

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

SPECIAL MEETING

THIRD DAY

February 6, 2008

STATE-OF-THE-COUNTY ADDRESS

**THE SPECIAL MEETING WAS HELD AT THE TOURO LAW CENTER,
225 EAST VIEW DRIVE, CENTRAL ISLIP, NEW YORK**

Minutes Taken By:

Alison Mahoney - Court Stenographer

Minutes Transcribed By:

Kimberly Castiglione - Legislative Secretary

(*THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 6:05 PM*)

P.O. LINDSAY:

Call the roll, please. Again, I will ask everybody to please take your seats.

Please call the roll, Mr. Clerk.

MR. LAUBE:

Good evening, Mr. Presiding Officer.

(*Roll called by Mr. Laube - Clerk of the Legislature*)

LEG. ROMAINE:

Present.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

(Not present).

LEG. BROWNING:

Here.

LEG. BEEDENBENDER:

Here.

LEG. VILORIA-FISHER:

Here.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

Present.

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Here.

LEG. MONTANO:

Here.

LEG. ALDEN:

Presently here.

LEG. BARRAGA:

(Not present).

LEG. KENNEDY:

Here.

LEG. NOWICK:

Here.

LEG. HORSLEY:

Here.

LEG. STERN:

Here.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Here.

LEG. COOPER:

Here.

D.P.O. MYSTAL:

Here.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Here.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Here.

MR. LAUBE:

Seventeen (Not Present: Legislator Barraga).

P.O. LINDSAY:

Would everybody rise for a salute to the flag led by Deputy Presiding Officer Elie Mystal.

SALUTATION

If everybody could just remain standing for a moment of silence for our men and women that are in harm's way as we speak tonight.

MOMENT OF SILENCE OBSERVED

Thank you. It's now my pleasure to introduce Bishop Stephanie B. Riddle-Green for our opening prayer. Bishop Riddle-Green is the Pastor of the Joshua Baptist Cathedral of Huntington, New York.

BISHOP RIDDLE-GREEN:

Thank you, Presiding Officer. Let us pray. God, we are most grateful today that you allowed us into this place. You allowed us an opportunity to come together once again. We are asking you now that you would have your way, that you would bring about understanding, that you would bring about knowledge, that we would leave here with every answer to every question. We're asking you now that you give our leaders the mind that you would have for them to lead us and to guide us. We are so grateful that you are our God and understand the hearts and the minds of your people and we ask you to do this in Jesus's name. Amen.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Thank you, Bishop. Will you please have a seat. Tonight's meeting is a special meeting of the Legislature called by our County Executive for the purpose of the State of the County message by the Executive. I welcome everyone here tonight and I thank our hosts for the use of this beautiful, modern facility. It is really something to behold. It's my first time here, it's a great facility.

Like every one of our meetings we start with public participation and I have a few cards here. First speaker is Denise Caracappa. Denise, are you in the room? Please come forward to one of the -- the one microphone. Denise, you have three minutes.

MS. CARACAPPA:

It's a simple question. Good evening. The month of January we've had -- we have not had any snow accumulation for the first time in 20 years. So I'm just wondering if the trend continues and we don't have as much snow as we have had in past years, what will be done with the money? Will it be saved for something else? Will it be allocated to a different department? I'm just curious if we continue on this trend of not so much snow.

P.O. LINDSAY:

The question was about the snow removal budget, because we have so little snow what happens to the money, and it's really a question that the Executive Branch I'm sure would be happy to answer. But I think the simple answer is that at the end of the year any money that is not used goes to what's called fund balance, and the fund balance is transferred to the following year and it's used to hold down taxes in the next year. Larry Skylar.

MR. SKYLAR:

Yes, I'll pass.

P.O. LINDSAY:

You pass, okay. And is it Randy King? I hope I'm reading it -- Randy King.

UNKNOWN AUDIENCE MEMBER:

He's coming down.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Okay.

