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ON TOPIC with John Testa

On Topic is designed to bring you pertinent information about Peekskill, Cortlandt, and Yorktown in greater detail than conventional media coverage can provide. On Topic will highlight influential people, special events, and historical information. As the County Legislator for Northern Westchester, John will also keep viewers up to date on the latest issues that affect the local municipalities and residents of Northern Westchester, NY. All On Topic shows are video streamed in their entirety through this site. If you are unable to watch our shows on cable television, you can see them by selecting the link via youtube/LegJohnGTesta. We hope you enjoy watching our programs. Please don't hesitate to offer any suggestions for future shows. We are always looking for interesting topics to cover. ■


Legislator Testa Helps Deliver Over \$200,000 of Funding for Area's Youth



program was designed to address the needs of youth in Peekskill focusing on objectives like dropout prevention, college exploration and readiness, developing resumes and job seeking. ■


Back in June, I was joined by my colleagues on the BOL in voting to enter into an inter-municipal agreement (IMA) with the City of Peekskill to provide critical funding to the city's "Advancing Leadership for Teens" program. As a full time educator and former Mayor of Peekskill I am thrilled to be able to help bring this funding to the youth of Peekskill. I have dedicated my career to educating kids and preparing them for their future educational or career endeavors. This is an investment in our greatest resource in Peekskill and Westchester, our kids, and it will pay great dividends far beyond the terms of the agreement. The "Advancing Leadership for Teens" program






Westchester County Board of Legislators NEWS

Voice of the People of Westchester County for over 300 years



Spring 2013 Newsletter



John G. Testa

District 1 ~ Cortlandt, Peekskill, Yorktown

Bipartisan Budget Agreement Keeps Taxes Flat

I am pleased to report that the 2013 budget has been approved by the Board of Legislators and signed into law by the county executive. For the third consecutive year, the county portion of your property taxes will carry a zero percent increase. Perhaps the most encouraging bit of news regarding the budget is that it was a compromise between both political parties and both branches of government to arrive at a responsible and balanced coalition spending plan. Unfortunately, eight Legislators walked out of the budget vote and refused to compromise however two courageous Democrats chose to engage in the difficult and important work of negotiating a sound and fair spending plan for the people of Westchester. The Democrat and Republican Legislators did not get everything we wanted in this budget, nor did County Executive Astorino but it is a budget that we can be proud of because we believe that the optimal number of services and programs have been funded in the most responsible ways to serve the residents of Westchester County. Unfortunately the ongoing fiscal challenges, rising costs of state mandated spending and the unsettled contract of the county's largest union dictated that we had to make some very difficult decisions.

Highlights of the compromise include:

- Subsidized day care will be funded with a 27% parent share, instead of the 35% initially proposed by the county executive but above the 20% proposed by the Democratic caucus, saving \$4 million.
- Public safety, emergency services, probation, and the DA's office will receive additional funding. Parks will see the restoration of four positions, including three curators, and the Department of Public Works will see the return of five engineering positions. In all, the coalition budget restores 30 positions (25 filled and five vacant).
- ArtsWestchester will receive \$1.25 million and Cornell Cooperative will receive \$800,000. In both cases, more than initially proposed but less than what the organizations requested.
- Funding was added for three programs included in the County Office for Women related to Small Business Training, Domestic Violence Training and Tot Drop & Human Trafficking. Community Capital Resources that helps small businesses throughout the county received restored funding. Key senior citizen services for Elder Abuse Legal Services and training received funding.



