



CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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GREGORY J. EDWARDS
County Executive

July 22, 2011

Thom E Shagla, Chariman
PO Box 458
Celoron NY 14720-0458

Dear Tom:

I send this letter in response to the letter you sent me that on the same day you elected to deliver a copy to the media. While I do not typically discuss personnel issues in the media, your decision to do so necessitates this response.

The South and Center Chautauqua Lake Sewer District (I will hereafter refer to this as the "District") operates, using County employees who are part of the CSEA Union that by Charter I am responsible to administer. While there are currently 16 members of the workforce of the District, each is part of an organized bargaining unit with the approximately 978 full-time permanent members of the CSEA all operating under the same contract and contract terms. While you chose to portray the process that has been employed by me on your request to increase the payroll of the District as "failure to act", and you oppose the "rigid policies I have developed to limit personnel expenses", let me provide you with some perspective.

Since 2006 the Director of the District has submitted 32 OMB requests for your workforce which consists of just 17 employees. An OMB is a form requesting hiring, or promotion of an employee. The vast majority of the OMB requests have been made to increase the pay of one of the 17 employees through promotion. Every promotion request means that the Director is changing the employee's title thereby increasing their hourly pay, and virtually guaranteeing that employee future pay step raises, which are governed by the CSEA contract. These steps permit a department to increase the employee's salary at least once a year every year for a minimum of 6 years in addition to any other contractual pay increases (that most all of us would call raises).

My review reveals that virtually all employees of the District have received all of his or her steps plus the raises provided in the contract from 2006 to 2010, resulting in two pay increases each year. Looking specifically at the District payroll, the average increase in pay to CSEA employees at the District from 2007 to 2010 is 5.73%. This increase is more than two times greater than the other CSEA employees who have seen an average increase of 2.78%.

In addition, the repeated refrain from the District has been that they are concerned about losing employees without the increases in pay and promotions. Currently the beginning base pay for

your entry level position is over \$14.00 per hour in addition to Family Health Insurance, State Pension, 13 paid vacation days, 12 paid holidays, 13 paid sick days, bonus pay of \$115.00 for every 120 days that are worked without the use of a sick day, plus the other advantages of working for a public sector employer that every member of the organized labor force of the County receives as part of their contract. The current average hourly pay for the employees of the District is over \$19.70 and that is after two very valuable and the highest paid employees of the District left employment over this time frame - one from retirement and the other to an untimely death. With these facts in mind I have a hard time accepting your argument that there is a significant risk of losing employees because of pay issues, particularly in light of the current economic forces leaving far too many people unemployed, or underemployed throughout the United States, and unfortunately in our County as well.

I agree with you that I do have a very restrictive policy with regard to hiring, and promotions in County operations. Due in part to this approach we now deliver more County services, more efficiently, to more clients now than we did in 2006. Further, the total tax load paid by Chautauqua County residents for 2011 is 6 Million dollars less than it was when I began my work as County Executive. Unlike the District, my Department Leaders have not received any pay raise for what will soon be three straight years, and my managers did not receive any raises this year and will likely not receive the same next year. You can compare my restrictive fiscal policy to the District where your Director has received a pay raise each year from 2006 through 2010 while at the same time other leaders of substantially larger operations with equally and some times even more impressive results have been denied increased compensation.

Your letter purports that my actions and inactions are thwarting your drive at true efficiency. My efforts have saved the County money, including the recent proposal I made to have the District pay the \$8,180.00 cost to monitor the level of Chautauqua Lake that is used in part to confirm that the District can discharge into the Outlet. Previously this cost was born by the Department of Planning which now as accepted by your Board will cut the costs to property tax payers by \$8,180.00. As you can see I take my job very seriously, to improve services, cut costs, and manage all of the employees of Chautauqua County in a way to assure that every department, every employee, and every taxpayer benefits from the decisions that I am called upon to make on a daily basis.

As a result of this most recent property tax savings, and a confirmation that there are no current bumping rights that would impact on your open position, I will authorize the refilling of the Wastewater Treatment Attendant/Assistant Mechanic position to bring the staffing level of the District to 17 employees. At this time I cannot however approve the pay increase, and the additional step(s) that would occur with the promotion that you have been advocating for another existing employee.

In the future if you wish to discuss employee issues and the role of the District Board as it relates to employee issues I would prefer a meeting as opposed to a press event.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gregory J. Edwards". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gregory" and last name "Edwards" clearly legible.

Gregory J. Edwards
Chautauqua County Executive

GJE:c