



## Union likes Astorino's idea of buyouts

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WHITE PLAINS — Westchester's largest union likes the sound of County Executive Rob Astorino's proposal to offer buyouts to hundreds of government workers, a move he says could save the cash-strapped county as much as \$19 million a year.

But the **Civil Service Employees Association**, which represents more than 3,800 county workers, says the union isn't keen on Astorino's suggestion the union open labor negotiations now — even though its current contract won't run out until the end of 2011.

"He's looking at the employees to cover this entire projected deficit — whatever it is, whether it's \$166 million or not," said Karen Pecora, president of CSEA Unit 9200. "It's just not fair that we should have to bear the entire brunt of this projected deficit."

"I'm willing to meet with him (Saturday) to discuss ways to deal with the deficit and the budget," Pecora said. "We're well aware of the predicament and the problems that the county is facing in the next few years. But opening up our contract, it's not going to solve the problem."

During his State of the County address Thursday — his first since taking office in January — Astorino called on the county's six labor unions to support his cost-cutting measures to keep Westchester from "going broke."

He called on the CSEA, the only union contract not now under negotiation, to come to the table. "Every dollar the county spends is being scrutinized, so we are certainly not looking at employees to cover the entire projected deficit," Astorino spokesman and adviser Ned McCormack said. "Our hope is to partner with employees and their unions in an effort to save jobs while eliminating the deficit."

The suggestion is part of Astorino's mission to cut county spending and avert a fiscal crisis. He is seeking the buyout plan to help trim a projected \$166 million shortfall in the 2011 budget. He said the proposal would give workers \$1,000 for each year of county service, capped at \$30,000. He said the move could save from \$6.8 million to \$19 million per year.

In a written proposal sent to the Westchester County Board of Legislators this week, Astorino said the buyout plan would not include members of the county Department of Public Safety or Department of Corrections unions.

It would also exempt elected officials and employees of Westchester Community College, and require any full-time county employee who takes the buyout to repay the money in full if they are rehired within five years.

Astorino wants all of the buyouts done by July 1st.

**Pecora, the CSEA president**, said she doesn't see a problem. "I think that it's a very fair incentive, and I believe that quite a few people are going to take advantage of that," she said. "I think that's going to go a long way to addressing the problem, and we're all for it. We'll support it, we'll push it, we'll do whatever we can." "I'd like to get it implemented like yesterday," she added.

Nicholas Longo, shop steward for about 170 county workers in Teamster's Local 170, agreed the proposal sounded fair — but said the union would review it before committing either way. "At first blush it's not something that we would oppose," Longo said. "But not knowing all the details, it's really hard for me to make a comment on it."

Still, McCormack, Astorino's spokesman, said the county was "very encouraged" by the unions' response to the buyout plan.

Westchester County Board of Legislators Chairman Ken Jenkins said lawmakers didn't get the proposed buyout plan until late Thursday, but would likely have time to get it through committee and on the agenda for Monday night's board meeting.

"I suspect that there's enough support for that to get enacted," said Jenkins, D-Yonkers. "This is consistent with what the board had in mind in the past, so we're going to move it pretty quick."

Astorino, a Republican who ousted three-term Democratic incumbent Andrew Spano in November, also said salary cuts, wage freezes and furloughs were being considered, and could save the county up to \$420 million.

He said the furloughs alone could save up to \$1 million per day.