

News Coverage on EffectiveNY

Eye on NY: Samuels says enough is enough; calls for a 'dedicated Legislature'

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Following the arrests of two state legislators on public corruption charges, Gov. Andrew Cuomo and legislative leaders have unveiled their own plans for cracking down on corruption and reforming Albany.

But Bill Samuels, who briefly ran for lieutenant governor in 2010 and is the founder of the New Roosevelt Initiative, has his own idea: A "dedicated Legislature."

Samuels' proposal would limit outside income and increase compensation for state legislators. The goal of Samuels' proposal is a "dedicated legislature, where every legislator is fully committed to their Senate or Assembly seat without outside income... A dedicated legislature would open up the possibility of public service in Albany to the state's best and brightest citizens who heretofore have been unable to afford to do so because of its part-time nature and need to seek additional outside income."

The Samuels plan is modeled after compensation and limits on outside income for members of Congress. He calls for tying legislative salaries to the consumer price index, which would adjust legislative salaries to \$125,000 a year starting in 2015.

"I've come to the conclusion that enough is enough. (The current system) hasn't worked. Decade after decade, it hasn't worked," Samuels said. "Therefore, I say instead of paying these guys less than a New York city councilman makes, let's just say this is an important job and pay them better, but also say you gotta follow the rules of Congress. No more part-time lawyers. No part-time business consulting people. I think we have to do it."

Samuels' plan to essentially establish a full-time state Legislature is an idea a majority of voters support.

The Siena Research Institute, in their poll released last week, asked voters if they support "prohibiting state legislators from having outside jobs by making the state Legislature full-time rather than part-time, while increasing their salary accordingly."

More than half of voters — 54 percent — said they support the idea. The proposal has support among Democrats, independents, liberals and moderates. But 54 percent of Republican voters and 53 percent of conservatives oppose the idea.

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