Important Infrastructure Projects



Back in July, I announced the passage of \$2.4 million in Bond Acts for rehabilitation and upgrades to a stretch of South Division St. and Crompond Rd. in the City of Peekskill. I was joined by all Legislators present in a 15-0 unanimous vote in favor of the Bonds. I am grateful to my fellow Legislators for joining me in voting for this very important funding package. This rehabilitation will ensure the safety of both the riding and walking public along this key artery in our community. The project will rehabilitate and bring much needed upgrades to a 1.38 mile section of this commercially-critical thoroughfare for northern Westchester County which is travelled by nearly 12,000 cars per day. The South Division St.-Crompond Rd. project is the latest phase in an ongoing effort to rehabilitate and improve several critical roadways in the City. Last Year, I was able to secure \$2.8 million through a similar Bond Act for the rehabilitation of East and West Main St. in Peekskill from Route 9 to Conklin Avenue. ■

In Support of Our Veterans

After participating in Yorktown's Veterans Day Parade in Shrub Oak on Sunday November 11th I was honored to thank our area veterans at the Cortlandt and Peekskill ceremonies on Monday the 12th. I was especially proud to be able to publicly welcome home and thank all our Vietnam Veterans. This year marks the 50th anniversary of that war and they have never received the welcome home and thanks they deserve. We have also seen a number of troops returning to our communities from Iraq and as our military presence in Afghanistan is drawn down we will see more troops coming home from there too. Please look for ways you can support those troops to show them our support. God Bless our veterans! ■

It was a true honor to participate in the American Legion Post No. 274 event when they renamed themselves the Oliver C. Chase Jr. American Legion Post



No. 274. U.S. Air Force Captain Oliver C. Chase Jr., a lifelong Peekskill resident and 1950 PHS Graduate, gave his life on July 22, 1965 when he piloted his plane directly into a combat zone to protect his comrades on the ground as they readied to retake a fort in Dong Xoai from 2,000 Viet Cong guerrillas. Captain Chase was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross by the US Air Force in 1965. ■

Back in June, I joined Veterans from

across the region at a rally in front of the Montrose VA campus. The VA had put the campus under something called an "Enhanced Use Lease Plan" which would have allowed them to redesignate part of the campus to allow for things like private developers to build condos there. We should not be taking away from our veterans, in fact we should be expanding and enhancing the services at the Montrose VA. Thankfully that plan will not move forward which is a great victory for Veterans in Westchester and Putnam. We must remain vigilant, however, about VA. Our senior veterans need a fully operational facility close to their homes and younger veterans who are now encountering issues like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and effects of undiagnosed Traumatic Brain Injuries need to have services that are convenient and comprehensive. We will continue to fight for our veterans to have these services in Montrose. ■

Free Legal Services Program for Seniors and Vets

While there were a number of difficult cuts made in the 2013 budget, one new service that I fought to secure funding for was to establish a local presence of the Legal Services of the Hudson Valley (LSHV) in the Cortlandt/Peekskill/Yorktown region. This program provides free legal services for eligible Veterans and Seniors as well as assistance for victims of domestic violence. Our senior population continues to grow rapidly as the baby boom generation reaches elder years and as we wind down our military

activity in the Middle East, we are seeing an increased need for legal assistance for returning veterans. The legal needs and challenges faced by these groups are unique and sometimes complicated and can be very costly. Our government provides free legal services for people facing criminal charges. I believe that if we can provide legal services for people charged with breaking the law then we should certainly provide civil legal advice for those who have served to uphold our laws and way of life. I insisted that our

coalition budget preserve the funding for this initiative. LSHV provides a broad range of advocacy and representation to elderly and veteran clients in practice areas including housing, benefits, Medicaid, future planning, and home care cases. With the recent staggering numbers of domestic violence cases in our area it is essential that we provide help for those with nowhere else to turn. If you or someone you know needs legal assistance from LSHV just call 877-574-8529 to get started. ■

Much Needed Renovations for Yorktown Seniors

In my last newsletter, I told you about funding from the county that we secured to help with the major renovations at the Yorktown Seniors Center. The funds from the county, combined with some private donations and \$300,000 from the Town all made the \$500,000 project possible. I am happy to say that those renovations are complete and they are a wonderful improvement. I was honored to be invited to the ribbon cutting ceremony where I got to see some old friends and make some new ones. ■



