



# State of Our Union

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## *Hypocrisy in our Democracy*

### *The Attack on Civil Service Workers is an Attack on the Middle Class*

Democracy is a political government carried out either directly by the people (direct democracy) or by means of elected representatives of the people (representative democracy). The term comes from the Greek word: *dēmokratía* "rule of the people", which was coined from *dēmos* "people" and *krátos* "power". Most democracies today are representative. The concept of representative democracy arose largely from ideas and institutions that developed during the European Middle Ages and the Enlightenment and in the American and French Revolutions. Democracy has come to imply universal suffrage, competition for office, freedom of speech and the press, and the rule of law.

Hypocrisy is the act of persistently professing beliefs, opinions, virtues, feelings, qualities, or standards that are inconsistent with one's actions. Hypocrisy is thus a kind of lie. Hypocrisy is also of Greek origin: hypocrites "play acting", i.e. the assumption of a counterfeit persona, that gives the modern word hypocrisy its negative connotation.

The recent acts of some of our elected officials involved in drug cases, domestic abuse, massive government overspending, along with lack of accountability of those elected through the process of democracy is indicative of hypocrisy. Those pointing their fingers in an economic downturn and scapegoating hard working civil service workers through media connects have now shown us the face of Hypocrisy of our Democratic system.

Labor unions across the nation have been thrown under the bus by our elected officials. The so-called "card check" bill that would make it easier to unionize employees has gone nowhere. A pro-union Transportation Security Administration nominee quit before he even got a confirmation vote. Additionally, even though unions got a sweetheart deal to keep their health plans tax-free under the Senate health care bill, that bill has collapsed, leaving unions exposed again.

In New York, Governor Paterson showed hypocrisy by furloughing 100,000 state employees and then giving raises to five of his staff members. After massive outcry from labor groups, Governor Paterson reluctantly rescinded the raises.

We have watched how the Westchester media, through past articles and illustrations, have slowly painted a grim picture to the hard working tax payers that the dedicated, hard working county civil service workers are to blame for the municipalities and Westchester's excessively high tax rate.

These are the same hard working civil service workers that wake up early in the morning and provide crucial services for the citizens of our county; police, probation, correction, sheriffs, DPW workers, firemen and countless others. All these professionals are highly trained and perform their duties in a professional manner; some without raises for 3 years and yet they perform to the highest of standards, while believing that their hard work will pay off with gratitude from county government.

What thanks do they get? Westchester County legislators passing a healthcare bill that mandates that non-union employees contribute up to 20% of their salaries is unacceptable. Currently, this only affects approximately 400 county workers.

Union leaders made a grave mistake by remaining silent on this legislation. This will be the blue print for future negotiations for the rest of the county unionized work force. With a majority of unions working under expired labor contracts, any monetary raise will be erased by healthcare contributions.

County management and elected officials continued to fatten their pockets while labor unions were forced to wait some two to four years for labor contracts. For the county employees going this long without a raise, this is money we will never get back and for the younger employees, they will never catch up to the rising cost of living.

With the constant barrage of the assumptions that these dedicated civil service workers are the cause of our financial woes and that the way to strike a balance is off the backs of hard working civil service workers. Most can't even afford to purchase a home in the city or county where they serve; we say to you: Do not expect to remain in office or be elected if you do not truly embrace accountability and balance at all levels!

The financial crisis in the cities and county has affected everyone. For the last 12 years, government has grown. This outrageous growth has been mostly at the top and frivolous spending can be attributed to those in appointed positions and elected officials has become. Common sense dictates that cost cutting starts at the top. Minimally, it may seem symbolic, but it sets the tone for fiscal responsibility.

Westchester County has become no better than Corporate America, no different than any Fortune 500 company with profits as its bottom line; cut from the bottom while management is over staffed, paper clip job titles, and some with no working knowledge of how their departments are run and by whom. All the while keeping their eyes on the rank and file, while over staffed management goes untouched and un affected.

County Executive Astorino has directed the department to present budgets with savings of 20 percent. We all can probably guess where the proposed savings will come from. So the change that the common people voted for has become the same bureaucracy and financial chaos created by the status quo. Labor union bosses should be outraged at the assumptions of the media and out of touch financial specialists' that it is Labor's fault for the financial condition of the county. The members should demand a fair and balanced story.

We have seen the private sector attempt to dictate policy to the public sector in Westchester County. It has been said that the Westchester Business Association called on County Executive Astorino to address the salaries of hard working county laborers so the business tax base can be lowered. It appears that Mr. Astorino is responding with a well thought out attack on county laborers; this is a grave mistake.

The Astorino administration is attempting to subjugate the Triborough Amendment of the New York State Taylor Law. The 1982 Triborough Amendment to the Taylor Law prohibits a public employer from altering any provision of an expired labor agreement until a new agreement is reached. This means, automatic pay increases where a salary step schedule or longevity schedule exists, even though the labor agreement has expired. Consequently, a public employer's salary continues to rise even when labor negotiations have reached an impasse.

Opponents of this amendment feel that it should be repealed so that public employers and employees can be encouraged to work together to achieve labor contracts that are both fair and affordable. Even though the union and the governmental municipality negotiated in good faith, the municipalities can renegotiate on the deal if deemed necessary. Basically, we giveth and we taketh away!

The Astorino Administration should remember their historical landslide victory last November. It didn't occur only with Republican votes. It was the majority of county workers, Westchester's middle class, their families and friends that stepped up on voting day and elected him in office with hope for a change for the better. It is incumbent of Mr. Astorino to create a substantial wage and benefits package that reflects good jobs and the ability to have a middle-class life style in Westchester County or his first four years just may be his last.

Democrats will not be successful in upcoming elections. The biggest threat, of course, is apathy from a Democratic constituency that has a history of mobilizing for elections in Westchester. The last major election in November of 2009 was the all time lowest turnout for Westchester County. A low electoral turn-out spells a nightmare for any incumbent, especially for the Democrats.

It's time for the labor unions' of Westchester County to truly stand up and become proactive instead of reactive. Where are the constant voices of our labor union presidents? Why do they wait until legislation is passed to rally the members? The legislator's chambers should be packed at every meeting. They have been muffled and confused because they enjoyed the crumbs from the Andy Spano error. Now they have to really work in the position they have been voted to represent.

Labor unions will not be able to go to their membership and say lets vote for this one or that one again. The membership will respond; what have they done for us? Union leaders will be astounded when the membership demands accountability and results.

If labor unions presidents don't step out the box, truly address labor issues and hold elected officials accountable on the local, state, and federal government levels, they would have failed its members and the greater public in holding elected officials to true democracy and exposed the hypocrites that pose as representatives of the people in our democracy.