



Westchester workers dispute high cost to taxpayers

Westchester County workers are scrambling to find out who is going to lose their jobs because of County Executive Rob Astorino's proposed layoffs.

And union leaders take issue with his assessment that they are just too expensive and can be outsourced.

Of the 226 jobs that the county executive plans to get rid of, large swaths are from the Health Department, housing, Public Works, Labs and Research and Information Technology, among others.

"That's great that he can save 1 percent on the tax levy," said Karen Pecora, president of Civil Service Employees Association Unit 9200, or CSEA. "But at what cost?"

"My concern, as equal to saving these jobs, (is) the services."

Since the Republican executive has targeted homeless shelters, mental health clinics, health centers, day care and other county programs that he thinks can be run or administered by nonprofits and the private sector, Pecora said people needing those county services may be unable to utilize them when they need them most.

And the savings would be nominal, she said.

"The not-for-profits they think are going to take this on are not equipped," Pecora said. "They're not able to provide services at the level we provide."

As part of Astorino's \$1.78 billion proposal, he chopped \$33 million from this year's budget.

The layoffs are in addition to 465 buyouts from earlier this year and 14 other vacancies that won't be filled, which translates into a 12 percent workforce reduction, or roughly 705 fewer workers.

Because the county's labor costs are so high, Astorino asked the county's largest union, the CSEA, to forgo 4 percent raises and contribute to the employees' health care. But so far the union has not agreed to those concessions.

Health-care costs are projected at \$117 million in

2011, up from \$111 million this year, and pension expenses are expected to be \$57 million, or \$11 million higher than this year, according to Astorino.

At those rates, each of the county's workers will cost the taxpayers \$117,000, which is far too expensive, Astorino said during his budget presentation Tuesday.

Cutting staff is necessary in order to make meaningful changes without increasing taxes, he said.

CSEA members, however, think Astorino is balancing the budget on their backs. They maintain that his projections that county workers cost so much isn't fair, either, because most CSEA members make less than \$63,000, Pecora said.

"It's just not true," she said of the average salary and benefits. "You can't just lump us all together."

Members of the Board of Legislators will start a long, deliberative process Monday and have pledged to balance the interests of taxpayers, workers and those needing services.

"We are obviously going to, as a legislature, as a government, take seriously the task of dealing with this financial crisis," said Legislator Lyndon Williams, D-Mount Vernon. "People expect us to make tough decisions, but to make them judiciously and to think of the impacts on all our residents."

County job cuts

Here's a breakdown of proposed layoffs:

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- County executive, 2.
 - Human Resources, 2.
 - Information Technology, 20.
 - Law, 3.
 - Planning, 42 (includes those who are administering the Section 8 housing contract with the state that Astorino wants to cancel.)
 - Emergency Services, 10.
 - Community Mental Health, 42 (that includes an initial 22 and another 20 positions six months later.)
 - Health, 28.
 - Labs and Research, 23.
 - Public Safety, 1.
 - Parks, 7.
 - Transportation, 6.
 - Public Works, 27.
 - Human Rights, 5.
 - Environmental Facilities, 8.
- Source: County Executive's Office

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