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Addressing the 'Brain Drain'

By MIKE CAPUTO

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"Brain Drain" - a term coined for the exodus of young New Yorkers to other parts of the country - is not a new term for Assemblymen Rob Walker and Marc Molinaro.

In fact, the two assemblymen have trekked up and down the state to discuss this growing issue as part of an initiative they co-chair known as RemainNY. The same topic was addressed at each locale, whether the state lawmakers were in the Finger Lakes, the Hudson Valley or one of the five boroughs. But each conversation was unique, Walker explained to an audience at Nassau Community College (NCC) on April 13, just as the regions are from one another.


"The problem we have with brain drain is that it is very regional," said Walker (R, C, I-Hicksville), whose district includes Salisbury and a portion of East Meadow. "Like Buffalo, there is plenty of housing, but there are no jobs." The RemainNY forum at NCC in East Garden City kicked off a full day of meetings with students and administrators at Nassau colleges and universities, including C.W. Post in Brookville and the New York Institute of Technology in Old Westbury. At Nassau, Walker and Molinaro were joined by two colleagues in the state Assembly, Tom McKeivitt (R, C, I-East Meadow) and David McDonough (R, C, I-Merrick), whose districts include a portion of East Meadow.

While meetings near Buffalo focused more on the job front, a recent forum at Staten Island Community College was overwhelmed by questions and concerns raised by students about the state budget, which included cuts to state and city colleges, the lawmakers said.

According to Census data, a full 22 percent of New Yorkers aged 20 through 34 moved out of the state between 1990 and 2000. Coupled with the current economic recession, and a decade marred with rising cost of living, that rate of departure is expected to be increased once the 2010 Census data is released. Although the assemblymen admit to not having an answer that will keep young New Yorkers home, the RemainNY forums are ways to develop ideas and possible future legislation, they said.

"We have a high cost of admission and that is what we have to address." said Molinaro (R, C, I-Red Hook), whose district is located in the Hudson Valley

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region.

McKevitt, who grew up in East Meadow and still lives there with his family at age 37, said the problem is evident just from looking around his own neighborhood.

"I notice how few people I recognize from when I was growing up," McKevitt said.

A quality education next door

With Nassau Community College President Dr. Sean Fanelli in the audience as one of several school administrators at the RemaiNY forum at NCC, the lawmakers lauded the important role that community colleges play in keeping young adults in New York.

"I recognize that community colleges are going to be a driving force behind New York's economic recovery," said Molinaro, who attended Dutchess Community College in Poughkeepsie.

Addressing NCC specifically, McDonough noted that Nassau's own community college has been recognized among the best in the nation, and stressed that it is important for local residents to explore all it has to offer.

"People call it the '13th grade,'" McDonough said, "until they walk through and find out what's here."

"We have to get the word out that it can start here right in Nassau," he added. "You can start here and end here."

The state lawmakers also promoted the quality of other two- and four-year colleges in Nassau, mentioning the likes of Adelphi in Garden City, Molloy in Rockville Centre, Hofstra in Hempstead and C.W. Post in Brookville.

"We have such great schools right here in our backyard," Walker said.

Young Long Islanders speak

Keith Halpert, a Hicksville resident who went into the Army at 17 years old, returned home from Iraq two years later with dreams of becoming a police officer, owning a home and starting a family some day.

Unfortunately for Halpert, 24, who is in his last semester of college, hiring freezes and cutbacks in public safety have delayed his goal of becoming a police officer for now.

"Now you come back to Long Island and you almost regret it," Halpert said.

Anthony Bansie, 21, of Rosedale, is an officer for NCC's student government. Seeing some of his television personalities losing their jobs, along with folding news agencies and cutbacks across all disciplines, Bansie suggested that his aspiration to become a news anchor may just be a pipe dream.

"I just don't see that happening," Bansie said.

However, Bansie was encouraged by the care he said expressed by the state lawmakers in attendance.

"They are trying really hard to get people to stay," he said.

Walker and Molinaro plan to schedule more RemaiNY forums, including a possible return to Long Island, in the within the next two years.

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