MR. KING:

I just want to say good evening and good luck to the Executive and the Legislature with the State of the County Address. My name is Randy King. I am the Chairman of the Shinnecock Indian Nation of Southampton, New York. I would just like to say that we are an active participant in some of the County programs, such as the Office of the Aging Nutrition Program, Child Protective Services. We have sat down with District Attorney Spota and his staff regarding antidrug initiatives and we share the same concerns as you, the economy -- why does gas cost 25 cents or more from Southampton if you drive to Riverhead, the war in Iraq, the impending recession. We share those same concerns -- some taxes, but we are residents of the Suffolk -- of Suffolk County and good luck.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Thank you, Mr. King. I do not have any other cards. Is there anyone else in the audience that would like to address the Legislature? Okay. I'll accept a motion to recess until 6:55. The County Executive's address is due at seven o'clock. I have a motion by Legislator Alden, seconded by Legislator Kennedy. All in favor? Opposed? Abstention? We stand in recess.

MR. LAUBE:

Seventeen.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Until 6:55 P.M.

(*The meeting was recessed at 6:13 PM and reconvened at 6:53 PM*)

I'm not used to a producer telling me what to do. Could all Legislators please come back to the podium. Have your seat. We are about to go on air in a minute. And I'm going to remind everybody if they have a cell phone please check it now and make sure that it's on buzz mode or shut it off.

Okay. Good evening, again, everyone. Welcome to the special session of the Suffolk County Legislature for the purpose of hearing the State of the County address by our County Executive, and it's my pleasure to introduce the great Supervisor from the Town of Islip, the Honorable Phil Nolan.

Applause

SUPERVISOR NOLAN:

Thank you and good evening. My role here tonight is to introduce Dean Raful, who is the Dean here obviously in the great Town of Islip at Touro Law School which we are delighted to have here, but I can't take -- I have to take a moment to talk about my longtime colleague and friend Steve Levy. Since I became Town Supervisor a number of people have asked me about going into government and some of them have actually been specific in wanting to go to work for Steve Levy and they asked me to give some thought to what does it take to work for Steve Levy. So I decided to do just that and I want to share a couple of things that you need if you are going to work with Steve Levy.

The first is a cast iron stomach, and that's so you can handle 12 cups of coffee to get the rocket fuel that you are going to need to keep up with Steve. The second thing is you are going to need a quick mind with the ability to calculate the County sales tax in your head at lightening speed so you can keep up with Steve Levy. Third, you are going to need -- you are going to have to have a knack for multitasking so you can shave in your car, pump gas, eat pizza and talk all at one time on your cell phone and do everything and do them well because Steve will make sure that you are doing them well. And you are going to need to do all of that to keep up with Steve Levy. Finally, you are going to need a great pair of roller skates. Yes, roller skates. Because you guessed it, you will need them if you are going to keep up with Steve Levy.

Of course there's a reason it's so hard to keep up with Steve. Steve is the hardest working person in public life that I have ever encountered and I have been around a long time and I have seen a lot of very hard working officials, no one works harder for the 1.4 million residents of Suffolk County than Steve does.

When Steve took office in 2004 he had inherited a 200 million dollar budget shortfall. The reforms he implemented not only erased the shortfall in just one year, but he has gone on to cut taxes the next year, the year after that, the year after that, and don't bet against him doing it again in 2008.

On top of that, Steve has worked to preserve our remaining open spaces, encourage affordable housing and reduce crime. When I think about the things that Steve has accomplished in just four years I realize there is one other characteristic a person needs to work with Steve Levy, and that's humility because you are going to need it. Because the truth is nobody can keep up with Steve Levy. Of course, I have to try to keep up with Steve Levy so I've come up with a perfect strategy, roller skates. Sorry, Dean Raful, this is your introduction. I don't have any roller skates for you. Thank you very much. Have a great evening.

Applause

MR. RAFUL:

Good evening. On behalf of the students, staff and faculty I welcome you to the Touro Law Center. The Touro Law Center is fast becoming nationally known for a new kind of legal education, one that integrates our classrooms and the courtrooms in our Central Islip neighborhood, with a model Federal Courthouse and the Cohalan State Courthouse. Touro also houses a one of a kind public advocacy home to 15 public interest legal groups serving the victims of domestic violence, protecting workers rights and defending our civil rights. And like today's event, Touro Law Center is open to the Suffolk and Long Island communities, offering legal services to legal residents and facilities for educational and organizational events. And today's event is a good example, a special highlight for us, and I'm pleased and honored to introduce our speaker in one moment.

