

The New York Times

From Westchester's Leader: How We Promote Diversity

To the Editor:

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“The Battle for Westchester” (editorial, May 13) says I, as county executive, “should be taking communities to court to stop them from blocking integration through restrictive zoning,” but offers no evidence that such conditions exist or that such action is justified.

Westchester is the fourth most diverse county in New York in terms of African-Americans and Hispanics, according to the 2010 Census. In percentage terms, Westchester is virtually tied with Manhattan. Every municipality in Westchester showed an increase in Hispanics over the last 10 years. While much of the Northeast experienced a decline in African-American residents, Westchester had an increase. How's that for blocking integration?

Westchester is far ahead in meeting its benchmark of

building 750 units of fair and affordable housing in 31 mostly white communities under the 2009 settlement reached by my predecessor and the federal government. Between 2000 and 2010, the African-American and Hispanic populations of these 31 communities grew by 56 percent through natural market forces. How's that for restrictive zoning?

So what's going on here? The federal government and now The New York Times refuse to acknowledge that everyday Americans don't need unwarranted and divisive lawsuits to build welcoming communities.

I am committed to affordable housing. A county where people can't afford to live is a county without a future.

I am also committed to complying with the

settlement. We are a nation of laws, where a deal is a deal, and no one side — even the federal government — can arbitrarily dictate new terms.

What's the point of building housing, affordable or otherwise, if the foundations that have sustained our country for more than 200 years — law and liberty — have been stripped away?

ROBERT P. ASTORINO
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White Plains, May 18, 2012