

The Post-Standard OPINION

Tucker on the Mexican border; Will on Obama and Russia

E2

Feedback: Was 'tea parties' headline biased?

E3

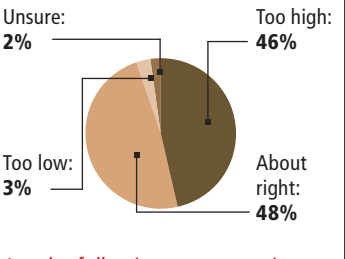


LAWMAKERS AND ETHICS

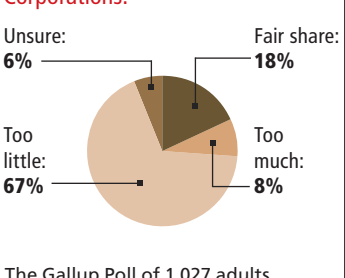
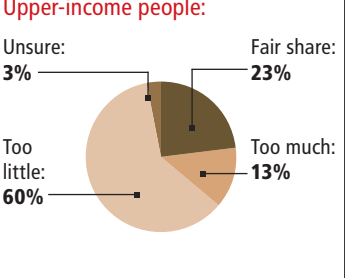
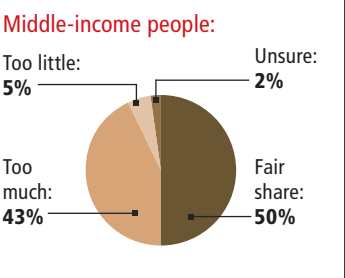
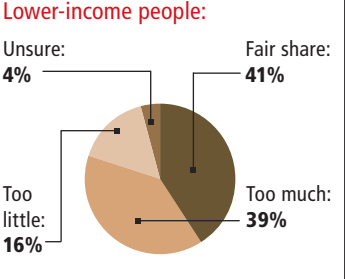
As the state Legislature reconvenes on Monday, it should focus on tightening the weak ethics laws that govern public servants and others in Albany.
EDITORIAL, PAGE E-2

ARE YOUR INCOME TAXES TOO HIGH?

Do you consider the amount of federal income tax you have to pay as too high, about right or too low?



Are the following groups paying their fair share in federal taxes, paying too much or paying too little?



The Gallup Poll of 1,027 adults nationwide was conducted April 6-9. The margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points.

Editor's Note

Obama climbs on board for Upstate fast rail

President Obama made the right move by offering a high-speed rail plan Thursday, even as the nation struggles through a recession. As the president noted, the nation needs to get up to speed with a mode of transportation that other nations have enjoyed for years. The benefits could be tremendous, from reducing dependence on foreign oil to creating jobs and impacting industries like tourism and freight delivery. Fortunately, New York state is one of the 10 regions being considered for funding under the Obama proposal, which would make \$8 billion available over two years and an additional \$1 billion a year over the next five years. The question is, is New York ready? It certainly has the support of key leaders, from the U.S. Senate to the governor's mansion. But are there concrete plans on how to move ahead with the service? If not, the state should take advantage of California's head start and study how it has approached the issue as well as the experiences of nations like France and Japan, which have had high-speed rail for years. What New York does not need is a process that will be tainted or slowed by partisan bickering and turf battles. Everyone needs to be on the right track when it comes to this project — especially since no region has yet been guaranteed funds.

BUILDING A CITIZENS' AGENDA

Central New Yorkers brainstorm for a vibrant downtown Syracuse

CNYSpeaks is back. Last summer, we began a community conversation on improving downtown Syracuse with the goal of developing a Citizens' Agenda for Downtown. A survey focused on what people love about downtown, and what keeps them from visiting more often. A series of articles looked at crime, panhandling, retail development and parking. Forums, moderated by facilitators from Syracuse University's Maxwell School, allowed people to explore their passion and concern for downtown with their fellow citizens. These efforts generated thousands of comments and ideas for improving downtown Syracuse. Over the last few months, we've been trying to make sense of what we've learned from these conversations and comments.



Now we are beginning to formulate agenda items that we hope you will critique. We took problems identified by citizens who participated in the first series of CNYSpeaks engagements and reviewed potential solutions that were also suggested by CNYSpeaks participants. Thus, what's presented below comes directly from citizen input. Remember, this is just a draft, a useful way for us to consolidate what we've learned so far, and, most importantly, to spark a new round of dialogue focused on identifying strategies that will help make downtown vibrant. **Here's how you can get involved:** Read the draft agenda below and tell us what you think. Which items do you support most enthusiastically? What do you have a hard time swallowing? How would you improve the agenda? What did we leave out? How can we make it more useful to elected officials and other policy makers? We welcome comments both from previous participants of CNYSpeaks

and people who may be hearing about the project for the first time. We want to hear from young and old, city residents and suburbanites, lovers of downtown and folks not yet sold on it. The best place to critique the agenda is on the blog — blog.syracuse.com/cny-speaks — where you'll find a new survey and other devices to help you give us feedback. If you can't get to the blog, call Civic Engagement Editor Greg Munno at 470-6084 or write him at The Post-Standard, P.O. Box 4915, Syracuse, NY 13221-4915. Stay tuned for a new round of forums, most likely in May, when we'll further refine the agenda. We'll then present the agenda to candidates for office in 2009 and work for its implementation. You can keep track of CNYSpeaks at blog.syracuse.com/cny-speaks, at twitter.com/cnyspeaks or on Facebook by going to Facebook.com and searching for CNYSpeaks.



