

Activists focus on Albany as well as Wall Street

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ALBANY — As the "Occupy Wall Street" movement stretches across the country, liberal activists from around the state ended a two-day training Tuesday on [taxes](#) and wealth distribution, including a campaign to restore higher income taxes on wealthy New Yorkers.

Nearly 150 people representing more than 100 organizations attended the "boot camp" at the Crowne Plaza, with some squeezing it in between a rally in front of the Bank of America in Boston and the ongoing protest on Wall Street in New York City.

"The purpose of the conference is to just get us better prepared to start talking about the millionaires tax and making sure that it's part of the legislative agenda in New York in the coming year," said Joshua Farina, 28, who serves on [CitizenAction's](#) Capital Region board of directors.

"We want to extend the millionaires tax. We do not want to continue cutting [funding](#) to schools," he said.

The income-tax surcharge on high-income New Yorkers expires Dec. 31. It has brought in more than \$4 billion a year since it was enacted in 2009 as a temporary tax to boost state revenues.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat who took office in January, vowed not to impose or hike any taxes.

The surcharge increased the personal income-tax rate from 6.85 percent to 7.85 percent for married couples with incomes higher than \$300,000 and 8.97 percent for couples who earn more than \$500,000 a year. Single filers earning more than \$200,000 [pay](#) 7.85 percent, and those who make more than \$500,000 pay 8.97 percent.

The Senate Republicans were on Cuomo's side, but the Democrat-led Assembly wanted to continue a higher surcharge, but only on people who make more than \$1 million a year.

Cuomo said in a recent statement that while he opposes tax increases in general, he supports President Obama's American Jobs Act, which would increase income taxes on the wealthy. If taxes have to be raised to reduce the deficit, create jobs and balance the [budget](#) "then those increases need to be done at the federal level and on the wealthiest Americans, not the middle class," he said in a statement Sept. 19.

Cuomo told reporters he has a different philosophy for state-level taxes. "My position on the millionaires tax here was it would put us at a competitive disadvantage, and it was a tax that the state had said would be a temporary tax, a temporary surcharge," he said. "And I believe it's important for the state to do what the state says it's going to do, and I believe it's important for the state that has the reputation of being the tax capital of the nation.

Dorrian Stewart of Yonkers, a member of Community Voices Heard, said it was helpful to meet and strategize with groups from across the state at the boot camp. He learned advocacy skills and how to approach and talk with someone about an issue. You and the other person may not see eye-to-eye, "but there's a way to sit down and have a civilized conversation," he said.

"We can agree to disagree, but we should have more things to come together on than disagree on. This is where we're at," said Stewart, 38. "And the same things that a Republican wants, a Democrat wants. They want a healthy lifestyle, they want a home, they want the ability to educate their children and be successful in the future."

Loretta Manning, 38, of Newburgh said she attended the rally in Boston before the Albany conference. A lot of people are upset about the economy and their current situation. She believes that the answer in New York is a simple one - place a higher income tax on the wealthy.

"It's about what's right and what's wrong. How can you take education from a child? How can you take [food](#) out of a child's mouth?" said Manning, a mother of six.