

## 2011 county budget: Democratic caucus' perspective

BY SANDY GOLDBERG  
AND DAN KUFFNER

Recent articles have painted a one-sided view of the current county budget process. It is our hope that this article will point out the shortcomings of this budget and what has been done to date.

The tentative proposed budget received by the Legislature on Nov. 1 left many services underfunded and followed a policy that will increase county costs in the coming year(s). That was unacceptable to the Democratic caucus.

The county executive, in his eagerness to present a budget that he could say had no tax increase, left out key elements and has put stress on service providers. The Republican caucus did not want to be blamed for a tax increase, so they made cuts, some of which further stress county departments so the Legislature could later add back some positions and services. For the Republican caucus, the priority was not human services.

The Budget and Finance Committee has adopted a tentative budget that will go before the full Legislature on Dec. 7 at 7 p.m. There will be a hearing on this budget on Thursday evening, Dec. 2, at the Bardavon.

Funds for essential programs and/or binding legal commitments were either excluded or underfunded by the county executive. For example, all three contracts the county has with its unions have already expired or will expire on Dec. 31, but no funds were included for a settlement; no funds were provided

for the Resource Recovery Agency net service fee that the county is legally required to pay; insufficient monies were put in for housing out inmates and for the overtime costs for transporting inmates; the county executive included closing the Beacon and Pawling Department of Motor Vehicles offices, despite the fact that the county clerk showed both offices create more revenue than they cost; the elimination of two auditors in the county comptroller's office, the financial watchdog of the county, would inhibit that office from performing its charter function.

The slashing of county funding to "non-mandated, non-reimbursable" programs provided by contract agencies is one of the most serious issues the Budget and Finance Committee had to address. The services these agencies provide are delivered at a much lower cost than if the county provided the same necessary service. The list of questionable and incomprehensible budget-cut decisions by the county executive goes on.

Both caucuses provided amendments to the Steinhaus proposed budget. As already reported by the local media, restorations to the Beacon and Pawling DMV offices were approved, the two auditors in the comptroller's office were reinstated, and positions were restored to the jail and sheriff's department. Additionally, \$25,740 was restored to fund the Fire Investigation Division. There were some restorations of funding to some contract agencies, Cornell Cooperative Extension being among them. The Democratic caucus supported *all* of these amendment resolutions, which were put forward by the majority caucus, and rightly so.

The Democratic caucus members are keenly aware of the current economic conditions. The caucus members fully believe that Steinhaus's proposed budget and the Budget and Finance Committee's amended budget with a zero tax levy increase goes way beyond the practical and is outwardly political in its motivation and construction. As a result, the Democratic caucus proposed amendment resolutions to the budget to restore funding for positions in the Youth Bureau, The Human Rights Commission, the Health Department Water Lab and other county positions that were eliminated. Vacant positions were not restored.

Amendments were proposed by the Democrats to restore county funding to some long-standing, effective programs that had been severely reduced or eliminated. County judges and commissioners of several departments

explained the implication of reducing and eliminating these programs. Cost avoidance that these programs provide runs in the millions. In our view, each of the following programs provide services that, in the long run, save county taxpayers from being saddled with exorbitant tax increases in the coming years.

As explained by Commissioner Robert Allers of the Department of Social Services, the Wheels to Work program provides reconditioned vehicles to public assistance recipients so they are able to get to work and maintain employment, thus coming off the public assistance rolls. This non-mandated, non-reimbursable fully county-funded program costs the county \$245,000 a year. Allers was asked how much it would cost the county if all of the persons supported by this specific program were to re-enter the public assistance rolls again. His response was an astonishing \$6.5 million a year. To date *none* of the participants has re-entered the system.

The GED program at the jail helps reduce recidivism. The Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program has proven essential for our court system. The Mediation Center has had great success in obtaining better outcomes in Family Court and has helped reduce the backlog of cases; this center also has had successful outcomes in working with the probation department with youthful offenders. Severe cuts to the Mid-Hudson Library Systems and the Dutchess County Arts Council, both of which provide services for disadvantaged children that help keep them out of the criminal justice system, were also of concern to the Democratic caucus.

The Democrats offered amendments restoring these essential services, knowing that in the long run, they saved county taxpayers significant money. All were defeated by the majority caucus.

This is the type of budgeting logic with which the Democratic caucus does not agree. Spending a reasonable amount of county dollars on an annual basis to save huge expenses in the future just makes sense. This is why the Democratic caucus continues to fight for all of the county's residents, to maintain a dignity and a quality of life for everyone. Cutting programs so drastically in a recessionary time is a recipe for financial disaster in the future.

*County Legislator Sandy Goldberg (D-Wappinger) is minority leader in the Dutchess County Legislature, and Legislator Dan Kuffner (D-Hyde Park) serves as assistant minority leader.*

## Gibson names district director

BY HV NEWS STAFF

Congressman-elect Chris Gibson has announced a Clifton Park man will serve as his district director when he takes office Jan. 3.

Steve Bulger, who has served in a number of leadership roles in different organizations throughout the district, was appointed to the position. During the recent campaign, Bulger served as Gibson's Saratoga County coordinator.

According to Gibson, Bulger will be responsible for "ensuring that the residents of the 20th Congressional District receive outstanding constituent services."

Bulger previously served as president of the Troy Boys & Girls Club Board of Directors and the Greater Troy Jaycees. He currently serves as planning board chairman in Clifton Park and on the Saratoga Bridges Board of Directors.

Professionally, he is a former manager for the Stryker Corporation, specializing in total hip and knee replacements and trauma fracture fixation implants. He has also worked for Johnson & Johnson and Synthes and has a total of nearly 20 years' experience in the medical manufacturing industry.

"Steve Bulger is a great example of a citizen dedicated to selflessly improving our community," said Gibson in a press release. "His volunteerism has already made a difference in countless lives and I'm honored and proud to have him serve as my District Director. He has demonstrated an ability to work with all people and has shown compassion and empathy for their struggles and challenges. Steve's dedication to his fellow man and his superior organizational and business skills will serve our constituents well."

"I was attracted early on by Chris's dedication to service and immediately knew that he would make an excellent congressman," Bulger added. "He served our nation for 24 years in the military, taught at West Point, earned a PhD and serves as a great example to future generations of what someone can achieve in this great country. The more time I spent with him, the more impressed I became. It is an enormous honor to join his team and become his district director."

Bulger is a Clifton Park resident. He lives with his wife, Mary Beth, and three children, Laura, 19, Kevin 17, and James, 9. He grew up in Brunswick, graduated from Troy High School and earned a BA in government and law from Lafayette College.

*Wishing you a Warm  
and Fuzzy Holiday Season*



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