

Rensselaer County News

GOP State Lawmakers Hold Unmask Our Children Conference



Assemblyman Ashby speaks with parents and advocates of the Unmask Our Children legislation on the Capitol steps on Wednesday. Photo provided.

Republican members of the NYS Assembly held a press conference on the steps of the State Capitol on Wednesday, June 9, to call for legislation that would prohibit state agencies from mandating masks for children younger than 18 years old in settings like schools, daycares and summer camps. The point of the legislation is to re-establish local authority in these matters of public health.

In a press release from the Office of area Assemblyman Jake Ashby, he says in recent days, the state caused great confusion for parents and school administrators after issuing differing policies from the Department of Health (DOH), the State Education Department (SED) and then the governor. On Friday, June 4, DOH said it was lifting the mask mandate on children, and then on Sunday, June 6, SED said it would not lift the mandate. Finally, on Monday, June 7, the governor announced that masks

would not be required for children in outdoor settings.

"New York keeps showing remarkable progress in curbing COVID-19 and our state policies should reflect this. The mass confusion caused by the governor, the state DOH and SED have been the final straw for parents and schools regarding masking children," said Ashby. "With the vast majority of adult mask mandates being lifted, it is unconscionable to force children – who throughout the pandemic have shown the most resistance and resiliency when it comes to COVID-19 – to wear masks for eight hours straight during the hottest weeks of the school year."

The press release goes on to say the legislation proposed by Ashby and his Republican colleagues will work to prevent the confusion and allow for local schools and governments to set public health policies that make sense for their communities.

Law Allowing 12 And 13-Year-Olds To Hunt Is Signed

Following New York State including a provision in this year's budget bills to allow 12 and 13-year-olds to hunt deer with a crossbow or firearms, the Rensselaer County Legislature last month approved a local law that allows these youths to hunt under direct supervision of an adult hunter. They must also hunt from the ground, no tree stands.

County Executive Steve McLaughlin on Wednesday, June 9, signed the law, which now takes effect upon its filing with the NYS Department of State.



Rensselaer County Executive Steve McLaughlin signs youth hunting law on Wednesday. Photo provided.

Mr. McLaughlin said he received basically only very positive comments about the legislation.

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couldn't get back to school! Teacher Ricardo Canto-Pereira was trapped in Brazil for 11 months. He couldn't get a work visa to return to Hoosac School. Student Gabriela Palladini-Macedo from Brazil had to quarantine twice during the pandemic, once in Cancun and once in Ecuador before she returned to Hoosac.

Wisdom Afrani is from Ghana, West Africa. He misses his large family. He hasn't been home in two years and won't be going home now because, at the moment, he would be unable to get back into the States. In the summers he stays with friends and works on his soccer. Headmaster Dean Foster said, "The kids who stuck it out here at school are the real heroes."

Of the 130 students at Hoosac School only 18 of them contracted COVID. Three faculty members were also affected. Foster said the school followed all COVID protocols. "And we

quarantined and sheltered in place for two weeks, as required" he said. They even have masks with the school logo.

Zoom, Zoom, Zoom

The show must go on... and so must the learning. The teachers zoomed to their entire world of students at the same time, regardless of the time difference. For example, the students in China had their classes from 8 pm to midnight. Canto-Pereira had the whole tennis team practicing three times a week. "The teachers were so good about getting the work done," said Foster.

Many of the students have now returned to their homes. Graduation will happen this weekend, with restrictions removed. The start of the next school year is a few months away. Perhaps by then all the Hoosac students will be in one place and we'll once again see the tall boys from ISA on the streets of Hoosick Falls.

Rensco Legislature Approves Funding For Fire And Ambulances

Minority Says GOP Establishes 'Pork' Fund With Taxpayers' Money

by Doug La Rocque

The Rensselaer County Legislature voted to approve what County Executive Steve McLaughlin is calling the Rensselaer County Recovers Fund, earmarking \$1.2 million from the \$18 million saved in the 2020 budget to assist volunteer fire and ambulance companies across the county with expenses related to the COVID-19 response and a reduction in revenues in fundraising and other areas.

The vote was not unanimous however, with 5 of the 6 Democratic members of the Legislature voting against it. (Legislator Bobby Burns was absent). The minority lawmakers say the newly established fund has no application process or plan for how the money is to be spent or who will be able to receive it. In a press release after the vote, Minority Leader Peter Grimm wrote "this fund is destined to be a slush fund set up at the convenience of the County Executive and the GOP Majority - both who are running for reelection this year."

"Traditionally funds of this sort are nothing more than what we refer to as 'pork'," said Deputy Minority Leader Cindy Doran. "This 'pork' or slush fund is a political ploy where politicians use the taxpayers' money to support their own special interests or their constituency, as opposed to the greater good of the county," continued Doran.

"Once again, we in Rensselaer County are subject to the powers of one-party rule and a system void of checks and balances. This blatant, unethical, and devious action without any public input and with total lack

of transparency is business as usual for the GOP in Rensselaer County," added Doran.

The GOP Responds

As one might expect, County Executive Steve McLaughlin and members of the Republican Legislative Caucus were quick to issue their own press release. "The Rensselaer County Recovers fund will help those organizations who give so much of their time and effort to protect our county and strengthen our quality of life. This is a way to put our savings, which belong to the people, back out into the community," said McLaughlin.

"We are proud to have achieved these savings, and we are equally proud to be able to put these savings to work for everyone's benefit," added McLaughlin.

Announcements on the distribution of the funding will be made in the coming days.

McLaughlin and majority legislators did take issue with the opposition to the resolution. "Funding for our first responders and our community organizations should not be a political issue. It is unfortunate Democrats did not join the spirit of this resolution, which is to use real savings in 2020 to help those who help us every day," said McLaughlin. "As a member of the North Hoosick Fire Department, I would not call any funding we receive 'slush funds'. Our call volume and our costs have gone up, and we haven't been able to raise money through our traditional means. A vote against this funding is a slap in the face to every volunteer first responder in Rensselaer County," said Legislator Bruce Patire of Eagle Bridge.