



Unit 9200 – Employees of Westchester County  
Civil Service Employees Association  
112 East Post Road  
White Plains, New York 10601

## Minutes of Town Hall Meeting with County Executive Astorino

MARCH 9, 2010

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- The County Executive released a statement on March 9, 2010, '[Astorino Outlines a Deficit Of \\$166 Million for 2011 - Goal to preserve essential services without raising taxes; Program cuts, employee givebacks, layoffs on the table](#)', along with a [Budget Fact Sheet](#), and a copy of his [presentation](#) given at a press conference earlier in the day.
- A meeting open to all County Employees was held at the County Center that evening. The Unit 9200 Executive Board attended the meeting with many Stewards, activists and members.
- Deputy County Executive Kevin Plunkett introduced the County Executive, after making a statement that no video or audio recordings would be allowed at this meeting.

### Some of County Executive Astorino's Remarks:

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- 'It isn't fair that budgets have been kept quiet in the past, and then dropped on the County employees and residents with massive cuts.'
- 'I don't blame any of you for the contract that you have.'
- 'We are seeking contributions from all areas to help bridge the budget gap.'
- 'We are engaging the Legislature and the "Stakeholders" in the budget process, beginning now.'
- 'We would like to have open talks with the unions, and make layoffs a last resort.'
- 'We are open to your suggestions. We are looking at everything.'
- 'The negotiator we hired has reached out to the unions.'
- 'School districts and municipalities are looking at 0% salary increases.'
- 'Phase II – Long Term Steps – outlined in my statement are worst-case scenarios.'
- 'We have begun the process of a massive restructuring of County government as a last resort.'
- 'Westchester is one of only four Counties in New York State that do not require Health Care Contributions.'
- 'We are considering a possible switch from POMCO (self-insurance) to NYSHIP.'  
[\[http://www.cs.state.ny.us/nyship/nyship.cfm\]](http://www.cs.state.ny.us/nyship/nyship.cfm)
- 'We are considering offering a Voluntary Separation Incentive to employees ready to retire.'
- 'Our goals are: (1) a balanced budget with 0% tax increase; (2) to maintain essential services; (3) to make layoffs a last resort; and (4) to work closely with Board of Legislators, unions, and other stakeholders.'
- 'I know there's a lot of uncertainty and fear. I hope there isn't a lot of anger.'
- 'I am trying to do everything humanly possible to avoid layoffs.'

## Questions from Unit 9200 Members and County Employees:

➤ **What will be the criteria for layoffs?**

The decision would fall on me, and layoffs wouldn't be done unilaterally, but in consultation with Commissioners. Across the board cuts would not work. Layoffs would be proposed to the Board of Legislators, which would have to approve them before they went into effect. If we are providing the "Cadillac level of services", we will need to pare down our resources to provide only the "Chevrolet level of services" that we are mandated to provide.

➤ **How will mandated services be affected by the 5.8 million in cuts to DSS?**

I met with Commissioner Mahon, and these were cuts he recommended that will not affect essential services.

➤ **Why does your proposal NOT include the consolidation of County Departments, as proposed by the BOL in December, which would eliminate dozens of redundant Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners, Directors and Managers, all making six-figure salaries?**

We've looked at this. The commissioners are considering whether departments should be combined.

➤ **Why is the District Attorney's office and WCC exempt from layoffs?**

No department is exempt.

➤ **How would the furloughs work if imposed?**

Furloughs are a potential option. One day of furloughs would save \$1,000,000.00.

➤ **Is the closure of some district offices part of your cost-savings proposal?**

Some have been suggested, but none have been targeted to date. The renovated building that has gotten so much press lately would not make sense to sell. We may be consolidating offices and selling off some other real estate owned by the County.

➤ **Could the 4-day workweek provide some savings?**

The 4-day workweek could only provide savings if the County were shut down one day a week, which we probably could not do.

➤ **Can the County offer an incentive for employees to Opt-Out of their Health Insurance benefits?**

We are potentially looking at this, and still doing studies where it's been done successfully.

➤ **How can you be talking about layoffs when you just gave pay raises to two of your senior staff?**

This was not a pay raise. The Board of Legislators reset salaries to where they were in December 2009. The County Executive's Office is down from 43 to 24 employees, and half the offices are empty.

➤ **[Unit 9200 2nd Vice President Kwabena Manu] Your statement about the cost of the average employee's salary and benefits being \$100,000.00 is inflated and a scare tactic.**

The average cost for an employee is \$100,000.00, with fringe benefits representing 51%.

➤ **How does your plan benefit our members, when you're asking us to take 0's and pay into our benefits?**

You have the right to get your contracted raises through next year, but if you choose that, our only choice will be layoffs.

➤ **Why is your focus to fill the budget gap only on employees? Are you not looking at other options? What proportion has to come from the employees?**

Concessions have to be made to avoid layoffs, and we are looking at other options like selling off real estate.

- [Unit 9200 President Karen Pecora]  
If the County is considering changing health insurance plans from POMCO to NYSHIP, CSEA would like to be involved in the process, since we have not been involved in past negotiations for health benefits.

