

WNBZ
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Sayward pleased with first Adirondack Caucus meeting

The newly-formed Adirondack Caucus hosted its first public meeting in Chestertown last week.

Assemblywoman Teresa Sayward is among the group's founders. She told WNBZ Thursday night's meeting was a resounding success.

"I thought it went really well," she said. "We heard consistently the same message – people want jobs. They want to find ways to keep our young people home or at least allow them to come back home and find jobs. And there's always that little bit of discontent about what's happening in upstate New York. But I thought for the most part it was very positive and that people are willing to move forward in a positive manner. It's going to take a little give and a little take to get done what we need to do."

The Adirondack Caucus was launched as a coalition of lawmakers representing districts either wholly or partially within the Blue Line – all of whom are currently Republicans.

With a slim majority in the state Senate and a strong majority in the House, Sayward notes the group will need Democrats moving forward in order to gain support for any legislation.

And it looks like the caucus will be successful on the front. A representative from state Senator Darrell Aubertine's office was in attendance last Thursday. Sayward also says two more Democrats – Assemblyman George Latimer and Senator Neil Breslin – are on board as well.

The idea for the caucus was hatched by two upstate business leaders – Garry Douglas of the Plattsburgh-North Country Chamber of Commerce and Todd Shimkus of the Adirondack Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Sayward was also pleased to see involvement from various environmental and economic development groups.

"We had Brian Houseal from the Adirondack Council, Kate Fish from the Adirondack North Country Association, Brian Towers from the Adirondack Association of Towns and Villages – plus plenty of business people," she said. "We also had representatives from CBN Connect, the group responsible for broadband development in the North Country."

Tourism officials, like Jim McKenna of the Regional Office of Sustainable Tourism, were also in attendance.

"We had those folks there mainly so that if there were questions that we couldn't answer, they might be able to answer them as they relate to the issues that are important to them," she said. "I thought it went extremely well."

One of the primary issues Sayward received feedback on is jobs. Residents are concerned that aside from tourism and government sector employment, the Adirondacks don't support enough employment to attract new workers.

That concern, Sayward notes, led to the other primary concern: the aging population.

"They are really tied together," she said.

One of the Assemblywoman's other concerns is the divisiveness that drives much of the discourse in the park. Her goal in bringing together the caucus is to find solutions to problems that all sides can agree on – and she senses she's not the only one.

"It's been amazing," she said. "We thought we'd see more push back. But we haven't. People are approaching us saying, I'm interested in this, can I participate? We're growing more every day, and the more people who join us, the better our momentum gets."

Sayward says the next public meeting of the Adirondack Caucus is slated to take place in Franklin County.

-Chris Morris, 4-20-10