



## GOVERNMENT

# GOP Nixes Allegations



By **ABBY LUBY**

The Westchester County Republican Committee will not take any action in response to alleged wrong doings by North Castle GOP

Chairperson Rosemary Ballantoni. County GOP Chairman Doug Colety, in responding to a list of accusations made by some North Castle GOP committee members against Ballantoni, said the county wasn't authorized to take any disciplinary action.

"There are no provisions in the county by-laws that permit us to remove a town chairman. We cannot adjudicate it," said Colety.

Certain North Castle GOP members have claimed Bellantoni did not adhere to particular procedural rules and voting statutes. Committee members who made these charges include North Castle Supervisor Bill Weaver, Loronda Murphy, and Doug Martino. They are being legally represented by attorney Vincent J. Messina Jr. of Sinnreich Kosakoff & Messina in Suffolk County. Messina did not return phone calls to *The Westchester Guardian* by press time.

Bellantoni said the allegations were meant to provoke the GOP.

"These are a pack of slanderous fabrications that are insulting and irrelevant and have no credible basis. The people who backed these allegations have conspired deliberately and are not behaving like loyal Republican committee members or citizens," she said.

Bellantoni was unanimously elected to the North Castle GOP chair in October, 2010 when Murphy, the then chairwoman, was forced to abdicate the committee's top post after being arrested for alleged real estate fraud.

Murphy, who insists she never stepped down, but rather took a leave of absence, denied wanting to oust Bellantoni. "We're not here to get rid of the chairwoman. I just want to make sure the rules are followed," she said. A decision in Murphy's fraud case is expected sometime this summer.

Other GOP members claim the charges against Bellantoni are baseless and are part of Murphy's political agenda to disrupt the GOP from endorsing potential candidates for the November election.

"I believe those charges are without merit," said Frank Benish, a GOP committee member. "Mrs. Murphy's presence on our committee has been like an albatross around our necks. We are trying to cleanse ourselves of this stigma and have asked her to resign. Of course she has declined to do so."

Murphy holds that certain rules have been broken. "I care that if people want to run for office that they have that opportunity. All I want is for fair, open and transparent government."

When Bellantoni assumed the GOP chair, she appointed William Potvin as parliamentarian who subsequently conducted an audit of past committee voting records and minutes from 2009 to 2010. Benish said the audit revealed how under Murphy's watch there were no minuted meetings that proved certain members were actually voted in as committee members; members that included Murphy's husband, Vinny Murphy, and Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Vice Chairman Neal Bauman, neither of whom had produced signed petitions initially required to gain membership on the committee.

"When Loronda was chair, she rotated people in and out of the committee on a whim," explained Benish, adding that under Bellantoni, Murphy lost the paper vote and with it, her power, setting the stage for an embattled GOP committee.

Doug Martino, who ran unsuccessfully for Westchester County Judge in 2010, has sided with Murphy in the allegations against Bellantoni.

"We want to maintain our sense of integrity and that the endorsements which come out of the committee have real legitimacy. That's why we want to make sure the process works properly."

Murphy's biggest ally is North Castle Supervisor Bill Weaver, said Benish.

"I think Loronda is being severely manipulated by our current supervisor. She might be holding out for Mr. Weaver to author a letter in her upcoming trial. But any elected official who aligns himself with an accused felon will have to answer to the voters on Election Day."

Town board member Diane Roth is uneasy with Murphy's liaison with Weaver.

"She's always up in his office," said

Roth. "That's against the rules since you are not allowed to talk politics in the supervisor's office. Instead, Weaver's office is a place to solve the town's problems." Roth is considering tossing her hat in the ring for town supervisor.

Murphy claimed that she respects Weaver and the office he holds.

For many, it's more of the old guard versus the new guard; the old guard references the late Supervisor Jack Lombardi who was at the town's helm for over 40 years, regularly appointing friends and family town jobs. Town board member John Cronin is particularly concerned that Murphy is invested in keeping the Lombardi practices alive rather than scaling back health and retirement benefits long enjoyed by town employees; benefits that Cronin said are deleterious to the town's economy.

"If a person works on the police force for ten years, they can retire with a lifetime health care plan for their entire family and a retirement package. That means if you start work at age 20, by age 30 you can go fishing for the rest of your life," said Cronin. "Residents of North Castle are paying for that. It's the old guard protecting jobs, the real old

style patronage that is now economically unsustainable."

Cronin said that the divisiveness in the GOP is part of the attempt to hold on to the old political model. "It's clear that the interest of this [old guard] group is not in selecting the best candidate but rather protecting their own little bit of turf. It's not about good governance but protecting a small group of people with set interests."

As of press time, the North Castle GOP still hadn't endorsed candidates for town posts up for re-election in November including town supervisor, five town board members, a town clerk and two town judges. Martino said he was considering running for town judge.

Bellantoni said they were unable to nominate any candidates because of the long list of interviewees attending last Thursday's GOP meeting. "We will have to convene on another date, probably next week. We didn't expect that we would have so many people to be interviewed."

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