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Golub: \$15 minimum wage hike threatens state parks

By Paul Post, The Saratogian

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SARATOGA SPRINGS >> State parks face loss of morale, high turnover and reduced services if Gov. Andrew Cuomo's proposed \$15 minimum wage hike is approved without more funding, a leading Capital Region businessman says.

Golub Corp. executive David Golub, whose family owns the Price Chopper supermarket chain, is also on the Saratoga-Capital region parks commission that met Thursday at Spa State Park.

"This is going to be tragic for parks," Golub said. "He's (Cuomo) going to have to find more money. If he can't, parks are going to suffer and the residents of New York are going to suffer."

Cuomo's plan calls for a \$15 minimum wage by 2020, which would make it the nation's highest. Minimum wage is currently \$9.75 in New York. An increase to \$10.16 takes effect in January 2017.

There are currently 93 permanent, year-round parks employees in the region. The region is already down 21 full-time permanent positions since 2008 and parks spending is not expected to go up in the next state budget.

Several hundred seasonal workers are hired each summer. Most make from \$9.75 to \$11 per hour, although some skilled employees such as pool operators and lifeguards get up to \$16.28.

At present, there is no plan to give current seasonal employees, working at or near minimum wage, more money than new hires if the rate goes up.

"Tenure means nothing," Golub said. "It's going to hurt morale. Getting good people in the door is going to be tough."

"On top of that we're already short-staffed," said Heather Mabee, commission chair.

"This is going to make it worse," Golub said. "The park managers, I feel sorry for them. They're going to be pulling their hair out, trying to get things done."

The Business Council of New York State and New York Farm Bureau are among several groups that have voiced opposition to a \$15 minimum wage.

Golub declined comment about how it might affect his own business. He is Golub Corp.'s senior vice president of e-commerce and government relations.

“My concern is as a steward of state parks,” he said. “We need sufficient funds for the labor that’s needed to keep parks up to par.”

However, the state has increased funding for parks capital projects across New York. Several improvements have already been made in the Saratoga-Capital region. They are:

- A building addition at Moreau Lake State Park.
- New Thacher Park Visitors Center, currently under construction.
- New restrooms at Schodack Island State Park.
- A dam rehabilitation and new restrooms at Grafton Lakes State Park.
- New fireplace, for hearth cooking demonstrations, at Johnson Hall State Historic Site.

Plans are also in the works for a major upgrade to the Peerless Pool at Saratoga Spa State Park. Improvements would include rooftop solar panels and more greenery in place of concrete patio areas. If funds are available, work might be done by summer 2017 or 2018 at the latest.

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