

## State budget talks come to Columbia County

By Roger Hannigan Gilson Columbia-Greene Media | Posted: Tuesday, January 26, 2016  
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GREENPORT — Local leaders attended a regional presentation and discussion of Gov. Andrew Cuomo's 2016 budget proposals at Columbia-Greene Community College Monday.

Assemblyman Pete Lopez, R-102, Columbia County Board of Supervisors Chairman Matt Murell, and Columbia County Supervisors Richard Scalera, D-Hudson5, and Sarah Silver, D-Hudson1, were in attendance.

The local politicians were generally supportive of the proposals, though questions were raised about taxes and competitive funding from the state.

The presentation was given by Acting Commissioner of the Office of Children and Family Services Shelia Poole, one of the many Cuomo cabinet members set to make 100 similar presentations across the state.

The presentation discussed Cuomo's executive budget — the budget the governor proposes separately from the state Assembly and state Senate.

The budgets are then negotiated into a single, final spending plan which is supposed to be passed by April 1.

The purpose of the presentation was to “highlight priorities” the governor had for the state, Lopez said.

The presentation by Poole described New York before Cuomo's tenure as an overtaxed state.

In 2011, Cuomo placed a two percent cap on property taxes, disallowing local governments from raising property taxes more than two percent without a 60 percent majority vote, a move he touts as fiscally responsible, though one which frustrated educators during the Great Recession because they were unable to raise funds locally as state aid to school districts dried up.



### Shelia Poole

Roger Hannigan Gilson/Columbia-Greene Media  
Acting Commissioner of the Office of Children and Family Services Shelia Poole fields questions from local leaders during a presentation and discussion of Gov. Andrew Cuomo's proposed budget at Columbia-Greene Community College Monday.

Part of Cuomo's proposals is to eliminate the Gap Elimination Adjustment, a cost-cutting measure introduced during the Great Recession that cut promised state aid to schools, and a \$200 dollar tax credit for teachers who buy supplies for their classrooms.

State investment in education would rise 4.9 percent with Cuomo's proposals, Poole said.

Scalera said he had a message for the governor.

He took issue with what he saw as Cuomo placing the blame for high property taxes on local governments.

"It aggravates a lot of local officials," he said.

He thanked Cuomo for reigning in the state Legislature's spending, which he saw as the reason for high taxes, not local governments.

Murell said he was in favor of the two percent tax cap, but wished necessary infrastructure improvements did not fall under the limitations.

"When we have to fix a road, there's not really a choice in the matter in most cases. If there's not grant money not available, we have to borrow or we have to budget for it," Murell said.

Built-in spending increases, such as for health insurance and union contracts, were often hard to budget for with the tax cap, Murell added.

Many of the funding proposals in Cuomo's budget take the form of competitions between different regions of the state to see who will receive the money.

Columbia County Supervisor Sarah Sterling expressed worry about the region's ability to attract these funds.

"I feel like we're in these 'Hunger Games' competitions," she said.

The region would have trouble competing with areas with larger populations and needs, Sterling said.

"We just need a couple million here," she said, expressing unease at the ability for the region to argue for huge monetary awards.

Murell thought there might be a fairer way to distribute the funds.

"The problem is that some [regions] are going to benefit, and some are not. Every part of New York state is needy," Murell said.

The competitive grants include \$100 million to be awarded to revitalize downtown areas around the state and \$200 million to be awarded to five different upstate airports.

Other proposals in the budget include raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour in New York City by 2018 and for the rest of the state by 2021, as well as cutting taxes for small businesses.

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