

Astorino raising and spending campaign cash

Westchester County Executive Rob Astorino has three years before he's up for re-election, but the first-term chief executive has been raising cash — and spending it just as fast. The Republican raised just less than \$200,000 from July 12 through Jan. 14, and spent \$160,000 during that same period on everything from consultants and fundraisers to meals and office supplies, according to a review of **financial** disclosure records by The Journal News. "We're gearing up for 2013 and dealing with the outside forces that want to keep the status quo," Astorino said recently of unions and other groups who are affected by his cuts or oppose his vision of a smaller government. "Government has to be very separate from the political operation and that's what we're doing."

In terms of fundraising, Astorino leads some potential challengers (none of whom have announced), though Democrats say they're not worried: They have plenty of time to raise **money** and choose a candidate. In contrast to his last race when he took on entrenched Democrat Andy Spano and garnered most of his support with donations of \$250 or less, donors are now kicking in \$5,000, \$10,000 and even \$25,000 in some cases. Individuals still make up the lion's share of his supporters, giving \$120,376 while corporations dropped another \$36,329 into the Republican's coffers. Big checks have come in from such contributors as Frank V. Sica of Bronxville (\$25,000); John A. Valenti of New Rochelle (\$10,000); William P. Harrington of Pound Ridge (\$5,000) and Elizabeth Bracken Thompson of Croton-on-Hudson (\$5,000), as well as many others who gave \$1,000, \$2,000 or more. Astorino's fundraising reflects a reality that executives have distinct government and political operations and that they operate on separate but parallel tracks. "It's a church-and-state separation," said Bill O'Reilly, an Astorino spokesman who is paid with campaign dollars.

While Astorino can use a so-called bully pulpit on some policy issues, he must rely on a political operation — which pays for his **Taxpayer Watch** website, www.robastorino.com, campaign **mailings**, travels to Albany and other activities — to address others.

"It's necessary to do. If you're cutting and taking on unions you have to be prepared," O'Reilly said. "When you're challenging them, you have to raise money. You have no choice. You just get slaughtered if you can't defend yourself." In addition to building a support base, the campaign allows Astorino "to speak more freely" on matters such as **budget** cuts, layoffs or other political issues, he said. The county executive has laid off **workers** — notably dozens from the county's largest union, Civil Service Employees Association — and called for wage freezes and givebacks.

He's also had a bumpy ride with the Board of Legislators and its Democratic majority on many issues including workers paying for **healthcare**, Playland Amusement Park's future and the county's administering of a Section 8 program, among others. "When you look at what the Board of Legislators is doing, they're digging their heels on everything," O'Reilly said. "Rob will

fight that governmentally and politically. He needs to go right out to the voters directly." It's really no different from what Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat, is doing by raising money to combat very powerful unions, lobbies and interests, O'Reilly said.

In addition to taking on unions and special interests affected by his proposed cuts, Cuomo last week kicked off a statewide tour in Westchester, calling on the public to get behind him in his efforts to recalibrate New York government. Although they are from different parties, Cuomo and Astorino have similar strategies. "We're on a parallel mission," Astorino said of the governor moments after Cuomo delivered his speech at Manhattanville College last week.

Although county board Chairman Ken Jenkins, D- Yonkers, has a countywide committee called "Jenkins for Westchester" that has \$42,609 in the bank, Jenkins said he's focusing on his re-election bid this year. (His name has been mentioned as a possibility for county executive or Yonkers mayor, though he says he's not actively running for either.) "For whatever races you're running for, you've got to raise money," he said. "You can't raise money when you need it. ... We'll see how it goes." Democratic Party Chairman Reginald LaFayette said there's a lot of interest in the county executive's race and there's plenty of time to figure out who is in the best position to challenge Astorino. "We feel we're in the running and have viable candidates. We have a long way to go," LaFayette said. "This is not a race that you use all of your energy at once. ... He's the incumbent. The incumbent is always looking over their shoulder."