

## New progressive front in war over tax policy

Keeping "millionaires tax" unites boot camp attendees

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Updated 07:59 a.m., Wednesday, October 5, 2011



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ALBANY -- Not only does Simon Tangney want to tax the rich, he wants to cut the pay of those who earn an annual salary greater than \$100,000 -- at least if they work as administrators for the state University at Albany.

It's only fair, says the UAlbany junior, since entire programs at the school have been cut and tuition is going up. Tangney pointed out that Gov. Andrew Cuomo in his budget address last winter attacked the six-figure salaries of public school superintendents. Why not impose a "crisis salary" for SUNY leaders?

Tangney's pay-cut proposal may not be shared by others who attended a two-day "Progressive Tax Boot Camp" that wrapped up Tuesday at the Crowne Plaza hotel. But all the attendees, ranging from idealistic students to Harlem-based activists and seasoned union-backed political operatives, did share one goal: extending the so-called "millionaires tax," a surcharge on high-income New Yorkers that expires at the end of the year.

Ever since Gov. Andrew Cuomo took office, he's been at odds with progressives, public employee unions and others over the tax, which was imposed in 2009 for those earning more than \$200,000. After the tax sunsets, their state income taxes in 2012 would drop from 8.97 percent back to 6.85 percent, the previous top bracket.

The governor and other opponents say the higher tax won't solve New York's chronic budget woes but would instead drive people out of the state.

Supporters scoff at the idea of a well-heeled exodus, and say the estimated \$5 billion the surcharge would generate can help provide services to the poor and keep more teachers, cops and other public employees on the job, thus preventing the unemployment rate from rising even higher.

Monday and Tuesday's events offered training for activists on topics like dealing with the media and other strategies to bring about the return of the surcharge.

"We're calling it a boot camp," said Chloe Tribich, communications director at the Center for Working Families, an anti-poverty group from New York City.

Some of the attendees were also preparing on Wednesday to join the protesters who have been encamped on Wall Street for the past few weeks, decrying what they say is corporate greed and the undue influence of financiers on the political process.

A group of unions -- including those representing New York City teachers and transit workers-- is scheduled to join the Wall Street protest.

Also Wednesday, Tangney plans to participate in a 1 p.m. walkout by SUNY students protesting tuition hikes and cutbacks in class offerings.

Organizers of the boot camp hoped to replicate among progressives the kind of enthusiasm and energy exhibited two years ago with the birth of the conservative tea party movement.

While early tea party members at the time expressed anger at the ballooning federal deficit, the Obama health care plan and rising taxes, progressives see high unemployment as a motivator for their ranks.

Joblessness, combined with knowledge that top Wall Streeters and corporate executives are earning enormous sums of money, is generating the same kind of frustration that fueled the tea party movement, they said.

"There is this fundamental anger," said Billy Easton, executive director of the Alliance for Quality Education, which pushes for more school funding.

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