



Speech presented Nov 22, 2011

by CSEA Unit 9200 President Karen Pecora

At the 7 PM Public Hearing for the 2012 Westchester County Budget

Hearing Location: New Rochelle HS

In attendance: Legislators K. Jenkins, P. Harckham, A. Williams, S. Marcotte, L. Williams, J. Alvarado, M. Kaplowitz, M. Shimsky, B. Spreckman, and J. Myers. Leg. M. Rogowsky arrived 8:40 PM; Leg. G. Burrows arrived 9:40 PM

Speech presented approximately 9:30 PM

Honorable Ken Jenkins and all of the honorable Legislators, thank you for allowing me to speak this evening.

Hurricane Irene in late August and a freak snow storm in October left many county residents without power, phones and forced them to leave their homes for days while the county tried to recover. The department of Emergency Services employees worked 18 to 24 hour shifts to insure that the emergency evacuation locations were supplied with water, blankets, flashlights and all of the necessary items the residents needed. Imagine 9 less people there to answer the 911 calls, or even to shovel the walkway so the employees can get into work.

During the same hurricane and snowstorm, the employees in Public Works again, worked double shifts to make sure the roads were clear as quickly as possible for the residents to be able to get around safely. How about all the bridges and the older buildings that were damaged during both storms? Imagine 38 less employees, out there inspecting these bridges and infrastructures. Will it be the small bridge in your community that will have to be put off because there are not enough trained

employees to inspect all of the problems that will come up from an anticipated bad winter?

Last year there was an outbreak of Hepatitis in a public eating establishment. The employees in the Department of Health found it immediately and informed the public, and were instrumental in getting the information out to the public about the proper procedure if you were infected, and worked with the establishment to make sure the problem was resolved. Imagine if there were not enough employees, how long would the Hepatitis infection have gone without being detected?

The County Executives budget proposal calls for the 6 nature centers to remain open but not staffed. What does that mean? Anyone can pitch a tent and squat at the nature centers? What will the nature centers look like after a winter and summer with no maintenance? So much for the nationally accredited beautiful Parks system in Westchester County!

The County Executives has kept Playland open in his budget which is great, and he emphasizes how much the park is losing every year, so let's lay off marketing people who might be able to create ideas to bring revenue to the park?

While the County Executives encourage residents to use public transportation to protect the "carbon footprint" of Westchester County, lets decrease the staff; the phones don't need to be answered, after all everyone can go to the internet to find out the information. And while I am on that subject, while we are encouraging everyone, employees and residents, to visit our website, let's get rid of our IT people. Basically the County Executives is saying it will take you longer to get the info on the phone and longer to get the website updated.

I would like to speak about some of the people that have been told their position is being eliminated.

- A 27 year employee who is legally blind (and the positions is funded by a grant) so there is minimal cost to the county.
- A 15 year employee who lost his wife last year and is raising 2 small children on his own
- A 4 year single parent to a disabled child

- A 24 year employee who lost her husband last year and is struggling to keep her home.
- A 19 year employee who was a Corrections Officer and got hurt and is now permanently disabled, and now must be forced to go on permanent disability

By the way, 4 of these individuals come from one department and 3 come from a small 8 person unit in that department. All are county residents and taxpayers. *Most of the targeted titles are filled with county residents and taxpayers.*

We are not just lines in the budget, we are real people, real families, we pay real taxes and contribute to the economy of Westchester County.

While we agree with the County Executives that the cost of living in Westchester is high and should not be increased, but how are 210 layoffs going to help anyone?

The number of homes going into foreclosure would increase, the number of people not able to pay their taxes at all will increase, the number of people that will be online for food stamps and public assistance will increase, and the number of people who will ask for Section 8 will increase.

Oh, by the way, Section 8 stopped taking applications in September because they do not have enough staff to handle the need in Westchester.

That's a great solution - lets decrease the number of people who can assist those in need, so maybe those in need will go away and save the county some money -.

As per the County Executive's request the last 2 years, CSEA members have been challenged by the County Executive to submit ideas to contribute to the solution of the budget woes. Our members are well educated, intelligent individuals that have ideas and solutions that can save the county millions upon millions of dollars as soon as next year.

The County wants nothing to do with our ideas, and in fact has done everything to disregard any idea we might have for substantial savings, including disciplinary actions. The County Executive sees only one way to save money, LAYOFFS!!

The County Executives stated in his budget presentation that he submitted a "jobs for savings" plan to the unions and they (we) ignored it.

I have never been offered such a plan, and agreeing to contribute more towards our medical (we already have substantial copayments, deductibles and drug costs) needs to be decided at the negotiating table, which is where we have been for the last 4 months. While it has proved difficult to schedule meetings to get all the necessary parties to the table, CSEA has never refused to meet with the county to try and negotiate a new contract, but, as is historic for negotiations between the county and the unions, it takes a lot of time. There are many issues to resolve other than our health benefits.

The CSEA negotiating team has invested many nights, lunch hours and weekends to prepare our proposals for negotiations, and even with 3 meetings in November, we are not going to be close to an agreement by the end of the year, much less by the date the budget was due.

As we have said from the beginning, we are not the problem, we are the solution.

Once again, thank you all for listening; I hope you can restore all of the 210 positions as a matter of safety to the residents of Westchester County.

Karen Pecora, President
CSEA Unit 9200

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