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New Head Of Rockland Independence Party Indicted On Perjury Charges

Debra Ortutay of Valley Cottage accused of falsely testifying in civil lawsuit over election petition signatures.

By William Demarest, Patch Staff 

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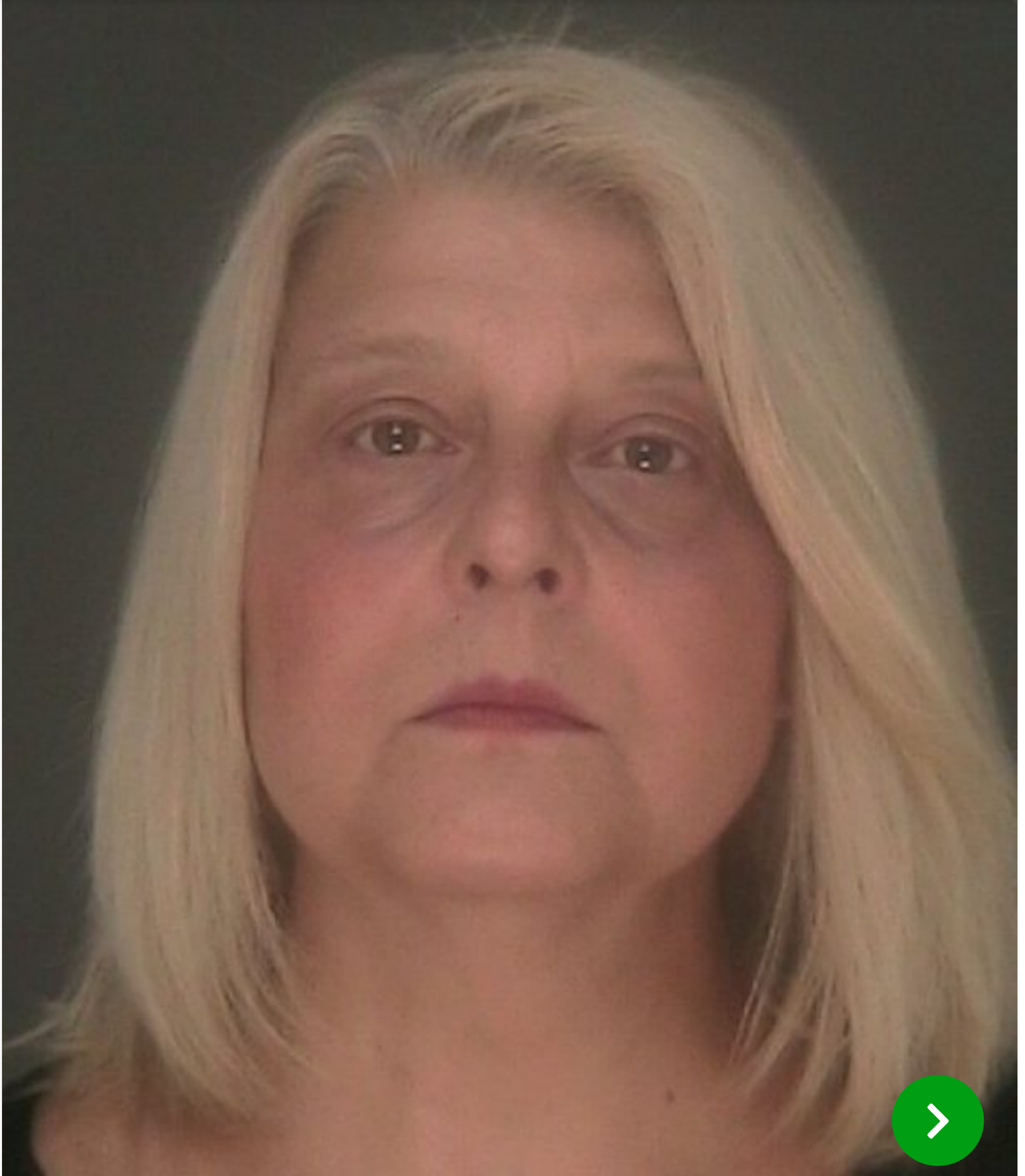
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The Valley Cottage woman who became head of Independence Party in Rockland County after a fight for control of the group in 2010 has been arrested on a 17-count indictment charging her with perjury in connection with her testimony in court about the gathering of election petition signatures.

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Westchester County District Attorney Janet DiFiore said Debra Ortutay, 56, of 15 Forest Glen Road, Valley Cottage, was arraigned in New City today, after the unsealing of an indictment handed down by a Rockland County grand jury.

DiFiore's office was named special prosecutor for the investigation of Ortutay following a request by the Rockland County District Attorney's Office to be disqualified from the investigation. Ortutay is mother-in-law of Rockland County Legislator Frank Sparaco, R-Valley Cottage.

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Ortutay is accused of:

- One count of Perjury in the First Degree, a class "D" Felony,
- Ten counts of Criminal Possession of a Forged Instrument in the Second Degree, a class "D" Felonies,



• Two counts of Offering a False Statement in the First Degree, class "E"

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- Two counts of Making a Punishable False Written Statement, class "A" Misdemeanors,
- Two count of Misdemeanors at, or in Connection with, Primary Elections, Caucuses, Enrollment in Political Parties, Committees, and Conventions, in violation of New York State Election law, a class "A" Misdemeanor,
- Two count of Misconduct in Relation to Petitions, in violation of New York State Election Law, a class "A" Misdemeanor.

The grand jury voted the indictment on June 22.



"Our electoral process does not work unless voters have absolute trust in the integrity of the system," said DiFiore. "The allegations contained in the indictment, that the defendant tampered with the most basic aspect of the electoral process, the collection of petition signatures, disenfranchised the voters of Rockland County. And then, by lying about her actions in a court proceeding challenging those signatures, only served to further erode that public trust."

In November 2010, Ortutay was elected as a state committee member of the Rockland County Independence Party in a campaign to oust the former leadership of the party, of



which Marsha Coopersmith was chairwoman of the group. **New City, NY** [+ Follow](#) 2010, Ortutay was elected chairwoman of the group.

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DiFiore said that as chairwoman, Ortutay is the highest Independence Party office holder in Rockland County and is responsible for coordinating the party's activities in the county, including screening candidates for office and determining which candidates will receive the party's endorsement.

DiFiore said that between July 20 and Aug. 6, 2010, Ortutay attested to the validity of signatures on Opportunity to Ballot petitions from the 94th Assembly District in Rockland County. DiFiore said that Ortutay, knowing that she had not witnessed those signatures, testified in a civil proceeding that challenged the validity of those same signatures before state Supreme Court Justice William Giacomo in August 2010, where she lied about her actions.

Assemblyman Kenneth Zebrowski, D-New City, won re-election in the 94th District last November. Sparaco ran against Zebrowski for the seat and waged a primary with Zebrowski for the Independence Party line in the election — with Zebrowski winning 198 to 172.

Ortutay was released pending a July 19 hearing in Rockland County Court. If convicted, Ortutay faces a maximum of two and one half to seven years in prison.



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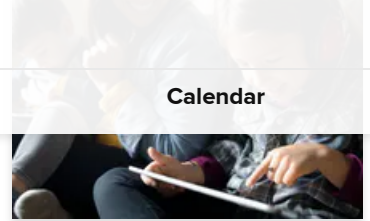
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The Independence Party is one of several so-called third party groups in Rockland County that appear on local ballots. While Democrats have an overwhelming majority among registered voters in Rockland County with nearly 182,000 members, parties such as the Independence Party look to attract the more than 41,000 voters in Rockland County who leave their party affiliation blank.

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