

## CitzeNetReporter

### County Exec, WCA, Hospitals, Seek relief for hospitals from MTA

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**WPCNR QUILL & EYESHADE. By John F. Bailey. May 7, 2009:** The Westchester County Association Executive Director, William Mooney, today told WPCNR that political leaders in the county and his organization would be working hard to get Albany representatives to relieve local hospitals from payment of the just-enacted MTA payroll tax. Once hospital relief from the tax is achieved, Mooney said, the group would continue to push for a rollback of the tax. No details were forthcoming on what form of relief for the area hospitals might take. They sharply criticized State Senators Suzi Oppenheimer, Andrea Stewart-Cousins and John Klein for not listening to the business community.



"Fed Up" with state legislators. County Executive Andrew Spano, left, Alfred Del Bello, Chair of the Westchester County Association, second from left, Robert Weisz, owner of 1133 Westchester Avenue, and William Mooney, Executive Director of the WCA, announcing effort to overturn MTA Payroll Tax Thursday.

Mooney said the payroll tax would cost local Westchester hospitals \$3.5 Million, Dutchess hospitals, \$1,819,000, Rockland hospitals, \$597,000 and Putnam County \$180,000. He began the news conference saying, "This is really outrageous stuff, another nail in the coffin of the Westchester business community."

Mr. Mooney was joined by County Executive Andrew Spano, who in his first statement said, "I am so angry about this." They were joined by three local hospital CEOs, Jon Schandler of White Plains Hospital Medical Center.

Mooney deplored the just-enacted MTA payroll tax, sharply criticizing Westchester and Rockland Democratic Senators Suzi Oppenheimer and Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Jeffrey Klein who voted for the tax, saying they do not listen to the business community and did not listen to the group's extensive lobbying on the issue. Mooney mocked State Senator Suzi Oppenheimer's quotation to the press describing this was "a silver lining for education." "Any one of them could have stopped it," Mooney said.

Mooney promised that hospital relief from the MTA tax was first priority on the group's new lobbying effort, and after that, elimination of the tax. He told WPCNR the MTA should have been made to trim their labor agreements, benefits packages, pension programs and operations to eliminate their deficit before seeking relief from taxpayers.

The business and political leaders promised an all-out lobbying effort to rescind the tax, which Neil Abitabile, President of Northern Metropolitan Hospital Association, told the news conference was effective retroactive to March 1 of this year.

Mooney delivered a stream of mocking scorn, criticizing legislators refusal to hear the business community. He charged Albany favoritism of New York City in that the legislature refusal to enact bridge tolls on Manhattan bridges, as well as the legislators refusing to go against the teachers' union and exempting school districts from the tax.

However, the exclusion of school districts from paying the tax, does not mean they will not collect it from tax payers in property taxes. The White Plains City School District already budgeted for the payroll tax in anticipation of its passing and will collect \$330,000 of the 34 cents per \$100 of payroll tax which they will include in their general fund in 2009-10. Exempting the districts in the final version of the MTA Payroll Tax which the districts do not have to pay, in ultimate effect, means any monies already budgeted by districts like White Plains has, amounts to more school aid, not MTA aid.

Mooney promised a news conference in about two weeks on the Westchester County Association independent Westchester "stimulus" effort he announced last fall. Mooney also said the state had to concern itself with funding the Tappan Zee Bridge rebuild (about \$16 to \$25 Billion).

Host of the conference, Robert Weisz owner of 1133 Westchester Avenue where the news conference was held, told the assembled media this was a tax on employment which would serve to create layoffs as companies would lower workforces to pay the tax. "It makes no sense to me. (Businesses) We're going to reduce employment to make up what this is going to cost us." This sentiment was also echoed by banker George Strayer who said that was what his bank would probably do.

Three heads of hospitals indicated that in order to continue services, job cuts might be necessary, the head of Westchester County Medical Center said \$1.2 Million the tax would cost the MedicalCenter said, "that's 13 jobs."

Mooney pointed out the series of costs that the legislature has foisted on the hospitals in the new budget, producing a chart of legislature moves that have hurt hospitals, including use of stimulus money to close the state budget gap; 4 consecutive budget cuts over the past 13 months; loss of health care jobs; cuts to essential services; low medicare reimbursement rates, and now the MTA Tax.

Mooney accused the legislature of loading the burden of their spending on the taxpayers and business while not addressing pension reform of government workers, failure to cut state spending, and extracting no concessions from unions of the MTA.