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## Spano yanks plan for raises for Westchester County managers

*Jorge Fitz-Gibbon*  
*The Journal News*

WHITE PLAINS - Westchester County Executive Andrew Spano today withdrew a proposed \$890,000 pay hike package that would have given 3.25 percent raises to nonunion managers and supervisors, including his top 24 department heads.

Spano's office announced the move shortly after 3 p.m. today, just hours after the Westchester Board of Legislators held a public hearing on the measure - a hearing during which all 20 speakers criticized the proposed raises.

"I know that there are many Westchester residents who are hurting in this economy," Spano said in a statement. "I fear that the economy will get worse before it gets better. If it weren't for the loss of revenue and for expenses out of our control, I would have not proposed any tax increase."

"I know that even the small tax increase is not what the public wants," he said. "That was the reason I slashed my proposed budget by over 11 million dollars, eliminating positions, cutting overtime, equipment and supplies. That was also the reason I eliminated salary increases for 2009, cutting in half my original proposal. But after hearing from the public, we decided to eliminate the 2008 raises as well."

The Westchester County Board of Legislators is expected later today to vote on a \$1.77 billion proposed 2009 budget that calls for a 2.97 percent property tax increase. Spano had withdrawn raises for nonunion managers from that spending plan, but was pushing for raises this year, retroactive to Jan. 1.

Last week, after facing opposition to the salary increases, Spano agreed to eliminate proposed pay hikes for his top-tier supervisors, but said he still sought increases for mid-level managers.

In all, about 340 county workers were initially targeted for raises. But opposition to the move due to a faltering economy mounted over the past two weeks, culminating with today's public hearing before the 17-member county board.

"The taxpayers have been making sacrifices in this county for years," Pleasantville resident Chris Dzielak told lawmakers. "We're the highest taxed county in the country. Maybe it's the legislators and county government that should make some sacrifices. And if any of you guys vote for this raise, I'm going to remind everybody on election day."

Susan Tolchin, Spano's chief advisor, said the county executive had been negotiating the elimination of the raises for several days, and that today's public hearing did not spur the decision.

"This was not a reaction to the public hearing today," Tolchin said. "This was something that was in discussion with the (county board Democratic) caucus over the weekend... as a result of the feedback we were getting."