You all know the basic story of our County Executive. He's a graduate of Sachem High School, Stony Brook University Magan Cum Laude, and perhaps in his one lapse of judgment, he earned his law degree from St. John's University, although to be fair, Touro Law School was not yet open at that time so it's okay. But he did show extreme good judgement when he hired a Touro grad as his top legal advisor. We are very proud of our County Attorney Christine Malafi.

Applause

He was elected to the County Legislature at the age of 26 where he served for 15 years before being elected to the State Assembly. In November 2003 he ran for the Suffolk County Executive. Suicide mission. No one gave him any shot, he had to borrow money, as many of you know, from his Mom and aunt, and his opponent had four lines on the ballot and he won. Fast forward four years, this November he was endorsed by Democrats and Republicans and several other parties and he won with an astounding 96% of the vote. That's not a mandate, as State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli said, that's a command. Things are going so well for Steve right now that even his beloved football Giants won the Superbowl. We are delighted to present our hometown champion, committed to keeping Suffolk County America's greatest suburb, Steve Levy.

Applause

COUNTY EXECUTIVE LEVY:

Thank you. Thank you, everyone. News 12 has us on the clock. Thank you. Oh, thank you all so very, very much. Thank you, Dean Rafal, the faculty, staff and students here at Touro Law School. Supervisor Phil Nolan, thank you as well, the great leader of Islip Town, my home town. It's great to be home, by the way. Thanks to all of you who are joining us here tonight in the auditorium and thousands more through television by News 12.

Just a few years ago this magnificent facility was no more than a dream and some may have thought we'd never be hosting such an address here. Those were the same people who said my beloved Giants would never beat the Patriots. But here we are.

Presiding Officer Lindsay, Minority Leader Losquadro, members of the Legislature, distinguished guests and friends, the State of the County lays a foundation for the year ahead. Sometimes it's rosy. Sometimes it's much more challenging. In this State of the County address I can say that the State of Suffolk County remains strong but there are clouds ahead that can either part into sunny skies or morph into a hurricane. It all depends on what we do.

Four years ago, I gave my first address and warned of the 238 million dollar shortfall that we inherited. We could have sat back and hoped it would disappear on its own, which never would have happened. That would have led to a huge tax increase, cuts to services, and a lowering of our bond rating. Instead, we decided to act.

We put partisan politics aside and crafted the largest budget restructuring plan in our County's history. This led to four consecutive General Fund tax cuts, something any other county in the state would be proud to match. And we kept our Police budget, which had been spiraling at near double digit increases, within our tax cap parameters for all of these years.

We have been able to provide this tax stability not through any gimmicks or smoke and mirrors, but through pure fiscal responsibility. We understood that the only way to control taxes was to control spending. In 2005, for the first time in nearly four decades, this County actually spent less than the previous year. And over the last three year period, actual spending in our County government increased a mere 2 1/2%. That's not 2 1/2% per year; that's 2 1/2% total over three years. Less than 1% a year. Imagine if there had been the same pattern in our schools and other jurisdictions.

Applause

Our fiscal prudence has been admired, not only by our beleaguered taxpayers, but by the Wall Street bond raters as well. Under our administration, by working together with the Legislature, Comptroller and Treasurer in a bipartisan fashion, our bond rating has risen to and remains at its highest level in our County's history. While other counties and jurisdiction have been placed on fiscal watch, our finances remain strong.

The fiscal responsibility we exhibited during the last few years must be more vigilant than ever in

the upcoming year because of a bleak national economy that is headed toward a slowdown. The red hot real estate market that fueled so much of our Long Island economy during the first part of this decade has flattened, and even dropped. Thousands of our residents with overextended loans are seeing them come due. As a result, we have seen a significant increase in property tax delinquencies here in Suffolk County. In the past, we would have had a near total payment of all property taxes owed. In these hard times, however, we have seen the delinquencies totaling \$30 million over a two year period. That was \$30 million we could not budget for.

As our property tax collections have declined, sales tax collections have dwindled to a fraction of what they were years ago. When the national economy was going strong in the late 90's, the County could expect sales tax receipts increasing as high as nine percent over that of the previous year. That made it very easy for officials to be all things to all people. But those days are over. You could increase taxes -- excuse me, you could increase spending dramatically while still reducing taxes at the time same time. We are now lucky if we will see a mere two percent increase in sales tax collections over the previous year.

