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Local Forum on the New York State Budget, **sponsored by Westchester County's Assembly Delegation** **Friday, February 2, 2018 – Greenburgh Town Hall**

Transcribed from the VIDEO by CJA Director Elena Sassower

Assemblyman Otis: ...We are very honored to have the democratic leader of the state Senate conference, Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins.... I'm going to start off by asking Senator Stewart-Cousins to make some introductory remarks.

Senator Stewart-Cousins: ...It is just a, you know, such an important thing that the Assembly has decided to do... Part of the swath, is right here, this is Greenburgh is happily my district, as is Yonkers, White Plains, Scarsdale, New Rochelle, and so on, but the reality is is that when we do this budget, it is a statewide budget, two houses are involved, the Assembly and the Senate and obviously the Governor. When we look at the budget, it is not only a spending document, but it is a policy document. So, what's in the budget is telling you where the priorities are, according to the Governor who presents it to us and then it has to be hashed out between the two houses. So these opportunities for us to hear what you think about our policy initiatives and how it will, our decisions will impact you is some of the most important things that you can do as conscious citizens of this great enterprise that we call democracy. We obviously have, we're facing difficult decisions based on the fiscal implications of the federal tax bill, in addition to our own problems in the state in terms of the deficit. So those decisions that we make this year are, you know, even more than most other years we've been together, will be extremely impactful. Your input matters. I want to thank my Assembly delegation for doing it, right here. And, again, this is not the only opportunity. We will always want to hear from you whether it is e-mail or, you know, however you communicate, call our office, or whatever. So even if everybody or everything you wanted to do or say is not done today. This is a good opportunity, it is not the only opportunity. Our deadline is the beginning of April, but, of course, the work is ongoing and has already begun. So, again, thank you so much for your interest and input and I'm sure you'll have a great hearing.

...

Assemblywoman Galef: ...it is great to hear from you and to know what your priorities are. As a legislator, I've also had some town meetings so I've heard from People in my district in northern Westchester and Putnam County about priorities. I also would like to introduce Chuck Lesnick, from the governor's office, right down here, so the Governor is hearing what's going on, and, also, Steve Bass from the County Executive's office. So, we're all different levels of government, but we all probably connect on many of these issues... So, we all have to work together on these issues to make a big difference in our communities. Thank you so much for being here.

Assemblyman Buchwald: ...This is a big county, with many different components ... There are 7, 7-1/2 Assembly districts within Westchester County. This is a fantastic county, but it also has needs that we have to be attuned to. And the state budget is part of the solutions for making this an even better place to live and work. So, I very much look forward to today's hearing.

Assemblyman Prelow: ...Sorry I'm late, but today is Groundhog Day. The same thing, over and over again. I was late last year... Anyway, just like the two groundhogs had opposite effects today. One saw his shadow, one didn't see his shadow. Something is going to be true. You should be assured, though, that the Westchester delegation has everyone's best interests at heart within this county and will do everything we can do to address the needs of our constituents. ...I am glad to see that the Governor sent one of his operatives, Chuck Lesnick, but he will be bringing back our concerns – actually your concerns – back to the Governor. The 21-day amendments, I think, are coming out next week, but then the Governor has another week to make more amendments and hopefully we can get most of the concerns that you have into the governor's budget and it saves us a lot of work, if the governor puts it into his budget himself.

...

[at 60 minutes-30 seconds]
before Assembly members (from right to left)
Mayer, Abinanti, Galef, Prelow, Otis, Buchwald, Paulin

Citizen Sassower: So, my name is Elena Sassower. I'm director and cofounder of the Center for Judicial Accountability, a nonpartisan, nonprofit citizens' organization, based in White Plains.

I was here a year ago and today, of course, is Groundhog's Day, and we are all familiar with the repetition of Groundhog's Day – that movie. And this is that same situation, because, a year ago, when I appeared before you – and you have my written statement – I identified to you that the state budget was off the constitutional rails, violated a succession of constitutional provisions, statutory provisions, legislative rules – that you, the Legislature, was being sued for corruption in a citizen-taxpayer action pertaining to the state budget. I begged and pleaded with you to examine the citizen-taxpayer action, accessible to you from the Center's website, to view my testimony before the Legislature which gave an overview of the problem, including the fact that the committees of the Legislature are sham, don't function, no oversight is going on, and, most significantly, the Legislature had refused to exercise any oversight of the two state commission reports that resulted in judicial salary increases that last year I identified were probably on the order of \$300 million, \$200 million, and growing – and which are now probably \$300 million. Those judicial salary increases and, of course, all the non-salary compensation benefits relating thereto, salary-based, are fraudulent, statutorily-violative, unconstitutional. Those commission reports are false instruments and you have had the evidence of that going back to 2011, and I begged for oversight.

There has been none, in any respect.

You have a budget that is filled with, not just fat, lard, but fraud. And, you are not free to ignore that without incurring criminal consequences. You can and should be indicted for corruption, involving the budget, grand larceny of the public fisc, and that is part of the written statement that I have furnished to you. I have filed a criminal corruption complaint against you with the Westchester County district attorney because of the consequences to the People of Westchester County *vis-a-vis* the district attorney salary increases, the fraudulent district attorney salary increases, embedded in the Westchester County budget, as to which I begged you, in correspondence to take some constructive steps.

Okay, before I peel off, I just want to identify, in addition to the judicial salary, the commission reports, the two commission reports, as to which there has been no oversight and which represent, to date, about \$300 million already expended, plus another \$70 million embedded this year in the state budget, I want to identify that the Judiciary budget contains \$60 million in reappropriations. There's a question as to whether they're certified, okay, and whether they are actually appropriate for reappropriations. \$60 million.

You have plenty of money to furnish to agencies, entities, worthy causes, who are seeking money. You have the money – but your budget is a slush-fund and you refuse to put the house in order. Everyone who comes up and thanks you, doesn't know what's been going on.

One final item, of fraud, of lard in the budget, over and above the pay raises, over and above the \$60 million in reappropriations in the Judiciary budget. The Judiciary budget, as you know, is piled on to the same budget bill as the legislative budget. The legislative budget contains in the back, in an out of sequence section, untallied reappropriations that have just popped in. They were – they are not certified.

Assemblyman Otis: Ms. Sassower, I need to interrupt just because you are a minute over the time.

Citizen Sassower: Okay, Okay. If Shelley Mayer, who now is chair of the Assembly Committee on Oversight, Analysis and Investigation, does not take steps to secure investigation of all that's gone on, all that has been laid out in the citizen-taxpayer action, beginning with those fraudulent judicial pay raises and the commission reports, she had no business --, you have no business – running for re-election.

Assemblyman Otis: Excuse me, excuse me, thank you very much. We have to give time to everyone. We have your written testimony

Assemblyman Buchwald: Ms. Sassower, before you leave, you asked my office to provide you, returning documents, so I have those for you.

Citizen Sassower: Yes, I did. Thank you, and would you please, I will take them to [Ms. Mayer] –

Assemblyman Buchwald: Your time is up but I will come down to you.

Citizen Sassower: -- with a copy of the materials that establish, within minutes, the fraudulence of those commission reports on which over \$300 million have already been expended, of taxpayer money, with another \$70 million embedded in the budget.

Assemblyman Otis: Okay, we're good. Show courtesy to others.