



Call to Action campaign pushes for change in Albany

BY DIANA COSTELLO • DCOSTELL@LOHUD.COM • APRIL 16, 2010

WHITE PLAINS — Frustrated by state spending and taxation, a group of Westchester County business leaders took its concerns to a delegation of elected officials in Albany.

Yet things didn't turn out exactly as they had hoped.

The meeting April 6 lasted about an hour, during which time Westchester County Association representatives vented that people were leaving New York because the cost of living and the cost of doing business had become so oppressive.

The response they got was an "eye-opener" — and a realization that action was long overdue.

It was against this backdrop that the Westchester County Association launched its Call to Action campaign Thursday.

"We were reprimanded, yelled at, pointed fingers in our faces, 'how dare you be so disrespectful to us,' " said Jeffrey Neeck, vice president at Strategies for Wealth, a financial-planning business in Rye Brook. "And as this was expressed to us, I was sitting across from a legislator in gym clothes looking disheveled. I kid you not."

The Call to Action initiative aims to mobilize businesses and individuals to press for controlled spending, lower taxes and consolidated services.

Representatives from real estate, small business, hotels, health care and other industries were on hand for the morning news conference at 1133 Westchester Ave.

Held as Tea Party rallies were taking place nationwide, the kickoff was filled with a spirit of concerned dissatisfaction with the way Albany is being run.

"We're not a bunch of fringe people," said William Mooney, WCA president. "We're trying to protect our community is what we're trying to do."

The group also unveiled its new Web site — www.calltoactioncampaign.org — which invites people to educate themselves and get involved.

On May 20, the Call to Action campaign will hold a rally at the Hilton Rye Town Hotel, 699 Westchester Ave., Rye Brook.

It's hoped that at least 1,000 people will attend. Registration is requested via the Web site.

One of the main themes hammered home by the speakers Thursday was that Albany cannot continue to keep spending beyond its means — because it's driving people and jobs from the state.

"We have to bring our cost of doing business down so that New York State can resurrect its image of the Empire State that attracts businesses," said Alfred B. DeIBello, WCA chairman. "There was a time when business after business came into the county executive's office exploring whether Westchester was a good location. From my understanding, that doesn't happen anymore. We are off the radar screen."

Gary Murphy, who employs roughly 45 people through his Maid Brigade cleaning business, said the recession has caused all businesses to tighten their belts, which in many cases has forced owners to be better businessmen.

But Albany has not done the same, and he's starting to feel like the guy who gets stuck with the check after every dinner.

"It's just appalling to me that in this climate, where there is supposed to be some level of shared sacrifice, it feels like the business community is getting pinched the hardest," Murphy said. "I know I feel it. We've been in business since 1996, and I can't remember a time that has been this much of an anti-business climate in Westchester County."