If there are major changes in benefits, then the unions will be involved. If the changes are equivalent or savings can be found by POMCO, then they may not.

- Playland park made money for many years, but now we are losing residents visiting the park. What will you do to try to change this?

We are looking at changes at Playland for next year, including marketing, revenues and management.

- I am offended by your use of the term 'we'. Most of the people in this room don't see anywhere near \$100,000.00 a year. None of us drive Cadillacs – most of us drive Chevrolets. We are employees working diligently to make the County a better place.

We are trying to reduce the number of people affected by the budget shortfalls. I am a father too. In a cooperative way, we can minimize the pain.

- Are you researching ways to bring money into Westchester County, like the film industry, or a lottery?

We have met with the hotel industry and corporations. We are also concerned about losing more companies from doing business in Westchester, due to new State tax proposals like the one on soft drinks, which could drive companies like Pepsico out of New York.

- [Unit 9200 3rd Vice President Jim Kelly]  
Incomes for employees have not gone up at the same rate as taxes and inflation have, the same as with the County. If you lay me off, I'll end up on welfare, and you'll be paying me anyway. We can't afford to give back the raises we've fairly negotiated. Maybe we will consider your suggestions if you agree to take no salary next year.

I am talking to everyone rather than taking the easy way out. I have responsibilities to the people who put me in office and also to the employees. We need your help.

- During the snowstorm at the end of February, cities, towns and villages closed and/or declared states of emergency and advised people not to travel, but the County offices were still open for business. Are you going to take the same care for employees with the budget as you did with the snowstorm?

The decision to keep County offices open on the day of the snowstorm was legal and contractual. We would have to pay overtime to employees if we were closed and they came in anyway, and we have essential employees that must report regardless of the weather.

- [Unit 9200 1st Vice President Judy Brome]  
Employees have already helped the County in the past by taking O's and bonuses instead of raises, which do not apply to our retirement. During good times, the County never gave us 5 days extra pay, so why are they asking us to give up 5 days of pay now? We have nothing to give back.

It is what it is. We can pretend it doesn't exist, but the numbers are real. I am asking from the bottom of my heart, if you don't help us, it will be disastrous in November. We can agree to disagree.

- Regarding the 15% health contributions, is it 15% of the premium or 15% of our salary? How can we afford it?

It is a benefit which you can take or not. It costs about \$8,000.00 for a single person and \$20,000.00 for a family per year, with an 8% increase in 2011. Is it better to have it at 85% or not at all? Private sector employees pay 25-50% of their premiums. The reality of this situation has to be confronted.

- Will you consider changing providers if POMCO cannot offer savings?

We are looking at other options, although POMCO has come back with short- and long-term solutions for savings.

- Are you looking at the pork in the budget, like \$1,000,000.00 to the Hudson River museum, when exhibits could be shown at County facilities, or contracts for bus routes?

The housing settlement will take funds allocated elsewhere. We have begun discussions about contracts with outside agencies. All contracts are being looked at, and will only be funded at 90% in 2011.

- Can you help us by helping to change the perception that public employees are the enemy? Budgets are 80% mandated. Let the public know this, and speak to the press against mandates and not against us.

I have repeatedly said it is not anyone's fault. I was a union member and so were my parents. This isn't about bashing unions. I thank you for doing what you do on a daily basis.

- I make a \$60,000.00 salary, but I only net \$38,000.00. After paying taxes, I can't afford to pay another \$3,000.00 in health insurance premiums, or I will end up losing my house. We keep hearing we have to do more with less. If I have to pay toward my health benefits, at least it would be offset by my raise next year, but you're asking us to give that up too. You say you understand – but we're living it.

We have to make structural changes and do things very differently. I empathize with you and that's why I'm here talking to you rather than hiding in my office. We have to figure out what is best for everyone as a group. This is the beginning of a long process.

- My husband and I both work for the Department of Community Mental Health. There has been a proposal from the Commissioner that the department should close clinics and privatize services. I appreciate the quality of life Westchester offers for raising children here. What quality of life will there be for the people that we serve if these clinics are closed?

We are considering this as a potential option, but no decision has been made. We would not make a decision that would affect people who need services.

County Executive Astorino thanked employees for coming and giving him the opportunity to try to dispel rumors, give employees the facts and start a dialogue.

Respectfully Submitted,

**Kimberly Gotzen**

Kimberly Gotzen

Secretary / Chair, Communications Committee / Shop Steward & Grievance Representative, Unit 9200

### Unit 9200 Executive Board

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**Karen Pecora – President**

**Judith Brome – 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President / Union Representative**

**Michael Wolf – Treasurer**

**Kwabena Manu – 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President / Union Representative**

**Kimberly Gotzen – Secretary**

**James Kelly – 3<sup>rd</sup> Vice President**

**Junio I. Alvarado – Union Representative**

**[Vacant] – 4<sup>th</sup> Vice President**

### Unit 9200 Office

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