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[Local Officials Demand Unfunded Mandate Relief from State](#)

[Rick Pezzullo](#) | Feb 03, 2013 | [Comments 1](#)



Sen. Greg Ball

A coalition of regional elected, municipal and school officials last week teed off on Governor Andrew Cuomo and the state Legislature for not making crippling unfunded mandates a reform priority for 2013.

State Senator Greg Ball (R/C-Patterson) led an onslaught of criticism from Yorktown Town Hall in a frustrated group that included Westchester County Executive Rob Astorino, Yorktown Supervisor Michael Grace and Somers Supervisor Mary Beth Murphy.

“There’s zero excuse for this governor to sidestep this issue and not even mention unfunded mandates in his State of the State Address,” Ball said, noting two years ago Cuomo established a team to create a comprehensive mandate relief package but has yet to propose any changes.

“Unfunded mandates are crushing our local governments and school districts all across the state. We need unfunded mandate relief and we need it now,” Ball remarked. “It may not be sexy, but mandate relief is the single most important thing we can do.”

Astorino said nine mandates from the state, including pension costs, which have skyrocketed about 3000% since 2001, consume 85% of Westchester’s property tax levy.

“Albany’s unfunded mandates are making it impossible for municipalities and schools all across the state to provide their own services, and that hurts everyone in their

communities,” Astorino said. “It is so coercive to local municipalities, schools and the county in a way that people are just starting to understand. Albany needs to get its foot off the throat of local municipalities. We’re feeling like we’re drowning and we’re going to drown unless something is done in a real way soon.”

While not in attendance, Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell issued a statement complaining that the state imposed 2% tax cap and 75% of county taxes going directly to cover more than 200 unfunded mandates was an “insurmountable challenge.”

“While Putnam County government is committed to complying with the 2% tax cap, we have to know that our counterparts in Albany are equally committed to relieving us of these progressive-strapping mandates,” Odell stated.

Grace and Murphy maintained local municipalities were handcuffed by the mandates, which has been leading to more residents to move out of the area and the state.

“If New York State doesn’t do something about it, New York is going to go off the cliff itself,” Grace said. “We believe Albany has to take very bold steps. The pussyfooting has to stop. We’re boxed in with incredible red tape and regulations that don’t make any sense.”

“We have to stop the bleeding. It’s out of control,” Murphy said.

Ball said the best way to make progress with unfunded mandates was during the budget process, which the state Legislature will be grappling with over the next two months.

“These are the bread and butter issues that we elected this governor to deal with,” Ball said. “Focus on the tough stuff. The pain is still there to get this done.”

Grace is optimistic by local officials banding together it will put pressure on the Legislature and Cuomo to make meaningful changes.

“The game changer here and what we can be optimistic about is we have supervisors, town board and school board members who are not beholden to special interest,” Grace said. “We are all suffering. With that type of coalition and grassroots, we do have a powerful voice and maybe they’ll start to listen.”



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