In the meantime, the cost of just maintaining our present operations continues to grow. Each year we must come up with 30 million new dollars just to pay for salary and benefit increases through a mandatory arbitration in the Police Department. And still millions more are needed for other bargaining units throughout the County. Healthcare costs for our employees continue to increase exponentially. And the mandated preschool special education program, over which we have no control, has grown to more than 120 million dollars annually in our budget.

Both our Executive's Budget Office and the Legislature's Budget Review Office have concurred that the 2009 budget will be extremely difficult to navigate if national economic conditions do not improve.

So once again, just as in 2004, we have a choice to make. We can sit back and just hope that things work themselves out. If we do, we avoid the difficulty of making hard choices. But if we're wrong and the economy does not pick up, we will have set ourselves up for major cutbacks in services and personnel while making it very difficult to continue our pattern of tax stability. The better option for us this year, as it was in 2004, is to act and act now.

I am therefore creating a panel that will meet as early as this week to address our budgetary concerns. Everything will be on the table in order to maximize efficiencies and restructure various elements of the budget. I will be asking Legislators from both sides of the aisle to join me in developing an action plan to protect our taxpayers. The only way a restructuring program can work is if there is a willingness on the part of individual lawmakers to not only say no to new spending increases, but also to say yes to changing the way things have been done in the past.

Together we have done a fine job in controlling taxes on the County level of government. But the County's portion of the typical resident's bill is a mere 11.4% of the total bill. We can be proud that we have reduced that figure from 13.3% of four years ago. But real tax relief will only come about if we have new methods of controlling costs in other levels of government as well. Last year I laid out a series of proposals that would help to consolidate common functions in all of our 69 school districts, such as transportation, security, buildings and grounds, and healthcare.

In December of last year, I was elected by my peers to head the New York State County Executives Association. The persistent lobbying that this organization employed, I am happy to say, has reaped rewards. For the first time, measures to make it easier for our districts to purchase their healthcare through a single consortium have been included in the Governor's budget. Authority was also granted to allow different levels of government to share equipment and functions, such as road maintenance. Additionally, money will be saved through another provision that will allow schools and municipalities, for the first time, to buy less expensive products from bids from other jurisdictions throughout the nation.

Now, while these measures provide some sense of relief, we still face enormous challenges in our quest to keep property taxes steady. This is one of the reasons we must continue to grow our economy. A healthy business climate leads to more jobs, more incomes, and more money spent and filtered down through our economy. This means more sales tax coming back to our County coffers in our attempt to relieve the burden of the property taxpayer.

Our Economic Development Department has been second to none in helping our companies to expand and in luring in high paying jobs to our county. Important companies such as Honeywell, Airtechnique and Telephonics have expanded their job base here thanks to the County's aggressive economic development policies. And, of course, we take much pride in our greatest accomplishment, attracting Canon Corporation's headquarters here to Suffolk County -- over 2,000 jobs that will help keep our economy moving forward.

Applause

But if we want to sustain our growing economy, we must continue to invest in our infrastructure. Because of our strict environmental regulations and our precious groundwater supply, our Health Department limits the amount of economic growth that any particular acre of land can handle. If that area is sewered, the concern is moot. But while almost 100% of Nassau County is sewered, a mere 27 percent of Suffolk County parcels are within a sewer district. Consequently, in order to grow our economy, this administration is embarking upon a 150 million dollar investment in building sewers in targeted commercial and downtown areas over the next decade.

Applause

Now, building sewers isn't very glamorous, it but it is very, very much needed. It's also very expensive. Back in the 70's, we were able to build sewers because of the immense reimbursement from the state and federal governments. For every dollar spent on sewer construction, 87 and a half percent was reimbursed from the federal or state levels. Unfortunately, today the amount coming from the state and federal governments is close to zero. There is simply no way that the county going at it alone can meet our demands for new sewers. It is time for the state and federal governments to get back in the business of helping us to grow our economy and keep our water supplies clean by sharing in the cost to expand our sewer districts.

