



News Release

Office of the Dutchess County Executive

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Democrats Refuse to Allow Budget Questions

Chairman Refuses to Defend Decisions While Millions of Dollars Remain a Mystery

Poughkeepsie...“In all of my years as a public servant in Dutchess County Government, I have never seen such a blatant disregard of what is intended to be an open, transparent, democratic budget process,” said County Executive Steinhaus.

At last night’s Legislature board meeting for the adoption of the 2009 County Budget, Democrat Chairman Roger Higgins refused to allow legislators to be provided public answers explaining the 700 Democrat party changes to the proposed county budget. Questions about revenues, expenditures and the service cuts caused by the new Democrat proposals were repeatedly stonewalled dozens of times over the seven hour meeting. **At the conclusion of the meeting, Democrats couldn’t even tell taxpayers what the final county tax rate and tax levy were because millions of dollars in adjustments remained a mystery could not be explained by the Democrats.**

At the start of the Legislative meeting, Chairman Higgins firmly stated, “We’re not going to get into a dialogue tonight with legislators and department heads” even though that has been the exact format for legislative business for decades and after nearly 700 budget amendments had been dropped in the laps of legislators by Democrats for review only hours ahead of time. With one-third of the legislators being in office only eleven months and voting on a county budget for the first time ever, there was a great deal of concern that legislators were denied the ability to ask any key questions to the Budget Director or department heads about Democrats’ multi-million dollar decisions.

As GOP Assistant Minority Leader Rob Rolison stated at the board meeting, “We have a responsibility as legislators to understand what these budget amendments mean. We rely on the professionals, both the department heads and the budget staff, to help provide that information to us.”

However, despite repeated pleas by Republican legislators to allow an exchange of information with department heads and professional staff, both Chairman Higgins and Budget & Finance Committee Chairwoman Diane Nash stonewalled legislators. “Questions are not going to be answered,” was the strident, angry retort of Legislator Nash.

Republican legislators had dozens of questions about Democrat budget amendments that not only cut state and federally funded programs with little to no local county cost, but also did not include the required corresponding adjustments to revenue. The Democrats refused to include any explanation or justification with any of their amendments. Although Republican legislators insisted they should be given the information so they would know exactly what they were voting on and how amendments would ultimately affect the property tax levy, Chairman Higgins shockingly said that it was “absurd to expect us to do that.”

“Again and again, we have heard from the Democrat Majority about how much they value open and transparent government which has now been proven to be worthless rhetoric. Democrats hid vital information key to the decision making process which they repeatedly refused to disclose. They just don’t want to hear the truth or the facts. This is a complete insult and disservice to the taxpayers who expect their elected officials to make informed decisions,” concluded County Executive Steinhaus.

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