Mike Greenlar / The Post-Standard, 2008



John Berry / The Post-Standard, 2008

PARKING AND TRANSPORTATION

Why it's important: On the CNYSpeaks survey, we asked people to identify their No. 1 deterrent to coming downtown more often. More people said parking than anything else. Yet Central New Yorkers are clearly divided on whether downtown actually needs more parking. A recent city study found that there are empty spaces downtown at all times of the day, and many Central New Yorkers worry that the call for more parking could lead to the destruction of more downtown buildings. What's clear is that if people think getting in and out of the city

is going to be a hassle, they are less likely to come. So we're looking for strategies to make getting into the city center easier without destroying the city's urban fabric or making huge investments in new parking structures. Here's what some CNYSpeaks participants have had to say on the topic: "No pedestrian walking, not bike friendly and no short-term parking"; "Lack of free parking"; "The parking garages need to be improved. They're dark, dingy, uninviting and the signage to them is inadequate."

PARKING, PAGE E-4

CRIME AND SAFETY

Why it's important: Other than a perceived lack of parking, nothing keeps people from coming downtown more than fear, according to our surveys. Comments at the forums included: "Downtown doesn't feel comfortable; there's no light"; "Our group was of the unanimous opinion that downtown Syracuse was perceived to be unsafe and crime-ridden"; "Crime is the No. 1 obstacle to an enjoyable visit to downtown." Yet many people swear by downtown's safety and, statistically, it is one of the safest places in Syracuse. Less than 5 percent of the crime

in Syracuse happens downtown, according to police statistics, and the city as a whole is safer than Buffalo, Rochester and Albany. But there are things we can do to make it safer. How do these following strategies sound to you? **Draft agenda:** ■ Use technology such as emergency call boxes, surveillance cameras and lighting to deter crime and make people feel safer without shifting too many police resources from neighborhoods with worse crime. ■ Make an extra effort to have

VISITORS, PAGE E-4



Jennifer Meyers / The Post-Standard, 2008



Jennifer Meyers / The Post-Standard, 2008

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Why it's important: What CNYSpeaks is really after is a vibrant city center dense with people and businesses. Such a center is what the experts say will keep and attract young people to the area. It's what will help curb sprawl. It's what we need to bolster our regional identity and pride. So spurring economic and, in particular, retail development that draws people downtown is at the heart of what we hope to accomplish. Here's some of what we heard on the topic from forum participants: "Poor shopping — not good for day-to-day living"; "There are many abandoned buildings"; "There just aren't enough businesses to draw me downtown. I'd rather shop downtown than the mall, but where?"; "I love the small boutique

shops downtown. They're locally owned and have really nice stuff." How do these following strategies sound to you? **Draft agenda:** ■ Continue to streamline the development process and be more welcoming and helpful to businesses considering downtown. "Reduce barriers to real estate development and people opening new businesses," as one forum participant put it. ■ Do a better job of advertising the tax-incentive programs available for improvements to city property, especially properties downtown. ■ Institute a "vacant structure tax" to discourage property owners from sitting on properties without making improvements and soliciting tenants.

SPUR, PAGE E-4

ART AND AESTHETICS

Why it's important: Let's face it, looks count. A city can be relatively crime-free and have a wealth of interesting businesses, but if it is dirty and dark, it is going to be perceived as dangerous, unwelcoming and depressed. Although Syracuse has some challenges in this regard, there is also real strength to build on. Downtown is home to some of the region's architectural gems, such as the National Grid building. It is where most of our region's cultural life plays out. CNYSpeaks participants overwhelmingly said that cultural events and festivals were the biggest draw for them coming downtown. Here's a small sample of what we heard on the topic: "Lack of green areas, trees, planters"; "In need of public art

spaces"; "We need better signage to highlight landmarks, events and festivals"; "The city is shabby and dirty"; "Best things about Syracuse? All the arts and culture an amazing amount for a city this size, and the thing that the city should be falling over itself to promote"; "The festivals that are offered are wonderful, and I would like to see more of them all year." So how do these following strategies sound to you? **Draft agenda:** ■ City leaders should work with property owners to do everything they can to beautify empty space, even if just temporarily. As one forum participant put it, "Turn vacant lots and buildings into art galleries or green space." ■ Economic development

USE, PAGE E-4