



Results from WCA Membership Survey

March 4, 2009

Do you feel the State is taking the necessary actions to control spending?

78% No 14% Yes 8% Don't Know

Comments:

"To the extent that the governor has been making issues"

"This state is out of control!"

"The Legislature has not moved on the governor's excellent program to reform the retirement laws; ie, making the retirement minimum age 62 instead of 55, and requiring new workers to contribute more."

"Cuts to school aid k - 12 as an attempt to "control spending" without addressing unfunded mandates is perhaps solving only part of the problem and creating others."

"Little or no downsizing of staff is evident."

"Are you kidding?!! Huge raises & expensive trips on one hand and cutbacks in health care, nursing home closures etc. on the other hand. They need a reality check. And there definitely needs to be strong & transparent oversight of how they use money from the federal stimulus package."

"I have first hand knowledge that they are wasting money in the area of real estate that could save taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars per month in one location. Shame on NY State."

"It is making an effort to do so, but Albany politics always trump process and logic."

"I suspect there are a lot of layers of duplication of services and that internally they could do more."

"The leadership has been in office too long and they have a personal stake and conflict of interest in holding on to benefits granted when the economy was booming."

"Recently, Governor Paterson gave raises to his staff. I think that was not prudent."

"Yet, I do not believe that they are looking at the impact of those cuts, particularly to healthcare. Cutting and moving healthcare dollars, without significant policy and payment reform, is like moving the deck chairs on the Titanic without fixing the damage to the ship."

"Gov. Paterson's proposals do absolutely nothing to deal with the Teacher's Union stranglehold on no longer applicable work rules."

"The State Government, in particular the Assembly and Senate, are not taking the need for spending reductions (not just "spending control") seriously enough. If they don't reduce spending by 10 - 20% over the next few years, NYS will be worse off than California. Raising taxes is not the answer: taxes need to be reduced, as they already are way too high."

"Until they get serious with the Unions and the pension system they won't make a dent in the deficit in the future."

"Finally, finally, they are addressing the pension issue!!! The existing system is absolutely absurd and taking action to prevent abuse of the system by eliminating overtime to be used in calculating pensions, increasing the contribution rate, and vesting periods are all crucial factors to begin to address an unrealistic abuse of the system. There is much room for other action, however, exposing this problem, and doing something to address the abuse is huge."

Do you feel that providing federal stimulus dollars to local municipalities and school districts eliminates their incentive to control costs?

Yes 47% No 50% Don't Know 3%

Comments:

"The districts know that the stimulus dollars are not forever and they have to start saving."

"School districts are constantly looking for ways to reduce costs and run more efficiently. The stimulus money will merely help out short-term to stem draconian cuts to staff and programs, reducing the quality of education in Westchester and making this a far less attractive place to raise a family, or establish a business."

"Yes, but perhaps not entirely. A certain amount of cost control initiatives will be necessary regardless. However, it certainly takes the pressure off difficult decisions such as staff reductions which may not necessarily achieve the desired results."

"Somehow I don't think our local municipalities "throw money around" inappropriately. Or I would like to think not."

"The federal stimulus is only a drop in the bucket to offset the deficit. Lost revenue from investments and rising statutory costs are the most significant culprits."

"This is even more tax money going to waste. This just delays spending controls."

"But I do think there should be some strict oversight on how the money is spent and a requirement for municipalities and school districts to prove that they have made significant efforts to reduce/control costs BEFORE the money is given to them i.e. This shouldn't be another free lunch."

"The school districts administrators have a cozy relationship with the Teachers Union and they (the administrators) benefit from outcome of the union negotiations. It is time for independent outside union negotiators to be brought into the process and eliminate the conflict of interest as is being done in other states."

"The spending seems to be directed towards niceties as opposed to necessities."

"I feel without oversight or checks and balances stimulus dollars can viewed and used as a handout. Unfortunately, municipalities may see it as found money thus, using it for purposes other than those intended. Stimulus money should be given for defined issues or projects and the municipalities should be required to prove the funds are used for the reasons intended."

"I don't think it should eliminate the incentive but I am concerned that some will use it as an excuse to avoid necessary changes."

"It also creates a budgetary problem the following year when the stimulus money isn't there & they need to maintain the program that was paid for by the stimulus."

"Yes to a degree. But most of the programs are mandated by the State. School districts also need to force action against teachers union benefits, and get them back in line with benefits of non-union corporate America, Tenure, sabbatical, extended leaves of absence, merit based pay increases, and conversion of pensions to 401-k plans are all required for survival in this economy and in the future."

Are you in favor of consolidation of municipalities to control costs?

85% yes 9% No 6% Don't Know

Comments:

"How many highway departments do we need! There is no incentive for municipal workers or teachers to bargain, they get their increases anyway. Way too much job protection in an age when they are arguing for matching salaries to the private sector."

