

Democratic Response to 2015 State of the County Address

Legislator Catherine Borgia, Majority Leader

Hello. I'm Catherine Borgia, the Democratic Majority Leader in Westchester's legislative body. I'm here tonight to provide the taxpayers of Westchester a report card of county government's performance.

The county makes sure that there is clean air and drinking water; developmental services for children; safe roads and bridges; and communities where our families can thrive, all while conserving taxpayer dollars.

The County Executive has said that the State of the County is a report card for past performance. I couldn't agree more.

Unfortunately, the 2015 County budget relies heavily on borrowing and spending money from the future to pay current expenses.

Westchester families can't run up their credit card debt excessively to pay for daily expenses—it's bad fiscal planning for your family... and it's wrong for your government to do it too.

Both a Citizens Budget Committee and independent auditors stated that these fiscal policies are irresponsible and will force higher property taxes for years to come.

County Democrats vigorously fought this bad plan because we know it will mean higher taxes; cripple critical services; and diminish confidence that Westchester is a great place to live.

We have found ways to save money by being smarter about how we spend. Our top priority is making sure that every dollar goes as far as possible to do more for everyone in Westchester.

With Earth Day upon us, it seems appropriate that the County is about to undertake significant improvements to the way drinking water is treated.

Plans to build new water treatment facilities in Westchester that were long overdue have finally received a passing grade from the Environmental Protection Agency, thanks to the hard work of Legislators Lyndon Williams and Ben Boykin.

For years, the County Executive failed to meet clean water standards.

His intent was to recklessly move forward with another costly fight with the federal government, risking taxpayers millions of dollars in penalties. Every dollar wasted is another dollar that will not go to benefit the people of Westchester.

Working with the impacted municipalities, Democrats successfully fought for a **NEW** plan that complied with the Clean Water Act and avoided unnecessary daily penalties.

Legislators Ken Jenkins and Catherine Parker introduced a Green Vehicles law which requires us to purchase vehicles that meet higher fuel-efficiency standards, saving money on gas and improving air quality.

Many Westchester families save thousands of dollars each year by purchasing fuel-efficient and electric vehicles; it's time the government takes advantage of these same savings.

Providing a safe place to live and grow is also about a high level of public safety, which defines Westchester's quality of life.

An important part of meeting those expectations is having safe roads and bridges, which we depend on but often take for granted. In this area, the County Executive is again failing.

Many of us heard the horrendous story of a Friday summer rush hour in 2012 when a concrete portion from the Ashford Avenue Bridge fell onto the Saw Mill River Parkway.

Miraculously, no one was hurt but the County Executive failed to learn the lesson that incident taught us.

Legislator MaryJane Shimsky has been working tirelessly to repair the Ashford Avenue Bridge and all of Westchester's crumbling infrastructure, in the face of delays from the County Executive's office.

One of government's critical responsibilities is to care for our children and those most in need. Since this administration took office in 2009, the amount of county residents who depend on low-income day care, food stamps, and public housing has gone up by 257%, costing taxpayers millions more than providing preventative services would have in the first place.

The Astorino Administration is now in danger of failing our children. For years, outstanding organizations have provided valuable services in our communities that have had significant positive impacts on kids' lives.

In the past, these programs have all been highly rated by the families that use their services AND by the Astorino administration itself.

The County Executive eliminated money for many of these successful programs, resulting in staff layoffs and potential program closures.

We believe the choice is simple; investing in our kids is an investment in the success of future generations. Legislator Alfreda Williams has been leading this important fight.

We must do a better job of working together to solve important problems.

Our economy will grow and we can provide services more efficiently if we work together as a team with businesses, non-profits, religious organizations, local communities, and residents.

County Democrats will continue to stand up for a brighter future for Westchester and resist irresponsible policies that fall short of achieving the high marks that taxpayers deserve.

Thank you.