



**BUDGET**

**Budget Crisis—New Rochelle Gambling with Residents' Lives**

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 was extremely concerned about the possibility of laying off 6 firefighters and 18 crossing guards. The loss of firefighters could result in a dramatic lowering of our ISO (insurance) rating. Overtime would have to be used to

make up the difference to man the rig (Ladder 12). He said the "City should be fighting to keep 27 men on a shift." Going below the 27 men threatens the safety of the people. When the December 6, 2011, City Council hearing is held in discussion over whether to go over the

cap was mentioned, Trangucci said he had expressed concern that despite his efforts to obtain \$9 million from Avalon which he had asked be used for essential services, the city instead last year chose to use too much of this money to balance the gaping budget differential. Comparing the 2.84% in taxes collected last year to the 2.9% he

avored which amounted to \$20 per household, there would have been almost a \$500,000 in the Fund Balance which could have been used this year to stay the layoffs.

The budget hearing will be held on Tuesday December 6, 2011 at City Hall.

*Peggy Godfrey is a freelance writer and a former educator.*

**GOVERNMENT**

**NFWL's National Women's History Museum Initiative**



By RUTH HASSELL-THOMPSON

In 1827, Sarah Josepha Hale, a magazine editor and noted author launched a campaign to establish a national day of thanks.

For 36 years, she published numerous editorials and sent letters to governors, senators, presidents and key officials. In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln finally heeded her request with a proclamation declaring Thanksgiving a national holiday.

This is only one of thousands of facts that we generally don't know about the important role that women have played in building the America we know today, simply because we are not taking an active enough role in the education our children are receiving. Only 1 in 10 figures in today's history textbooks is a woman, few statues are in our national parks and less than a dozen of the 214 statues in our nation's Capitol Building portray woman leaders. Yet, women have impacted every aspect of our lives whether it is education, art, medicine, journalism, politics, or technology.

Amazingly enough while many important museums currently exist in Washington, DC that enrich all who visit and tell the story of our nation's history from many different perspectives, there is NO building dedicated

to highlighting the achievements and contributions of women.

The experiences and life stories of women like Ms. Hale and so many other important trail-blazers will be part of a permanent exhibition within the soon-to-be-built, world-class National Women's History Museum. Legislation is pending in Congress that will provide a permanent site for the building at the National Mall alongside our nation's most iconic museums (and not one dime of federal money is being requested).

This is an exciting time for women leaders. We hold a multitude of offices at all levels of government. Young women are attending college and earning advanced degrees at the highest rate in history and the future only looks brighter for the girls and young women of tomorrow. While celebrating our current achievements and future hopes, it is important to acknowledge the accomplishments of our past.

The women who helped to build this country - who tended to the families while men were away at war, who built businesses to sustain themselves and their families, and who were innovators in their field - have been left out of our national story.

I have been working with the National

Foundation for Women Legislators (NFWL), who, in conjunction with more than 43 national women's organizations, has been working in support of the National Women's History Museum (NWHM). Together we will settle the debt we have seen in our history books and museums, by bringing women's history into the mainstream.

We recently held the "de Pizan Honors," an event named for Christine de Pizan who lived in Italy in the early 1400s and was the first Western woman to write about women's impact on society and show how they were being left out of history. The "de Pizan Honors" gala recognized female history-makers to

ensure that their legacy remains alive and drew the attention of acclaimed actress Meryl Streep, who hosted the event and used her notoriety to bring awareness to a cause that is long overdue.

As we gather with our families for the Thanksgiving holiday to recognize the important role we play in each other's lives and to be reminded about the importance of giving thanks to all who have impacted us in some way, let us also remember the importance of giving thanks to the foremothers, like Sarah Josepha Hale, who have impacted us by laying the solid foundation we all benefit from today.

