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Russian mayors examine Mid-Hudson government

NEW PALTZ – When sour economic times hit America, it's often government which acts as a buffer, with jobs and services, to deter the trickle down effects on local municipalities.

And in the fledging democracies of the former Soviet Union, now Russia, the current economic downturn, funding local governments is faced with varying dynamics. Some mayors from the Russia visited SUNY New Paltz Wednesday to see our American municipalities function when the private sector is less stable.

“I spoke about the fact that state and local governments historically do not cut employment or do not cut it by very much in comparison to the private sector, where in a recession employment declines are very significant,” said Don Boyd, a senior fellow at the Rockefeller Institute in Albany. “The number one service that government provides is K-12 education, and there’s no decline of kids during a recession.”

The conference was sponsored by the Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach with the collaboration with Institute for Democracy and Cooperation, a Russian group based in New York City.

“In many cases they feel these problems are alike, and they are dealing with these programs also, and they are taking the same measures by cutting expenditures, or cutting employees or raising taxes,”

said Andranik Migranyan, director of the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation.

In Russia, Migranyan said local governments are more self-governing. And that self-rule is a devaluation of power from the top to the bottom, making local governments more independent and self-reliant. Migranyan said local governments do get funding from the nearly seven dozen or so governing bodies that are equivalent to our states.

“In this country, they have more revenue sources that are fixed or more reliable than in Russia. In Russia, local governments don’t have sources like sales taxes or property taxes. They are more heavily dependent on regional governments,” he said.

Viatcheslav Brozovskiy is the mayor of Berezovskiy, and he said he learned a lot, especially on how government jobs are preserved during these sour times.

“We learned about the flowing of funds into the budget. We also saw what are the goals are facing municipal governments in order to increase revenues,” he said.

“And the biggest part depends on the federal government because of work force safety and the safety of social politics. I also learned what methods are used to decrease local expenditures because it’s not obviously right for government today to lay-off the wrong people. That’s why there had to go negotiations to decrease wages. I think the primary goal is not to lay-off people in municipal governments – but to use other methods.”