“Only where it makes economic sense. The merging small villages with the town government should be the initial target”

“If there are so many states that have clear best practice case studies, than the question is why haven't we done this already?”

“While it might make financial sense, municipalities will lose some of their culture and uniqueness.”

“We have to get over the provincial attitude that each area in Westchester is unique unto itself. Why pay a quarter of a million to a superintendent of schools to lead 5 schools? Consolidation will cut down on administrative costs.”

“Actually I am more in favor of eliminating the County Govt.”

“This should have been done years ago”

“With a clear understanding that all municipalities will share in funding. The issue as to how big the municipality becomes once consolidated is important as well. The larger the municipality becomes the more difficult it becomes to manage. There are many other issues involved in the consolidation.”

“Villages that are contiguous to each other should seriously consider consolidation.”

“If that's what it takes.”

“I live in Fairfield County and we have no county government. As a result, my property taxes are much lower than those in Westchester County and yet each municipality in Fairfield provides more than adequate services. Although I have concerns about the loss of county jobs by eliminating the county level of government, I see it as a feeding pit for politicians and unnecessary layers of administration.”

“Way too much duplication of overhead and services in our municipal governments and school boards.”

“A recent article in the Journal News suggests that the IDEA of such consolidation is appealing, but in reality the cost savings would be miniscule.”

“Consolidation of Municipal services”

“There are massive amounts of waste in this regard. From tax collectors, assessors, building departments down to the clerk's office, a lot of this should be done on the county level, especially support staff.”

“1000% yes. Connecticut abolished the county government model more than 30 years ago, and it works fine without it. Similarly, town's and villages....not in this economy.”

Are you in favor of consolidation of school districts to control costs?

Yes 71%

No 19%

Don't Know 10%

Comments:

“I would like to see consolidation of administrative & overhead functions, such as personnel, accounting, purchasing, maintenance, etc.”

“I would start with combining "back office" functions like purchasing, maintenance, etc.”

“Long overdue, look at Fairfax County Schools in Northern Virginia, 200,000 students, one superintendent!”

“Yes, and the state education commissioner should be given powers to press for the consolidations of small districts just as the commissioners were allowed to do in the 1950s and 60s until the Legislature stripped them of the power.”

“Only if this consolidation raises the standards in the consolidated schools.”

"Again, should have been done years ago"

"Not unless the residents who live there are in favor of doing so. People do not move to Westchester to enroll their children in big, impersonal school districts. Increased consolidation/sharing of services would be beneficial. There needs to be thorough cost analysis of the benefits of true consolidation- the actual savings may not be as large as one would initially think."

"This could be tricky. I see where it would make sense in some respects as long as we do not end up cutting the quality of education for the children. Nor do we want to get into some crazy busing scenario."

"Absolutely- I can't see why more consolidation isn't happening in schools and local government. Cortlandt Manor consolidated its Police force, and that is working well."

"Again, incentives must be provided. Big problem is that tax equalization rates across geo-political boundaries will wreak havoc without a comprehensive state wide property re-appraisal."

"Yes the smaller school districts should be consolidated. But should not be consolidated to the point where children are being bused further then a defined distance from the school. There are many other issues that need to be addressed if this is done."

"There should be one Superintendent for the County with each district having an asst Super reporting to the County School Districts Super. Use the BOCES model to start."

"IF a true savings in enacted and smaller villages (like Tuckahoe) would not lose their identity in the merger of services. The Town of Eastchester is having such problems getting school bonds passed for real construction needs that to suggest consolidating certain programs with its Village of Tuckahoe would take an act of God."

"TO the extent that a school district is small, then it should be consolidated with a bordering larger district unless the town votes to stay independent."

Are you in favor of the MTA's proposal to reduce its deficit by levying a payroll tax of .33% on employers in the MTA region?

Yes 13% No 74% Don't know 13%

Comments:

"I believe this is a federal government function to provide for efficient mass transportation."

"As long as they open their books to more oversight and get out of the development business. We need a viable/efficient public transportation link to the city from the suburbs."

"This is an incredibly unfair proposal, taxing a public entity such as a municipality or a school district, to pay for another - the MTA - that isn't able to balance its books. Furthermore, some of the counties subject to the proposed tax receive no or little MTA service. The school districts and municipalities need to be exempt from this tax."

"It's absurd. Simply shifting the financial burden from MTA to employers who have there own financial issues to deal with. There is no direct correlation between the tax and it associated benefit to the employers (particularly those further away)."

"I don't really "like" it, but have they given us any other viable alternatives?"

"It's time to CHANGE the way things have always been done in Albany - beginning with reduced spending"

"Everyone is taking a hit in every sector, public, private employees shouldn't be excluded."

"Non profit organizations should be exempted from this tax."

