

NEWS

RENSSELAER COUNTY LEGISLATURE

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Democratic Legislators Oppose Continued Misuse of Capital Fund

Troy—At last month's Legislative meeting, the Democratic Minority filed a resolution to terminate the "Chamber Fund," a bloated capital fund originally established in 1999 to pay for renovations to the Legislative Chamber. They proposed that the balance in the fund, over \$840,000 as of May 12, be used to reduce the tax levy. The Democratic initiative was defeated in committee by GOP legislators.

The Chamber Fund, which started out with around \$69,000 for improvements to the Legislative Chambers, has been padded each year under GOP with so-called "savings." It now contains an excessive amount—over \$840,000. In addition objecting to the size of the fund, the Minority contest its use for numerous purposes other than capital improvements. (In fact, only around \$20,000 has been appropriated for work on the Chambers during the last decade.)

This month, the Democrats filed another resolution to establish an appropriate, transparent plan for use of the fund and for the return to the taxpayers of any monies not needed for improvements to the Chambers. Their resolution was, once again, defeated in committee. Meanwhile, the GOP Majority have filed their own resolution this month to appropriate \$5000 from the Chamber Fund to pay for consultation on the preservation of the legislature's annual journals. Democrats proposed an amendment to the resolution that would appropriate funds from an unused \$30,000 line in the Clerk of the Legislature's budget, but the amendment was defeated in the Special Rules Committee that meets prior to the meeting of the full legislature.

"We fully support the project to ensure these records are preserved, but, once again, insist that it should be appropriately funded. The Clerk of the Legislature is charged with maintaining Legislative records and this project should be funded from the Clerk's budget, not from a capital fund," commented Minority Leader Ginny O'Brien (D-East Greenbush, North Greenbush, Poestenkill).

"We've repeatedly voiced our objections to the inappropriate use of this fund. In addition, we've made constructive suggestions about using the substantial sum hoarded from year to year to help reduce that tax levy, especially during these challenging economic times," said Legislator Brian Zweig (D-East Greenbush, North Greenbush, Poestenkill).

"This is an inappropriate way to disburse taxpayer dollars—one more example of the GOP using the fund to ingratiate themselves with particular causes and organizations. Please understand, I believe these causes are worthy, which makes it all the more important that we insist upon their being funded in the budget so they don't depend on "gifts" from the Majority paid for by Rensselaer County taxpayers," said Legislator Flora Fasoldt (D-Sand Lake, Schodack, Nassau)