A group of advocates from around the state are urging Gov. David A. Paterson to reduce New York’s reliance on local property and sales tax and place more emphasis on collecting taxes “based on the ability to pay.”

The Omnibus Consortium, a collection of “property tax groups, unions, fiscal watchdogs and education advocates,” gathered in Albany last Wednesday to discuss their plans for a “more logical and fair” solution to New York state’s property tax crisis.

“This is a historic event,” said Ron Deutsch, executive director of New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness. “Many of the groups that are standing here today form what we’re calling the Omnibus Consortium. We’re here today to release what we believe is the solution to the property tax woes faced by New York state right now.”

The plan the coalition unveiled would do away with the “archaic” property tax system in the state and replace it with a “circuit-breaker” tax system.

A circuit-breaker tax system gives tax credits to homeowners whose property tax payments represent a large amount of the homeowner’s income.

“New Yorkers desperately need short and long-term tax relief,” Deutsch said. “Some people are being charged 30 or 40 percent of their income in property taxes.”

Under the group’s plan, the state would fund the new circuit-breaker tax plan by doing away with the School Tax Relief Program already in effect.

Under the STAR program, homeowners in New York receive a check annually meant to help them cover the payment of their property taxes. According to the state Department of Taxation and Finance, “rebate amounts are determined based on a combination of factors, including the income bracket for your property, the tax rate for the school district where the property is located, and the city, village or town where the property is located.” The rebate can range anywhere from $50 to $500.

“The STAR rebate check program … provides relatively small checks to all homeowners,” said Frank Mauro of the Fiscal Policy Institute. He said the circuit-breaker credit would “provide significant relief to those homeowners who are truly overburdened by their property taxes.”

“Our people are dying. We’re dying,” said Susan Zimet, an Ulster County legislator representing New Paltz. “People are losing their homes every single day.” Zimet said she and the consortium would be visiting every legislator they could to try to get them behind the reformed tax program.

Their long-term plan for property tax relief strives to “make the New York’s group wants shift in tax philosophy

By EDWARD J. CARR
Gazette staff writer

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Clinton

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strategy “we must actively pursue” in the Middle East, as well as the importance of reaching out to both friends and adversaries to bolster old alliances and to forge new ones,” as a required part of “smart power.”

And the coalition brought up by multiple senators was environmental issues.

Clinton said she would work on reaching agreements with major nations such as Russia, India and China on climate change policies to collectively come to an agreement on standards for greenhouse gas emissions. She also mentions that energy independence is part of the climate change agenda.

Clinton said she plans to work toward energy independence in the Western Hemisphere with Obama, who has talked about an energy partnership with Latin America. She also mentioned that she would be following a recommendation made by Lugardo to have someone in the State Department work on coordinating energy security issues with the Europeans.

Also, due to the conditions in the Arctic— molting of the sea ice— U.S. ratification of the Law of the Sea Treaty is a priority for Clinton. This treaty was negotiated in the 1980s and specifies the responsibilities and rights of nations for the management of marine resources, use of oceans, basins, groundwater and environmental factors such as controlling pollution.

During the hearing Clinton also assured senators on the panel that she and Obama are in lock step with regard to their foreign policy goals. One of those commitments she mentioned in her opening statement, is ending the war in Iraq and transferring full responsibility back to Iraqis for their nation.

Also mentioned in her opening statement was terrorism.

She listed her goal of rooting out al-Qaeda and other terrorist extremists from Afghanistan and Pakistan. “Terrorism remains a serious threat and we must have a comprehensive strategy, leveraging intelligence, diplomacy and military assets to defeat al-Qaeda and like-minded terrorists by rooting out their networks and drying up support for their violent and nihilistic extremism,” she said.

Following her opening statement, the senators started a round of questioning where each senator was allocated about 10 minutes. Many of the senators started their allotted time praising Clinton and mentioning their support for seeing her in the job of secretary of state.

The questioning did become heated as the hearing went on, with Republican senators asking Clinton to provide more information and Democratic senators asking for a more direct action to help Clinton, saying that when a senator asks a question the answer should come out of the senator’s time. Vitter rephased the question asking for a more direct yes or no answer to which Clinton responded in a few sentences.

This wasn’t the only time Kerry, D-Mass., appeared to go out of his way to make Clinton comfortable. Having heard that the nominee wished that her daughter didn’t have to sit behind her during the hearing, Kerry offered Chelsea Clinton the opportunity to be a one-day intern so she could sit by Kerry allowing her mother to see her during the hearing.

The confirmation hearing concluded last Tuesday, with the committee voting 16 to 1 to recommend the full Senate vote to confirm Clinton. Vitter was the sole dissenter.

The Senate could vote on Clinton’s nomination as early as this week.

Poll

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Yorker whose opinion counts, of course, Gov. David Paterson. And a plurality of the rest of us still think that Paterson will pick Kennedy.

