

Astorino oversaw deceptive campaign to gain seat

The Westchester County legislative races are over. District 3, where I have served as county legislator for four years, was the key battleground. I was the prime target of the county executive, Rob Astorino. He was obsessed with taking back the seat he once held and breaking the so-called supermajority of Democrats on the Board of Legislators. I knew this would be a difficult race no matter who the opponent was. The real opponent was the county executive, not his handpicked candidate.

Let's debunk the myth of the "supermajority." The supermajority is a myth created by the Astorino administration to win control of the legislature so that checks and balances in county government would disappear. Yes, the supermajority overrode the county executive's line-item vetoes of the 2011 budget to enact a budget with more than twice the tax decrease as the county executive's budget, and we are on track to achieve the Board of Legislators' tax decrease.

Apart from the budget veto overrides, there were a total of 12 veto overrides last year, when the current budget was adopted. Republican legislators joined in nine, or 75 percent, of them. So much for the Democratic supermajority. Two of

these vetoes involved capital projects for the repair of dams owned by the county. These dams were in a dangerous condition, and the county was under court decrees to repair them.

In his passion to break this mythical supermajority, the county executive poured state Republican Party funds into the race. This was not unexpected. I was ready for an expensive fight. But I also expected a fair fight. What I did not expect was the depth of lies and deception that would characterize my opponent's campaign as orchestrated by the county executive. These campaign materials were riddled with false and misleading statements about my votes, my positions and, in particular, Westchester's housing settlement with the federal government. I obtained three rulings from the Westchester County nonpartisan Fair Campaign Practices Committee finding that my opponent engaged in unfair campaign practices. The committee found seven false and misleading statements sustaining all of my charges. This must be a record. These

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violations were repeated in numerous campaign materials.

But the worst was yet to come. Then there were the robo-calls in the 24 hours before the election proclaiming that a vote for me was a vote for low-income housing in our neighborhoods — an outright lie. How have we come to this brand of gutter politics in Westchester? Can't we debate the issues honestly without resorting to lies and deception? Rob Astorino wanted to win this race at any price — even the price of truth. If this is our county executive's vision of a "healthy Westchester," God help the people of this county.

I wish all those in our county legislature success in achieving a bipartisan dialogue to resolve the issues that face our county. I implore Mr. Astorino and Ken Jenkins, the Board of Legislators chair, to work harder to achieve solutions that are fair to all the residents of Westchester. We must strive to find common ground. Americans are tired of stifling either/or solutions. What has made America great is our ability to work through our differences to achieve consensus rather than wrap ourselves in ideological straitjackets to the detriment of our constituents. Let us recognize our shared values rather than our differences. Let's not resort to lies and deception to win elections to the detriment of our constituents.

The Issue

Republican County Executive Rob Astorino and the Democratic-controlled Board of Legislators recently forged an armistice of sorts, agreeing on a fiscal 2012 budget with significantly less rancor than last year. But don't expect the political animus to disappear in its entirety, as bad feelings endure after the November elections. The county executive played a leading, some say unprecedented, role in the vote for board seats. Here is a comment from a Democratic lawmaker, hailing from Astorino's backyard, who was defeated by Republican Michael Smith, with Astorino's backing.

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