

By BRIAN ACKLEY
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Sacrificial lambs in politics come and go as quickly as campaign promises. But none in recent memory has been more sacrificial than Howard Mills.

For the record, Mills is 40 years old, is a Presbyterian, and won a karaoke contest in Tokyo a couple of years ago by singing Bob Dylan's "Like A Rolling Stone." He gave credit to the sake. He's also the assistant minority leader for the Republicans in the New York State Assembly.

And, in case you missed it, he was just slaughtered in his "race" to oust Democratic U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer. You might know at least that, because you certainly haven't read or seen any of his other information anywhere else.

Schumer raised \$27 million for his re-election effort, Mills \$500,000. In one poll, Schumer was preferred by 48 to 36 percent of those surveyed. Not too bad, until you realize those were the numbers when only *Republican* respondents were considered. In New York City, Schumer led Mills in pre-election polling by, get this, 83 percent to seven.

Grand Old Party? How about Give Others Power? At worst – and it's hardly a stretch – the state GOP's collective indifference might cost them any shred of strength it might have left by 2006. Republican's advantage in the state Senate, which is seven seats, has been reduced by this election. The Democratic stranglehold on the state Assembly is so absurd it isn't even worth discussing.

Many believe Shumer's free pass is the groundwork and foundation on which a 2006 gubernatorial bid will be built. Republicans didn't just hand him a shovel; they gladly tossed in the blueprints, backhoes and cinder blocks to boot.

Schumer, on some fronts, has been a pleasant surprise, proving on a few occasions to be something less than a lock-step Democrat. But, it's hardly comforting that six years after using the upstate economy as his initial campaign's linchpin – at least in our area -- the respected Brookings Institute recently chronicled our precipitous slide which has put virtually every level of government here on the brink of economic meltdown.

Schumer was right in 1998 when he campaigned using the frequent analogy of "There's a fire raging in upstate and Western New York." Under his watch, the blaze is now a conflagration. Not only hasn't he provided a hose, his squirt gun doesn't have very good aim either.

According to Brookings, personal income growth – actual money in the pocket -- grew in our area at only 50 percent of the national average over the last decade or so. Even more disturbing is of that paltry growth, a full half of that was actually fueled by the government itself, in the form of bigger Medicare and Social Security checks. Saying Chuck Schumer has delivered for Buffalo, like one recent newspaper endorsement claimed, is as hilarious and hollow as saying Brian Higgins has been responsible for our waterfront development.

Schumer has already started being coy about taking a shot in 2006 at the governor's mansion. "The only thing on my radar screen is to be a good senator ... but I never say never," was his response at the recent downstate debate when asked about serving a full second term.

The GOP's embarrassing pass on the race has allowed Schumer to sprinkle some of that \$27 million like Tinkerbell and her pixie dust. *New York Newsday*, the hometown paper of the gentleman Schumer ousted six years ago in the form of Al D'Amato, chronicled a recent event there this way.

"By the time the guest of honor arrived at the catering hall, where political warm-up acts had roused the party faithful, Suffolk Democrats had downed their desserts and some were drifting toward the doorways. But Sen. Chuck Schumer quickly got their attention - after they learned he had contributed \$10,000 to the county party."

You'd be right if you guessed millions in answering the question "how much of Chuck's \$27 million has he given to groups and candidates like this all over New York this fall?" Good to know the system works, right?

To Howard, thanks. To the state Republicans, thanks for nothing.

(Brian Ackley is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers (WIN) of Western New York. WIN is a consortium of 19 community weekly newspapers in Erie and Niagara counties with a combined paid circulation of 75,000 homes, providing collaborative advertising and editorial support for member

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