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## **Astorino rejects hundreds of lawmakers' budget items, millions in added expenses**

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WHITE PLAINS — County Executive Rob Astorino put his trusty pen "Veto" to paper Wednesday, rejecting hundreds of budget items worth millions of dollars for programs, capital projects and revenues that he called "irresponsible."

In applying his aptly named ink saber — a black Mont Blanc pen that was a gift from his father on inauguration day — to 247 packages addressed to the Board of Legislators, the Republican on Wednesday told county lawmakers he wasn't buying into their budget, particularly \$32.5 million in expenses, \$23.3 million in revenues and \$60 million in capital projects.

He compared the process to "three-card monte" and said there's all sorts of "crazy stuff" in the \$1.79 billion plan that the board approved last week.

"This is a financial disaster that they created," Astorino said of legislators. "The numbers just don't add up."

In rejecting all sorts of line items, ranging from day care scholarships and the Human Rights Commission to increased golf fees and Opening the Playland pool, Astorino accused board members of wasting money, using phantom revenues and overstepping their bounds.

He ripped them for overseeing a process he viewed as broken that in the end excluded Republicans and any sort of scrutiny.

"What they did was reprehensible," he said. "A large part of this budget is legally questionable."

He also blasted them for adding \$500,000 to their own budget — a transfer from the law department — for legal services; cutting \$10 million to pay for future labor contract increases; and eliminating three deputy commissioner posts in the Department of Social services .

The Board of Legislators on Friday approved a budget that restored many programs that Astorino cut in his initial proposal. But it included a 2 percent tax levy decrease, in part, because it cut spending by \$28 million. Astorino proposed a 1 percent decrease.

The budget passed 16-1, with Democrat Marty Rogowsky of Harrison, voting against it because it called for borrowing for pensions and had what he perceived as faulty revenues projections.

Though it included about 90 layoffs, it also restored funding for day care programs, health clinics, Section 8 housing and many other programs, non-profits and services.

"Our budget provided the most tax relief while providing essential services," said Tara Martin, the board's director of communications. "We are going to agree to disagree."

She said the board is awaiting the packages and would take them up Dec. 23. Chairman Ken Jenkins, D-Yonkers, also defended the board's additions, even explaining why most made sense.

The \$2.3 million in revenue increases were reasonable, he said, while other additions like keeping Playland's pool open and repairing would eventually attract more people and therefore more money.

Increasing golf fees by \$2 a round, or \$500,000 in more revenue, was appropriate given the \$6 a day increase in day care costs, he said.

He was comfortable that most, if not all, of these vetoes would be overridden with the needed 12 votes. The board has 12 Democrats and five Republicans. "I would not be surprised if Republicans supported some of the overrides," he said.

"We've been through this rodeo before," Jenkins added. "We know it's the county executive's first time, but it's not the first time the board has done a budget."

Though Republicans voted for the budget with reservations, they took issue with the process and are expected to back the county executive this go-around. "I fully expect there are going to be five votes" supporting Astorino, said Legislator Gordon Burrows, R-Yonkers. "But we're hoping to get a couple of Democrats to vote with us."

Child care advocates were disappointed , but said they would keep up their efforts with the Board of Legislators , according to Kathy Halas, executive director of the Child Care Council of Westchester. "Despite hundreds of people coming out to support" day care, "the county executive vetoed programs that are critical for working parents," she said.

The Business Council of Westchester applauded Astorino's actions, saying the vetoes "preserve a budget that is fiscally responsible and makes the structural reforms that best positions Westchester for positive economic growth."

## Additional Facts

## **Vetoed at a glance**

- Total: 247 line items, totaling \$54.8 million, plus another \$60 million for capital projects.
- 200 involve \$32.5 million in expenses and 20 involve \$23.3 million in revenues.
- 24 involve capital projects, totaling \$60 million, and three are related to the solid waste district.

### **Highlights:**

- Section 8 Housing Voucher Program: The legislators restored \$4.1 million for 40 people to administer this program.
- Day Care: The board added approximately \$5 million for day care so that the parent contribution would be lowered.
- \$990,000 for Cornell Cooperative Extension
- \$575,500 for the Human Rights Commission and five positions that were restored by the board.
- \$1.9 million for Neighborhood Health Centers
- \$950,000 for a homeless Shelter in New Rochelle that the board wants to keep open.
- Astorino vetoed 134 positions of the 147 that the legislators had restored to the budget. This includes 118 positions that are currently filled.

### **Operating budget revenues:**

- \$2.3 million in added sales tax revenues
  - \$750,000 in additional parks revenue including \$100,000 for the Playland pool and \$500,000 for golf fees.
  - \$1.5 million in added revenue for Labs & Research.
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