



Astorino, legislators feud over job cuts, tax levy

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WHITE PLAINS — The fiscal feud between Westchester County Executive Rob Astorino and legislators continued Wednesday, with the two sides butting heads over the county tax rate and the number of job cuts. In the latest salvo between the executive and legislative branches, Astorino sent termination notices to more than 110 county workers, including 38 in the county's Section 8 office whose jobs had been restored by the county board. Another 73 staffers were told they would be cut under the county's \$1.78 billion budget for 2011, with 17 more potentially in line to lose their jobs as details of the spending plan are analyzed.

The county executive and legislators even failed to agree on what the tax levy will be for taxpayers next year. The board voted a 2.25 percent decrease in the rate Monday. But Astorino vetoed the move, saying it was based on "bad accounting" and that the 1 percent tax levy he had proposed earlier had already been approved by the board and remained on the books. "The county executive has taken a principled stand to veto the tax levy because he doesn't think the budget supported by the levy, by the board, is structurally sound," said Ned McCormack, Astorino's senior adviser. "He feels that the board's budget is filled with phony revenues, gimmicks and one-shots that are bad accounting, bad government and could jeopardize the county's triple-A rating," McCormack said. "It's the same game that Albany's been playing for years."

Still, the board said it had to vote on a new tax levy because the budget that was finally approved Dec. 23 had changed from the prior spending plan. They claimed Astorino also didn't have the legal authority to veto the board's Monday vote. "We had a legal obligation to have a budget and a tax levy in place by the 27th. We met our obligation," said Tara Martin, the board's director of communications. "We don't know why he's doing this. To us, the budget's done. We passed it, he vetoed it, we overrode it. Done. This is just malicious at this point."

Astorino, who said County Attorney Robert Meehan signed off on the veto, had proposed cutting a total of 226 jobs in the budget he submitted to the board this month. That included all staffers in the county's Section 8 office, a state program which the county was under contract to administer.

Legislators restored millions in funding and dozens of jobs to Astorino's budget. In turn, Astorino vetoed 249 items in the revised budget. Undaunted, the legislature on Dec. 23 overrode the county executive's vetoes, approving a budget that cut only 90 jobs and temporarily extended the county's contract with the state for Section 8.

This week, Astorino nonetheless moved forward on eliminating 38 of the 40 workers in the Section 8 office, notifying them that they would be terminated at year's end because the contract with the state was not renewed.

On Wednesday, Astorino announced that the state signed a lease with the county to move into the East Post Road building and take over the program until a private vendor can be found to do so.

Staff writer Candice Ferrette contributed to this report.