

2 top Astorino staffers get raises

WHITE PLAINS — In a move that some lawmakers say is out of line with the times, two senior members of County Executive Rob Astorino's administration are getting raises — more than \$18,000 apiece.

Laurence Gottlieb, director of economic development, and Ned McCormack, communications director and senior adviser, will each be paid \$155,245 under the new pay plan approved by a 9-6 vote late Monday by the Westchester County Board of Legislators.

"It is outrageous that in these punishing economic times, when so many of my constituents are hurting financially, that the county executive would ask for an \$18,000 raise for two political appointees who have been on the payroll for barely two months," said Legislator Pete Harckham, a Katonah Democrat who voted against the increases.

The county board, by a 9-6 vote, also approved a reshuffling of its own staff that creates several positions, including a chief of staff, eliminates others and sets pay ranges for those jobs. Critics, including the six legislators who voted against it, said those ranges are too high.

Harckham, who voted against both measures, said it was hypocritical for Astorino to ask for raises for appointees when taxpayers are struggling and when the executive is seeking givebacks from workers in the form of health-care contributions and budget cuts. This creates different classes of workers, he said.

"We're asking everybody to cut back," Harckham said. "This is about the signs we're sending to the

electorate that we're tightening our belts and doing more with less just as our constituents are."

The Astorino administration's 28 staffers are far fewer than the 42 that former County Executive Andrew Spano had, which translates into a payroll that's \$1.2 million lower, said George Oros, chief of staff. Those numbers don't include Astorino's elimination of a security detail, a roughly \$400,000 operation, he said.

With a trimmed staff, Oros said, workers, particularly senior managers, have taken on more duties, and that's reflected in a different organization structure.

"This isn't about raising people's salaries after two months. The idea is to run a lot leaner with a lot less people," Oros said. "We're reducing staff by 30 percent, and we're reducing the money by 30 percent."

In Gottlieb's case, the increase is being paid through the Westchester County Industrial Development Agency. He's focusing on expanding the tax base and making Westchester friendlier to business, Oros said.

While McCormack is handling the communications department, which had co-directors under Spano, he's also involved in larger policy decisions, Oros said.

Legislator Jim Maisano, R-New Rochelle, said this administration is far leaner than the previous one, with some workers taking on two or three positions.

"Andy Spano's budget gutted his office. I give him credit, he's working with (a smaller staff). Half of the offices are empty," Maisano said. "I want to give Rob the tools to run his administration as best he can. I

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think he's really trying to hold the line on spending."

Though nine legislators voted for the salary increases as a courtesy to the county executive, several said he's proceeding at his political peril.

"Each county executive is entitled to choose his own staff and allocate resources as needed," said Majority Leader Tom Abinanti, D-Greenburgh. "I'm appalled by the symbolism. ... I think he's going to have to answer to the people of this county."

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