Advisors to the Commission:

Lisa Donner is the founding Co-Director of the Center for Working Families. Previously, she worked as an organizer for the Service Employees International Union for four years, mostly dedicated

to the Justice for Janitors campaign in Washington, DC. Ms. Donner subsequently worked for ACORN for 11 years, first as a Legislative Representative and then in turn as Legislative Director, National Campaign Director, Director of ACORN's Financial Justice Center, and as ACORN's National Director of Public Policy. Ms. Donner graduated from Harvard University with a B.A. in Social Studies.

Elizabeth Lynam is the Deputy Research Director at the Citizens Budget Commission, a non-partisan, nonprofit civic organization devoted to influencing constructive change in the finances and services of New York State and New York City governments. Ms. Lynam covers the New York State and City budgets and other policy issues important to State and local government. She works closely with the media, and has designed and authored studies on local tax relief, reforming New York State's fiscal practices, Medicaid, special education policy, collective bargaining, and alternatives to incarceration for drug offenders. Prior to the Citizens Budget Commission, Ms. Lynam was the Deputy Director of the Office of Special Education Initiatives at the New York City Department of Education, where she helped manage the transformation of the way special education services are delivered in New York City public schools. She received her BS from Cornell University and an M.S. in Urban Policy and Management from the New School University.

Karen Scharff has served as the Executive Director of Citizen Action of New York since 1984. Citizen Action is a statewide grassroots organization that empowers New Yorkers to fight for social, economic and racial justice, with a focus on policy change at the state level. She was one of the founders of the Alliance for Quality Education, and she co-chairs AQE's statewide board. Ms. Scharff chairs the Steering Committee of the Coalition for After-School Funding, which was founded in 2000 to advocate for increased state and federal resources for after school programs. She co-chairs the Policy Committee of the New York State After School Network, and serves on NYSAN's Steering Committee. Ms. Scharff graduated magna cum laude with a B.A. from Harvard University in 1979.

Robert B. Ward is Deputy Director/Director of Fiscal Studies for the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government. He is author of New York State

Government: Second Edition, published by the Rockefeller Institute Press; and of *The \$163 Lightbulb: How Albany's Mandates Drive Up Your Local Taxes*, published by the Public Policy Institute of New York State. Ward has previously served as Director of Research for the Public Policy Institute of New York State/the Business Council of New York

State; and as Assistant to the Chairman of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee. He is a founding member of Parents For Excellence, a parents group in the Bethlehem Central School District. A graduate of Syracuse University, Mr. Ward lives in Delmar.