The outcome of a Quinnipiac poll are similar to the results of a Sienna poll released in late December that showed New Yorkers should pick Cuomo, 26 to 23 percent, over Kennedy, but that they thought the governor would pick Kennedy over Cuomo by a margin of 11 to 16 percent.

Earlier in December, a Marist poll showed respondents evenly split at 25 percent in their preference for Kennedy or Cuomo, with other possible contenders coming in with much lower levels of support.

And in November, before Kennedy’s name was being widely discussed as a possible contender for the Senate seat, another Marist poll showed 43 percent of New Yorkers wanted Cuomo to represent New York in Washington.

When asked by Quinnipiac who they thought Paterson should pick, 16 percent of Republicans chose Kennedy and 32 percent said Cuomo. Thirty-one percent of Democrats polled chose Kennedy, and 32 percent said Cuomo. Other candidates included U.S. Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand, Carolyn Maloney and Steve Israel—all polled at less than 10 percent.

Of the 1,664 New York state registered voters who were surveyed, 57 percent favored Cuomo, 16 percent found him unfavorable and 32 percent indicated they were unsure of how to vote. Cuomo’s favorability on the dollar men are paid for the same stage, would provide additional funds for Medicaid, education and infrastructure, hopefully creating jobs. She talked about women’s rights, how the economic recovery can be stronger and will be stronger having met more New Yorkers.

Maloney refused to comment about her meeting with Paterson earlier this month.

“This was his meeting, his invitation to a meeting, I will leave it to him to characterize it,” she said. “We had a very cordial meeting.”

Maloney also took the opportunity to discuss some of her recent work such as the Credit Card Bill of Rights, which she said she signed on Friday. The bill would attempt to cut down on “abusive” practices by credit card companies such as not informing consumers of their raising rates.

The federal stimulus package was also brought up during her stop at the Capitol. Maloney said this package could “tremendously help New York.”

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Philosophy

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overall tax system more equitable by reducing state’s reliance on local property and sales taxes based on the ability to pay,” mainly focusing on collecting more from individual and corporate income taxes.

“We would implement a bracketed [tax] structure that is the same for upstate and downstate,” she said.

The coalition hopes this plan will raise $10 billion in 10 years with their reform income tax plan.

The group’s plan is an expansion of the Galef/Little Bill, named after its main sponsors Assemblywoman Sandy Galef, Fountain Valley, and Senator Elizabeth Little, R-Queensbury. The Galef/Little Bill introduced the idea of providing a tax cut for homeowners in New York state.

“None of our own homes, our own,” said Bill Hinch, Cayuga County property tax reform coordinator. “We all pay rent; taxes.”

Read this week’s paper and browse archived newspapers online at www.LegislativeGazette.com

Gazette photo by Kristen Hamme Rep. Carolyn Maloney meets with reporters in the state Capitol last Friday. Maloney said she would support any of the picks chosen by Gov. David A. Paterson to replace Hillary Clinton in the U.S. Senate. Maloney has been endorsed by several women’s rights groups.

The Associated Press

While most of the attention over Gov. David Paterson’s selection of a U.S. senator is focused on Caroline Kennedy and Attorney General Andrew Cuomo, Paterson says he’s examining a large and diverse field. The lineup includes:

Rep. Carolyn Maloney of New York City. In Congress since 1992 has the support of three major women’s groups and could be seen as attractive to women and Catholics.


Nassau County Executive Tom Suozzi. In two terms, he’s the county’s fiscal crisis, led Paterson’s high-priority commission to reduce property taxes, and ran statewide in 2006 for governor against Eliot Spitzer for the Democratic nomination.

Rep. Steve Israel from Long Island. In Congress since 2001 he’s earned important committee positions in the House.

Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown. A former state senator, Brown would provide geographic balance to the 2001, 38 percent approved and 30 percent disapproved.

The poll, conducted between Jan. 8 and 12, had a margin of error plus or minus 2.4 percentage points.

December 23 was 55 percent, 11 percent of voters found him unfavorable. Thirty-nine percent of voters found Kennedy favorable, 29 percent found her unfavorable and 31 did not comment because they hadn’t heard enough about her. Two percent refused to answer.

The same question was asked in a poll last month and 46 percent favored her, while 27 percent found her unfavorable.

Carroll said the polling data also shows that “Clinton gets high marks from New Yorkers on how she did her Senate job.”

Carroll said that percentage of voters approved of the way Clinton handled her job as a U.S. Senator, while 26 percent disapproved. In 2001, 38 percent approved and 30 percent disapproved.

The poll, conducted between Jan. 8 and 12, had a margin of error plus or minus 2.4 percentage points.

During the hearing Clinton also thanked Sen. John Kerry, D-Dosa, for helping her campaign. She also mentioned that she is ending the war in Iraq and transferring full responsibility back to Iraqis for their nation.

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Big field could mean big surprise

The Legislative Gazette January 20, 2009