

New legislation gets citizens closer to local government reform

PLEASANT VALLEY - "If you leave it just to the politicians, it is not going to happen," said Attorney General Andrew Cuomo in Pleasant Valley Tuesday, to applaud the enactment of the "New N.Y. Government Reorganization and Citizen Empowerment Act".



Cuomo pitches the plan to an SRO crowd, including several local and state lawmakers

"If the elected officials don't do it, the citizens can. This is the first local citizen initiative in the State of New York. It is a very, very exciting new development."

The measure, authored by Cuomo, overwhelmingly passed both houses of the Legislature with bipartisan support and was signed into law on June 25.

Several Republicans were part of the standing room crowd at the Pleasant Valley Town Hall, including Assemblyman Joel Miller, who proclaimed Cuomo, a Democrat, "the best Attorney General we've ever had in New York State".

Another Republican assemblyman, Marcus Molinaro, whose district includes Pleasant Valley, spoke more to the issue.

"This allows and empowers citizens to determine how they wished to be governed. For those of us who actually believe that voters are the fundamental foundation of an American Democracy, and democracy in this state, we happen to think this legislation makes a lot of sense," he said.

"This law is a win for New Yorkers because it empowers citizens and communities to cut government waste and slash local taxes," said Cuomo, in unveiling a new website, www.reformnyc.gov. "This Web site explains how to use those tools, and shows citizens how they can reinvent government so that it actually meets the needs of today."

Cuomo's "New N.Y. Government Reorganization and Citizen Empowerment Act," is designed to cut government waste, reduce taxes, and provide vital services in a more efficient manner. Today, there are more than 10,500 governmental entities imposing taxes and fees across New York State. This includes towns, villages, districts, and special districts such as water, sewer, and lighting districts. These numerous overlapping governments saddle residents with the nation's highest local taxes.

Among those traveling some distance to be at the Pleasant Valley announcement was Patricia O'Dwyer, the Democrat candidate for Orange County executive. As a former Goshen town supervisor, she supports the concept, and acknowledges some

psychological obstacles that arose from her efforts, 15 years ago, to get the village and town to share some services.

“They were very receptive to that. Consolidation is very different. Now, somebody is losing their identity. The village is going to lose its identity. That’s very difficult. People are reluctant to do that, sometimes, even when you point out to them how expensive the cost of that government is.”

Cuomo said the legislation, and website, gives citizens and local officials the power to cut the nation’s highest local taxes by consolidating and dissolving the numerous layers of local government that exist in the state today.

www.reformnyny.gov.com is a single source for information regarding the new law. The site features:

- New interactive maps detailing the number of local governments and special districts in each county
- Sample petitions to help citizens initiate the process
- Two simple step-by-step instruction guides as to how the process works: one for citizens and another for local officials
- Interactive communication features to connect citizens across the state allowing them to share ideas about reorganizing local government.