

RENSELAER COUNTY LEGISLATURE

OFFICE OF THE MINORITY 270-2892

January 30, 2009

To the Editor:

The Rensselaer County Legislature convened a special meeting on January 29th at the request of the County Executive to review the Governor's proposed spending cuts and the effects they might have on the County's 2009 Budget. The Budget and Finance staff summarized cuts proposed by Governor Paterson, describing how those cuts could cause a \$4.75 million shortfall in the 2009 County Budget. The County Executive made a plea for the Legislators' support for a Local Law to increase fees in the County Clerk's office.

Governor Paterson has been forthright about the fiscal condition of the state and projected \$15 billion budget gap, so cuts in state aid were imminent and should come as no surprise to localities. These factors were already in play when the County budget was passed by a party-line vote of 12 to 6. In our analysis of the budget, Democrats in the County Legislature found that unrealistic revenue projections, newly created staff positions and a \$7.3 million increase in spending were cause for them to vote against the County Executive's budget.

This meeting provided an opportunity for discussion that has been all too rare. The county budget directly impacts all our constituents, whatever their party affiliation. President Obama's example of listening to different viewpoints, his effort to build consensus, and intention to work across the aisle provide a model we should aspire to at the local level of government as well.

We are now left with tough decisions. The Democrats in the County Legislature strongly favor efforts to cut costs to the greatest extent possible without reducing necessary services. We will support efforts to reduce spending. At the same time, we are resistant to the County Executive's proposed fee increases and will not back them until every alternative has been fully investigated.

The Democratic Minority submitted a budget report on November 20th with a number of recommendations for cutting costs and increasing efficiency. We again urge consideration of these recommendations. In a time of great challenges, the Democratic Minority pledges to focus our attention on finding solutions that provide the greatest good for the greatest number. To suppose that no tough decisions lie ahead and that cuts will always be elsewhere and at someone else's expense, is shortsighted and unrealistic for anyone to imagine. The practice of open government by officials willing to transact the peoples' business in the light of day is essential to restoring confidence and keeping the public informed.

The Rensselaer County Democratic Minority Legislators:

Ginny O'Brien, Keith Hammond, Flora Fasoldt, Peter Grimm, Kevin Harrington, Brian Zweig