

Dear Governor Paterson,
Mindful of your call for "shared sacrifice" in this time of crisis, we approach your budget proposals with appreciation for the difficulty of your task and with an acceptance of the need for reductions in public spending.

We note the unfortunate cuts in education and healthcare, affecting primarily the youngest and the oldest among us.

We note the added burdens being placed on workers asked to take less and on students asked to pay more.

We note the cuts for home healthcare, nursing homes, mental health, foster care, the elimination of math and science initiatives and teacher mentoring, the closing of youth facilities, the reductions in spending for the arts, the cuts in municipal aid that will mean diminished operations in libraries and senior centers.

We note the reduction in public spending for environmental protection to the tune of \$50 million for 2008-2009.

And we note the savings to taxpayers in reduced support for or the elimination of such economic development initiatives as tourism matching grants (\$1.5 million), JOBS Now (\$1.5 million), and several research and technology development centers. Total economic development savings: \$8 million in 2009-2009, \$9 million in 2009-2010.

We are mindful of the impact that these cuts in public spending-and more to come-will have on the quality of life of many New Yorkers. Yet nowhere do we see even a hint of any cut in the estimated \$60 million of taxpayer money earmarked for a private commercial mega-resort development on Belleayre Mountain in the central Catskills.

Under the current Agreement in Principle engineered by your predecessor for that proposed project, an estimated \$14 million of the \$60 million would be used to purchase land from the developer to keep the land from being developed-although \$14 million is well in excess of the market rate. Taxpayers would shell out the remaining \$45 million or so for ski lifts and snowmaking facilities aimed at making the public Belleayre Mountain Ski Center, BMSC, more attractive to patrons of the private resort; indeed, some of the improvements for which the public would foot the bill would be primarily for the use of resort patrons.

Moreover, once constructed for the benefit of these private guests, the ongoing operation of these facilities would represent an additional annual operating expense, to be borne by the public, that, as our planet continues to warm, is likely to rise consistently and substantively. In addition to these direct costs, the developer has applied for municipal tax abatements and for further taxpayer-funded incentives under Enterprise Zone legislation.

The Belleayre Mountain Ski Center and the Catskill State Park and Forest Preserve of which it is a part constitute a precious public asset that has long been a "destination resort" for millions of New Yorkers and others. The public budget rightly funds these facilities and the family-centered, affordable, low-impact activities that take place there.

Asking taxpayers to fork over tens of millions of dollars to, in effect, induce a private development company not to build an environmentally intolerable project but rather one that is merely environmentally disastrous-as well as economically unsound-strikes us as a bad idea at the best of times.

In our current crisis, when so much is being asked of so many, we suggest that this kind of public spending to support private interests makes no sense at all. We respectfully urge that you review this \$60-million public expenditure in our state budget-which we hold to be an unnecessary and, in the present crisis, an excessive burden on taxpayers.

The Catskill Heritage Alliance
Richard Schaedle, Chairman
Cc. John Bonacic, Senator
Kevin Cahill, Assemblyman
Clifford Crouch, Assemblyman