



April 28, 2009

Congressional delegation offers no guarantee on stimulus

Jerry Gleeson
jgleeson@lohud.com

Westchester's congressional delegation yesterday acknowledged to local businesspeople that the federal stimulus package is not coming with a full-satisfaction guarantee.

"Do we know it will work? Of course not," said Rep. Eliot Engel, D-Bronx. "Do we hope it's the right thing? We do."

Engel and colleagues Nita Lowey, D-Harrison, and John Hall, D-Dover Plains, addressed an annual congressional luncheon sponsored by the Westchester County Association at the Ritz-Carlton Westchester in White Plains. Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., also spoke informally with the audience before the event.

One measure of local engagement with the stimulus issue was attendance at the luncheon. About 250 people were on hand, up 25 percent from last year. Not everyone was happy, County Association Chairman Alfred DelBello said.

A recent survey of its membership produced the largest response ever, and many were "extremely upset" with government, he said.

Eighty-five percent of respondents said they felt they didn't have enough information to evaluate how well the stimulus program would work, DelBello said.

Association President William Mooney Jr. echoed the frustration that he read in notes that members sent along with the survey. "If you ever read these notes, you would think there's a revolution going on," he said.

Some representatives said their business constituents were struggling. Lowey said some small companies in White Plains had seen business drop 20 percent to 30 percent, and they were getting by by juggling multiple credit cards carrying high interest rates.

"Frankly, I wish I had confidence it (recovery) would be less than three months, or six months, or 12 months," she said. "But I do know, and I've said it before, that I feel it's essential to be aggressive, and that's why the stimulus plan is so important."

Hall said that not all the stimulus spending is under way yet.

"We're seeing the front edge of this wave," he said. "I can say that, whatever the bottom is, we've made it shallower. I'm confident of that."

Hall said he supports government dictates on compensation for executives whose companies were receiving federal bailout funds.