A Victory for the People of Westchester

In 2009 the NYS Legislature passed the MTA Mobility or Payroll Tax on the businesses, municipalities, school districts, hospitals and not-for-profits in what is known as the Metropolitan Commuter Transit District (MCTD). The MCTD is essentially the 12 county area covered by the MTA from Long Island to the Hudson Valley. This MTA "Bailout" Tax, as it has become known, imposed a \$.34 tariff on every \$100 of payroll in order to raise \$1.5 billion annually for the MTA. On August 22nd NYS Supreme Court Judge R. Bruce Cozzens Jr. ruled this tax as unconstitutional for violating the New York State Constitution. This was the result of a lawsuit brought on originally by Nassau County. In August of 2010, as County Legislator, I spearheaded the effort to have Westchester County join the suit as Putnam County had recently done. My colleagues on the Westchester County Board of Legislators unanimously agreed with me and voted to direct the County Attorney to have Westchester join the suit. County Executive Astorino agreed and also directed the County Attorney to officially join Nassau's suit. In the end Nassau, Suffolk, Putnam and Westchester Counties

were plaintiffs in the lawsuit along with 17 villages and towns scattered across the Hudson Valley. After weighing the facts of the case of how this tax came to be enacted, Judge Cozzens determined that the vote used to create the tax was not in compliance with the Constitution of the State of New York. The reason is that the state legislature violated the home rule provision required with this type of legislation. Which means that since this tax was to be imposed on only 12 of New York's 62 counties it would require a home rule message from those affected. That was not done. Additionally, in the absence of a home rule message the law required a two-thirds vote of the entire NYS Legislature. This was not accomplished either. On August 23, 2012 I joined fellow state, county and local elected officials praising Judge Cozzens's decision on the MTA Tax. As a result of this ruling we are also calling for the retroactive reimbursement for payments that have been made since this unconstitutional law was enacted. Although the MTA has stated it will "vigorously appeal" the ruling we are confident the NYS Constitution and the Judge Cozzens's ruling will prevail. ■

County Parks Board Appointment a Great Honor

In June, I was appointed to the Westchester County Parks, Recreation and Conservation Board. I am honored that my appointment was affirmed by a unanimous, 17-0 vote of my colleagues on the Board of Legislators. Anyone who has served in government with me knows, I have long been an ardent supporter and advocate for parks, conservation and the preservation of historic sites.

I believe that Westchester County's open spaces, parks and historic sites are one of the true treasures that we have been blessed with and I am honored by the opportunity to help in the stewardship of those resources. Balancing things like commercial and residential development with the conservation of

open spaces is very important

One of my passions is local history and I have turned that passion into establishing and preserving Peekskill's Lincoln Depot. I have also worked to create new public spaces and parks like, the 40-acre historic Fort Hill Park and the Annsville Trail Preserve along the Hudson River as well as overseeing the renovations of Franklin Park, Depew Park, Lepore Park, Riverfront Green, Tompkins Ball field.

As a County Legislator, I have fought for funding to improve County Parks like Blue Mountain Preserve in Peekskill/Cortlandt and George's Island in Montrose. I am honored to continue my commitment to our county's parks in this new role. ■



Keeping History Alive

Abraham Lincoln's popularity has certainly been on the rise, especially at the box office. Of course we have been way ahead of Hollywood by many years in honoring this great President. On Saturday, September 29, 2012 the Lincoln Depot Foundation held an event to show the extensive progress on the restoration of the depot building. The unveiling of a special gift by local artist and lifetime Peekskill resident Bob Barthelmes and his wife Kay highlighted the event.

The gift was an original Southard-Roberson Peekskill pot belly stove Bob had purchased three decades earlier and had loaned it to the Peekskill Museum for display. The stove was just like the one that would have been used in the Depot when President-elect Lincoln addressed Peekskill residents there in 1861.

Another special feature of the day's event came from State Senator Greg Ball, who represents the City of Peekskill in Albany. Senator Ball was able to secure a \$100,000 NYS grant for the depot project! This funding will go a long way in offsetting the costs of the restoration of the building and the creation of the Lincoln Depot Museum. ■