*Ruth Hassell-Thompson is the New York State Director for the National Order of Women Legislators (NOWL) and the Senator representing District 36.*

**INVESTIGATION**

**Long, Nor'Easter Outage—Who Is to Blame?**



By ABBY LUBY

Accusations and blame have escalated towards utility companies unable to restore power during the "October Surprise Nor'Easter." The unseasonably early snow storm dumped snow and ice on leafed trees forcing laden branches to down electric lines, cutting power for millions in New York and Connecticut. The record long, extreme duration of the outage saw many without electricity for up to two weeks. Lawmakers have demanded answers from both the utility companies such as NYSEG and ConEd, and the New York State Public

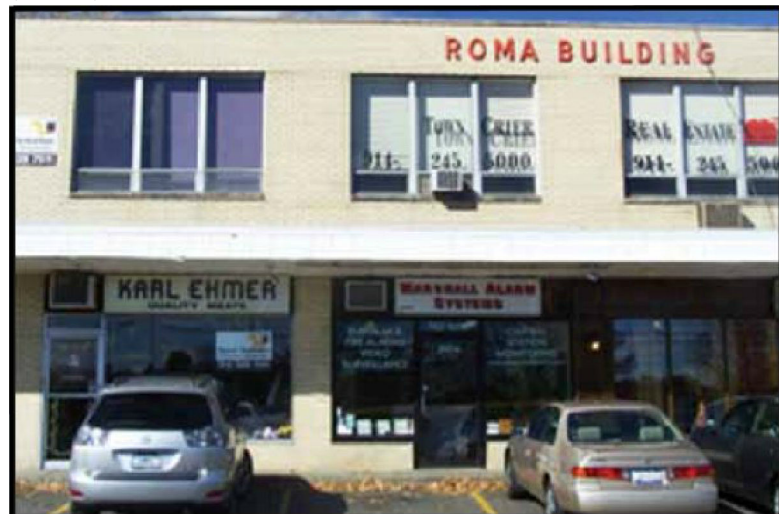


*Board of Legislators Peter Harckham (left) and Mike Kaplowitz*

Service Commission: Why did it take so long to restore power? Isn't there enough staff and equipment on hand for emergencies?

Two Westchester County Legislators,

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## INVESTIGATION

### Long, Nor'Easter Outage—Who Is to Blame?

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Michael Kaplowitz (D-Somers) and Peter Harchkham (D-Katonah) are calling for a special meeting to question NYSEG, ConEd and the PSC. "We want to know, Westchester specific, what we can do going forward," said Kaplowitz. "Are these utilities doing anything to minimize the impact of future storms and avoid long outages?"

Harchkham, whose district went without electricity for almost a week, wants to know about the amount of resources that were actually available during the storm. "This was a brutal storm and the damage was widespread and the power companies generally did a good job, given the circumstances," he said. "But they didn't have resources until five days into the recovery. We need to know why there weren't enough boots on the ground."

Other state representatives want to specifically investigate foreign companies that own the utilities. Senator Greg Ball (R, C – Patterson) said he will launch an investigation of Iberdrola S.A., a company based in Spain that purchased NYSEG and Rochester Gas & Electric in 2008. Ball claimed that since then, NYSEG customers have noticed a progressive degradation in service.

"This is not a third-world country," said Ball, who is the Chairman of the New York State Homeland Security Committee. "As a state we have the authority to limit foreign ownership through legislative action. Its real common sense that a New York State utility should not be foreign owned. They [Iberdrola] lack basic responsiveness and basic customer service."

Ball announced that he will also introduce legislation "concerning foreign owned utilities. "My investigation has homeland security implications and it will involve several hearing over the course of time. There are myopic and global issues here."

According to James Denn of the PSC, the United States doesn't prohibit foreign ownership of companies. "The PSC approved the sale of NYSEG to Iberdrola, just like we did for United Grid of the UK to run utilities for upstate New York. No matter who the prospective owner is, we determine if the utility company will work to insure that the transaction is for the public benefit. It's not

who the company's owner is, but how they operate here in New York."

Denn told *The Westchester Guardian* that the PSC started gathering information on the storm almost immediately.

"Any outage lasting longer than three days requires us to perform an internal review. The report is due out in January, 2012." Denn said the PSC is encouraging comments and questions via the website, phone or written letter. Comments and staff investigation information will go into the report.

But Kaplowitz contends that the PSC hasn't been responsive to the Westchester community especially when, in September, he asked top PSC officials to testify at the Westchester Board of Legislator's Environment and Energy Committee then investigating slow restoration of power after Hurricane Irene. Kaplowitz said the PSC not only neglected to show up, but never responded to the committee request.

"They don't take our calls very seriously. We look towards this regulatory agency that plays a critical role in overseeing utility companies. The PSC has a level of accountability. Any fault lies at their level."