"This is insane! Expense control is needed first. This is like giving hard liquor to raging alcoholics. Look at the LIRR disability debacles and the union overtime work rules. This idea is government at its worst."

"The users of the MTA in Connecticut and NJ aren't being subjected to such a tax."

"Another tax on top of the 5 already going to the MTA is absurd and another hit on business"

"The deficit should be reduced by making the cuts it must make, and increasing fares to USERS!"

"The MTA is another agency that has no interest in controlling their administrative costs."

"MTA needs to do a better job convincing the legislature as well as the public that their financial act is in order a fare increase should be a part of the total package. Everyone must shoulder some responsibility"

"Taxes are too high already. They must reduce costs, primarily by reducing labor costs."

"Strongly opposed to shifting MTA burden to municipalities and school districts that will result in increased property taxes! Those who use the MTA should pay for it."

"Force the MTA to cut costs, starting with pensions, overtime, fraud investigation, sick time, etc."

Do you feel that NY State should keep its Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) at the current level?

Yes 37%

No 19%

Don't Know 44%

Comments:

"The state should improve the TAP program and restore it to what it once was"

"It should be increased in order to bridge the rising gap between the increasing cost of higher education and a student's ability to afford a college education. A student's purchasing power has been eroded by the fact that financial aid (federal and state) has not increased in recent years in alignment with the rising cost of higher education."

"Higher education needs a real overhaul, and TAP is only one aspect that should be reviewed for effectiveness. Do we really know if the community benefits long-term from students receiving TAP?"

"It should be increased. If education is the basis of our future economic growth, students need to be able to afford their education."

"Given the current economic situation the tuition assistance program (TAP) levels should be raised. Families are finding it harder to send their children to college. Given the fact that today's children are tomorrow's leaders whether in government or the private sector no money spent on them and our future is money wasted. All Federal money earmarked on education should be used for that purpose and that purpose only."

"Somehow society has this idea that a college education is everyone's right and that it must be 'easily' affordable - I disagree. My three children all carried considerable debt following their college graduations and are diligently paying loans off (as are their mother and I for those same educations). The uproar over the SUNY increases appall me: taking on an additional \$600 per semester or year is peanuts. Education is an investment for one's own future!"

Any additional comments that you have for our NYS legislators?

"Throw open the chamber's economic doors so we all can see what you really make, our salaries, your expense accounts, your chairmanship benefits, etc. what you really do and how you spend our money on. A system that allows three people to run an entire state is ridiculous!"

"What are they doing to bring more state aid dollars to Westchester? Westchester is always at the bottom of the list."

"Be responsible and not political at this time."

"Our legislators have an onerous fiscal responsibility placed on their shoulders right now - they need to make every decision with great thought and understanding of its ultimate impact on each of our lives."

"Reduce State payroll -Reduce unfunded mandates -Eliminate the sweetheart state pension system Change teacher tenure practice to include merit increases based on individual performance"

"Every industry, and every family in this country is losing money, its time to hold people responsible for their spending. From school budgets to Union Labor Agreements, everyone must be cut because already so many of us have."

"Yes, create a budget that will eliminate giveaways, and increase money to elementary education. This is where our children must get the basics, like learning to read and write."

"End the bickering and fighting over "pork" and return this State to a leadership position nationally. They are doing nothing except protecting their special interests and taxing business and citizens to a certain exodus to other states."

"What initiatives is the Westchester delegation working together on to benefit our county? Not statewide- just local- i.e. west med center, getting more regional transportation money, esdc etc"

"Like CEOs giving up bonuses & taking salaries of \$1 until their cost return to finl health, elected officials should forgo any raises until NYS budget has been in the black at least 1 yr. Also, leg's w/family income above \$250,000 should donate their leg. Salary to community-srvc orgs in their district as a gesture of solidarity w/their constituents."

"Cut spending. Don't just cut the rate of spending growth, cut spending overall. Liberate the state from the control of the "Iron Triangle" of Public Employees Unions, Teachers Unions, and Health Care Workers Unions. Otherwise, the exodus from the State of corporations, and productive individuals, will continue and accelerate."

"Need their continued support in protecting consumers and providers from unfair and costly health insurance company policies that delay and deny care and avoid payment of services provided."

"Have they done an appropriate job educating people about the Stimulus money and how to access it? What specific steps have they taken to address costs and spending knowing that Stim money won't be there next time"

"Continue focus on cutting spending."

"We are in a new age, and let's take this opportunity to break apart the system of entitlement of state employees, and our citizens, and rebuild it to make it run like a lean company. Outsource as many seasonal jobs to the private sector as possible, it's being done in other states."

THE VOICE OF BUSINESS

The Westchester County Association, Inc.
1133 Westchester Avenue, Suite S 217 White Plains, NY 10604
Tel (914) 948-6444 Fax: (914) 948-6913

Not a member? Join at www.westchester.org