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## Westchester business leaders rip state budget

*Jorge Fitz-Gibbon*  
*The Journal News*

WHITE PLAINS - Gov. David Paterson's proposed state budget is "unconscionable" and will further endanger Westchester's already fragile economy, one of the county's largest business and advocacy groups said yesterday.

The Westchester County Association charged that the \$7 billion in proposed increases in various state taxes are a "short-term Band-Aid" solution that will serve only to drive more residents and businesses out of the county.

A proposed income-tax increase alone would hit nearly 35,000 local businesses and residents, the association said, while the proposed elimination of the STAR property-tax rebate would hit homeowners at the worst time.

"There's a big huge disconnect between the business community and state legislators," said Amy Allen, the association's managing director of advocacy and international business, yesterday.

"The business community is feeling that the budget that's being put forward is fiscally irresponsible in this economic climate," Allen said. "Everybody's cleaning their own house, and they're certainly not doing so."

State legislators this week worked feverishly to adopt the proposed \$131.8 billion budget, with lawmakers trying to bridge a \$17.7 billion budget shortfall.

Among other measures, Paterson has proposed restructuring the state income tax to increase the rate for wealthier residents. He also is seeking tax hikes on wine, beer, cigarettes and other items.

Matt Anderson, a state budget spokesman, said the governor has been responsive with a record-high \$6.5 billion cut in state spending. He said Paterson proposed the income-tax measure only "as a last resort" when the projected budget shortfall grew by another \$4.7 billion since early February.

He also said the STAR program was not entirely eliminated: The property-tax relief is still in place, even if the rebate check homeowners receive was cut.

"The governor said that there's going to have to be shared sacrifice across every area of the budget, and there was," Anderson said. "And there are a lot of tough choices and shared sacrifices across this entire budget."

But in a statement yesterday, County Association President William Mooney said the "short-term Band-Aid approach" to cost-cutting is not the budget reform the state needs.

Mooney said that in a recent poll of association members, 78 percent of those surveyed expressed that lawmakers in Albany were not doing enough to control spending.

The association also is circulating an online petition "expressing dissatisfaction" with the budget.

The petition is at [www.westchester.org/petition.asp](http://www.westchester.org/petition.asp).