Denn said that the PSC staff is limited, especially after a huge storm that demands a work overload. "We do try sometimes, but limited staff prevents us from going to all the hearings and meetings. When the reports are finished, that's when there is something we can share and really engage in a discussion. People are always encouraged to call us up. We're not a closed box." Denn added that the completed report on Hurricane Irene was extended about a week because the PSC staff had to suddenly deal with the Nor'easter; the report is expected out mid November.

Of the many queries posed by Kaplowitz and Harchkham, most center on the "inadequate" local utility staff to conduct Stay Safe operations immediately after the storm. Stay Safe crews normally pinpoint danger areas where live wires are downed, alerting communities of the location and possible dangers. "Our working theory is that the utilities have degraded their system, not improved their systems, over time," said Kaplowitz.

The slow response to the October Nor'easter was partially blamed on the time



NYSEG Press Conference: NY Senator Greg Ball, center, flanked by Yorktown Board

it took for mutual aid crews traveling long distances to get here. Some crews traveled from Michigan and Ohio, taking as much as four days to reach Westchester and Connecticut. Utilities have been queried about having surplus trucks and equipment ready and available for out-of-state crews who can fly at an hour's or day's notice, rather than drive, to the areas needing their service restored.

Are utilities pulling back on such capital investments to beef up shareholder dividends?

"These [companies] are private entities driven by shareholder profits," said Kaplowitz, who wants the PSC to investigate that amount utilities are currently investing in emergency vehicles and equipment.

"We set the return of profit for the company and approve their capital expenditures," explained Denn. "They can't slash company expenditures below what was approved and take all the money as a profit."

Financial issues for utilities are part of rate plan requests, which Denn said occurs, depending on the company, every one to three years. The last rate increase for NYSEG was approved in September, 2010, where the PSC approved rate hikes spread over three years totaling 11 percent hike by 2013. The rate approval also noted that \$19.2 million had been saved by reducing the companies' workforce and related labor cost-cutting initiatives. Consolidated Edison's (ConEd) three year rate plan was approved in March, 2010 with an annual increase of 3.6 percent. Companies can choose to file for a new rate increase at the end of their plan.

Denn said utility companies have reserve funds to spend on emergency situations, but if costs exceed the reserve, a company has the



PSC Spokesman James Denn

right to ask to be reimbursed for "unanticipated costs."

Will rate payers end up paying for restoration efforts for Irene and the Nor'Easter?

"Rate payers will most likely pay for this," said Denn.

You can send comments to the PSC for their Nor'easter report:

Commission's toll-free Opinion Line at 1-800-335-2120; [Secretary@dps.state.ny.us](mailto:Secretary@dps.state.ny.us); by mail: to Honorable Jaclyn A. Brillling, Secretary, New York State Public Service Commission, Three Empire State Plaza, Albany, New York 12223; or by using the comment form below. Mention Case 11-M-0595 in your comments. Comments can be viewed at <http://www3.dps.state.ny.us/W/PSCWeb.nsf/All/23ADF58E45A111B28525793C0062C4F2?OpenDocument>

*Abby Luby is a Westchester based, freelance journalist who writes local news, about environmental issues, art, entertainment and food. Her debut novel, "Nuclear Romance" was published last week. Visit the book's website, <http://nuclearromance.wordpress.com/>*

## FRENCH ON RYE

### November Rye City Council Updates



By DOUGLAS FRENCH

**Rye City Budget 2012: Now It's Time to Hear from You**

Since 2009 residents have continued to call for property tax relief. The

submission of the City Manager's Budget for 2012 this week will once again call on the City Council to make very tough decisions that balance the scope of the current government service footprint vs. the desires

of the community for traditional programs and services. Public workshops are scheduled for 8 pm on November 14th, 16th, and 30th as well as a Public Hearing on the budget on December 7th. The Citizens Finance Committee will present their opinion at the regularly scheduled meeting of the City Council on November 16th. Final adoption will be voted on by the Council on December 21st. At this time, the proposed budget to be

deliberated will most likely be over the New York State tax cap, as economic conditions continue to affect the City's options. Prior to the budget presentation, on the revenue side, revenue from interest income, sales tax, and mortgage tax is down \$2M since 2007. The undesignated fund balance is at 10%, but only roughly \$1.5M above its chartered minimum. The direct bonding authority of

*Continued on page 17*