

APP.com

It's all about the economy

By PAUL C. GRZELLA • STAFF WRITER •
September 10, 2010

BERNARDS — Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver has her October agenda set — as well as the agenda of everyone else in the Assembly: Develop ways to create a better business environment in the state.

"We all want New Jersey to be a place that businesses want to remain in, and to be a place that businesses knock doors down to get in," Oliver told a group of more than 50 business and community leaders attending a Legislative Breakfast Forum on Friday at the Olde Mill Inn here. "We know that New Jersey is crawling out of the recession at a slower pace than the rest of the region, and we have to address that."

Oliver, a Democrat representing District 36 in Essex County, was the final speaker in a year-long series of legislative forums sponsored by the Somerset County Business Partnership as part of its Make New Jersey Affordable initiative. The forums have engaged a number of political leaders from both parties to speak about ways to keep and create business for New Jersey, and ways to make New Jersey more affordable, for those who own businesses and who work and live in the state.

Toward that end, Oliver listed a series of topics she wants the Assembly to address, review and make recommendations upon during October:

Each standing committee will be charged at looking at ways to develop job-enhancement initiatives and support the evolution of jobs in the state.

Review and update 2009 stimulus plans.

Protect the unemployment insurance fund and see what can be done to avoid tax increases to do this.

Cultivate New Jersey as a place that can emerge as a leader for "green" jobs.

Examine whether tax credit initiatives are working.

Review urban enterprise zone initiatives and see how they can be made more successful, even in the face of funding cuts.

See how New Jersey businesses can be linked to international trade opportunities overseas.

Protect and promote New Jersey ports, including addressing the raising of the Bayonne Bridge. If this is not done, the state may lose substantial business to ports in Baltimore and Norfolk.

Improve the ability for businesses to get access to capital.

Jump-start the construction sector and get people back to work.

Get revamped Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) legislation introduced by Sept. 30 or Oct. 13.

Oliver said it is also crucial "to look at the myriad of regulations that exist" that have put a "regulatory stranglehold" on businesses.

A deliberate process

In doing all this, Oliver emphasized that her goal is to make the entire process inclusive and deliberative.

"Often we pass legislation with a flurry and then have to readdress it months later because of significant flaws," she said. "We have to invest the time upfront to get all stakeholders involved."

Advertisement



We focus on automating Marriott® Hotels' global invoice process. So they don't have to.

Learn more at RealBusiness.com



Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

APP.com

Oliver received a round of applause (and appreciative laughs) when she said, "I also believe that we pass too many laws." She said she wants to get away from an approach that focuses on specialized regulation, and instead focus on an approach that allows for the broadest possible application of legislation.

After the morning meeting, Oliver was heading to the Meadowlands where a summit on the gaming industry in New Jersey was conducted.

"I know that Somerset County is part of the discussion because you have so many people involved in horse breeding and horse racing here," Oliver said.

She said that revenues from New Jersey gaming businesses have been hampered by competition from neighboring facilities in Delaware and Pennsylvania, and that the New Jersey gaming industry failed to retool itself for changing times and audiences.

"We have to delve in and see how to help the industry solve" the challenges it faces, she said, noting that the state also has to help cities do a better job with "what happens to the monies that go into their coffers" — after pointing out that Borgata pays \$43 million annually in taxes while still maintaining self-contained security and trash services.

Other issues addressed

During a question-and-answer session after her presentation, Oliver addressed a number of other issues, including her support for civil service and arbitration reform — though, following a question from Franklin Councilman Daniel Glicklich, she said that any new agreement with a cap would be a starting point and that as the economy changes, so too could the cap.

Somerset County Freeholder Director Jack M. Ciattarelli noted that while the county has just finished an exhaustive study on combining many services across municipalities, there are existing laws that would prohibit some of those collaborations from going forward.

"We are very aware of the impediments," Oliver responded, "and we know that we have to do legislative remedies." She added that these would likely emerge as part of civil-service reforms worked on this fall.

Oliver also addressed the need to find ways to replenish the state's transportation trust fund, which could mean increasing the state's gas tax, she said. Similarly, Oliver is aware of the need for the state to address its pension obligations. "The longer we delay this, the worse it will be," she said. Steps could include revamping the existing pension system and other efforts designed "to stop the bleeding going forward."

In emphasizing the need to make this effort nonpartisan, Oliver reflected the theme of the Somerset County Business Partnership's Make New Jersey Affordable initiative.

State Sen. Christopher "Kip" Bateman, a Somerset County Republican representing District 16, lauded the partnership for its work that reached across party lines, saying that "this organization has accomplished a great deal in a short time, and has been a catalyst for a reform agenda in New Jersey."

Frank Steinberg, chairman of the business partnership, noted that the initiative has grown to include a number of other business chambers from around the state, including Hunterdon, Edison, Newark and the state chamber.

"We're trying to get everyone involved in a

Advertisement

Mom Dilemma #36:
Your daughter insists on wearing her princess costume to the grocery store. Allow it or not?

YES, at least she's dressed!

NO, I have some rules!

momslike me
where Local moms meet

Print Powered By FormatDynamics

APP.com

discussion to get New Jersey to again be an economic driver in the Northeast," he said. "We are going to keep doing what we've been doing."

Among the things the partnership will be doing is a Nov. 1 "Call to Service" Summit scheduled from 1 to 4 p.m. at Raritan Valley Community College in Branchburg. The aim of the event is to engage Somerset County employees and residents in leadership and service opportunities in their communities — especially those that would make government more affordable. The event's keynote speaker will be Kelly Jonston, vice president of government affairs for Campbell's Soup.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: To learn more about Somerset County Business Partnership's Nov. 1 "Call to Service" summit, to review the partnership's Make New Jersey Affordable reform agenda or for general information about the partnership, visit www.scbp.org or call 908-218-4300.

Advertisement

USA TODAY
AutoPilot ✈️

The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®

Presented by *Hampton*

SEE HOW IT WORKS »

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™