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## **Amodeo bucks Cuomo in bid for Senate seat**

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ALBANY – In a state where few Democrats are willing to publicly break with Democratic Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, State Senate candidate Michael L. Amodeo says he disagrees with two key Cuomo policy initiatives – a move certain to win him no new friends in the Cuomo camp.

Amodeo, a Hamburg lawyer who is running in a district with large numbers of union households, has already won over at least one large public employees union by suggesting that the Cuomo-pushed property tax cap law goes against democratic voting principles and insisting that the governor's new effort to raise pension contribution costs for new state and local government workers should never have been enacted. The break with Cuomo represents a rare independent streak in a Democrat who wants to join the State Legislature to represent a Democratic-dominated district in parts of Buffalo and its northern and southern suburbs.

Amodeo's position was quickly condemned by one of Cuomo's chief Albany allies, Senate Republicans, who are looking to protect their majority status in the Senate and boost freshman Sen. Mark J. Grisanti's re-election chances against Amodeo. But Amodeo's position is being cheered by New York State United Teachers, one of the state's largest unions, which is working to help Democrats regain control of the Senate in November.

The NYSUT board recently endorsed Amodeo against Grisanti, and local union activists are seeking to portray the Democrat as far more friendly to organized labor than the Republican incumbent from Buffalo. "We have many thousands of members living in his district, ... and our political action activists will be contacting locals to explain why we support Mike Amodeo over Mark Grisanti," Mike Deely, NYSUT's regional staff director, said in an interview.

In an email to 115 Western New York local NYSUT presidents obtained by The Buffalo News, Deely lays out a platform of union-supported positions on which Amodeo agrees with the teachers group. While NYSUT applauds Grisanti for voting for gay marriage rights last year, Deely said in the email that the incumbent has supported too many ideas – such as "parent trigger" proposals to make it easier to convert a public school into a

charter school – that “harm our members and are bad policy ... that make it impossible to support him now.”

Amodeo said the property tax cap enacted in 2011 – a cornerstone of Cuomo’s policy initiatives – is unfair because it requires 60 percent of voters in a district to approve an override of the annual 2 percent cap limit. (In fact, the cap is actually higher than 2 percent because various expenses are not factored into the equation that determines a cap level.)

Instead, Amodeo said, the tax cap vote should be like any other – a simple majority – without the extra hurdle of the 60 percent level. “In this democracy, in this form of government we live in, it’s always a simple majority that wins. Here, it should be a simple majority,” Amodeo said.

Amodeo said the cap is not actually reducing taxes. “It has stopped the bleeding. It has eased the burden on taxpayers, but we need to make it better,” he said.

For instance, the state needs to stop enacting mandates on school districts without providing the state funding to pay for them, Amodeo said, and Albany needs to boost the amount it spends on public schools.

“I realize taxpayers need relief, that a cap on property taxes is a starting point. But we also need to make sure our municipalities and school districts aren’t getting hurt,” the Democrat said.

As for the Tier 6 pension law Cuomo also pushed through the Legislature, Amodeo said, “I wouldn’t have voted for it.” He said that a previous pension measure, Tier 5, had been enacted only about a year earlier and that state officials did not give it time to work. “It was passed in the middle of the night with no negotiations by interested parties,” Amodeo said of the Tier 6 law. (When the law was passed earlier this year, unions cried foul, while fiscal conservatives said that it was a watered-down compromise that will not achieve the savings Cuomo touts.)

Scott Reif, a spokesman for the Senate Republican Conference, said Amodeo’s position of trying to weaken Cuomo’s tax cap law means he “has chosen the special interests over hardworking Erie County taxpayers.”

Reif referred to Amodeo’s position as “a disgrace.”

“Sen. Grisanti knows the property tax cap has been a tremendous success that has already saved Erie County taxpayers \$29 million,” Reif added, “and he is committed to working with Gov. Cuomo to keep it in place.”

Reif said the \$29 million figure comes from a combination of calculations based on the last decade of area school spending and data from the State Comptroller’s Office.

After several high-profile battles led by Cuomo in Albany against public employee unions in the last two years, NYSUT members in Western New York are gearing up to work the phones and put out mailings on behalf of Amodeo. Last week, Deely said 500 local NYSUT activists showed up for a planning meeting for the November races. “We got 500 people to a meeting that used to get 100 people,” he said.

Cuomo has not taken an official stance on the race for the 60th Senate District. Democrats hope, with little evidence so far, that he will stick with his own party and endorse Amodeo, while Republicans would be happy with a Grisanti endorsement or, almost as good, if Cuomo were to just stay out of the race in the district, which has a 2-to-1 Democratic enrollment advantage.

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