

NEWS

RENSSELAER COUNTY LEGISLATURE

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GOP Orchestrates Public Hearing on 2009 County Budget

Troy—The GOP hijacked the public hearing held on November 24th to discuss the 2009 Proposed County Budget and made a mockery of the concept of open government and a well-informed citizenry. Obviously scripted statements read by GOP plants, all delivering the same message nearly verbatim, accused the Democratic Minority of calling for a reduction in the county's unappropriated fund balance, the so-called "rainy day fund." Contrary to the erroneous statements read, the Minority's 2009 Tentative Budget Report does not suggest spending down the fund and in fact suggests quite the opposite. Among their multiple recommendations the Democrats urge **"...increasing the unappropriated fund balance to sufficient levels to eliminate year-end borrowing."**

"We heard from GOP operatives and a number of early campaigners who read scripted, totally misleading statements. If the public wants to get past the spin, I suggest they read our report for themselves to see what the Democratic legislators are actually proposing. It's online at our website, www.rensselaergov.com, or they can get a copy from our office by calling 270-2890," said District 2 Legislator Kevin Harrington.

In addition to the other remarks read at the meeting, a statement was made by Frank Curtis, Director of Tax Services, to explain how the amount of property tax Rensselaer County residents will pay is determined. Repeating this year's "0% tax rate increase" mantra, he placed responsibility for any increases at the feet of municipalities and the state, claiming that, because the County does not control equalization rates or property assessments, they have no control over taxes beyond setting the tax rate.

"Mr. Curtis's remark that the County Executive only has control over the 'tax rate' is complete nonsense. The County Executive has control over spending and how much money she collects from taxpayers. The simple fact is that the County Executive decided she needs **\$7.3 million more in the 2009 Tentative Budget** and a good portion of that increase is coming from the pockets of property taxpayers," remarked Legislator Flora Fasoldt.

"Rensselaer County residents are getting a misleading message from the Republicans," warned Minority Leader Ginny O'Brien, "and I'm afraid there may be some unpleasant post-holiday surprises coming when they get their county tax bills. Families throughout the county are cutting back and the recommendations in our budget report call on the county government to cut costs as well."

"The GOP is trying vainly to deflect all responsibility—it's either the state or the municipalities, we're told," continued Legislator Brian Zweig. "But the fact remains that while they've controlled the county government we've seen taxes go up every single year. **In fact, since 2002 the tax levy in Rensselaer County has gone up 98.5%.**"

Read the Democratic Minority's complete report at: www.rensselaercountygov.com or call 270-2890 to receive a copy.