Applause

I am therefore calling upon the Governor and the State Legislature, and our congressional delegation as well, to create a fund that will match the county dollar-for-dollar for every sewer investment made in the next decade. To further accentuate the importance of sewer development in Suffolk County, I am calling for a sewer summit on March 20th that will bring together leaders from the public and private sector to map out an action plan to meet the County's growing needs. This summit's findings will complement a legislative study to be conducted later this year on the subject and our Waste Water Task Force as well. Again, not too sexy, but so very, very, very important for the future of Suffolk County.

Applause

You know this county can be proud of its pioneering efforts to revitalize our downtown communities. Over the last decade, over 7 million dollars has been pumped into our local communities that has been leveraged into another 21 million dollars to beautify our downtowns. We've worked with innovative mayors, such as Paul Pontieri of Patchogue, to provide incentives, tax breaks and expedited permits to revitalize our downtowns.

Together we are promoting a major redevelopment in Patchogue, where the old Sweezy's

department store, that has been vacant for over a decade, will be converted into hotel, retail and next generation housing hub that can serve as a model for other downtowns throughout the county and the country. These will be beautiful, state of the art designed units that have the appearance of luxury, but at a cost that is within the reach of our twenty-somethings now living in Mom and Dad's basement apartment. This project comes on the heels of the Copper Beech Village development that the Village and County constructed last year and the new Artspace proposal that will allow for 70 up-and-coming artists to live in beautiful lofts in downtown Patchogue.

Applause

This revitalization effort not only provides our young people with a vibrant and affordable place to live, but also provides the shopkeepers and restaurants in the area with a built in base of customers. And, of course, this beautiful architecture and positive activity in the street brings up property values and instills a sense of pride, identity and excitement in the community.

This year I am unveiling Destination Downtown -- an integrated marketing campaign to acquaint our residents and visitors alike with the new and improved "Downtown Suffolk." If you haven't been to Patchogue, Bay Shore, Greenport or the county's other burgeoning downtowns in a while, you owe yourself a visit. And you will be pleasantly surprised.

It is no coincidence that it is these downtowns that are now on the rebound. All of them have sewer districts that allow them to consider these types of innovative projects. Without the sewers, revitalization is a very iffy proposition.

A lack of sewers also inhibits our ability to build the type of next generation housing that is so essential to keeping our families together and our talented workforce from fleeing to less expensive areas throughout the nation. When it comes to workforce housing, this County gets it.

Applause

Over the last couple of years we have built hundreds of homes for our sons and daughters and have thousands more in the hopper. While in years past affordable housing was a dirty word that brought with it the connotation of lower property values, today we are recognizing that housing development done correctly can give our next generation the opportunity to experience the American dream as we did. And, of course, this investment will also help our businesses from losing the talented workforce they need to survive in a very competitive marketplace.

We understand how important this housing is for the health of our future. But building the type of housing we need will only be acceptable if it is done in a smart way. First off, we shouldn't allow our need for more workforce housing to compete against our strong desire to preserve our beautiful open spaces. There are abandoned warehouses and shopping centers and other pre-developed areas that we can revitalize in order to provide this housing stock. This puts these properties back on the tax rolls and raises property values by removing blights within our community.

Secondly, we need not, and I repeat we need not seek greater density in our traditional single family neighborhoods. Many people moved here for their single family home with the white picket fence and should not be -- we should not be encroaching upon their slice of suburban heaven. However, greater density, with attached one and two bedroom units is appropriate in our downtown areas and in the redevelopment of the abandoned sites.

And while survey after survey shows the public becoming more accepting of the need for next generation housing, our leaders are often lagging behind. Our housing needs are blocked, either by officials backing down to a small group of "not in my backyard" folks or through unjustified fears that needed housing will lead to more strain on the local school system and the existing infrastructure. Building starter housing for our 20-somethings does not bring more children into a district. It has been proven that such construction is usually a net plus in terms of tax revenue for a

local district. Nevertheless, there continues to be many who fight this needed housing on the mistaken fear that it will raise taxes.

This issue is dealt with once and for all in the Downstate Suburban Housing Initiative that I have promoted along with six other county executives in the downstate region. It seeks to establish an 87 million dollar fund in the state that will help pay for our water and sewer hookups, as well as planning for housing. And, most important, it will provide monies to any school district that can prove the workforce housing had a deleterious impact on its tax base. In part, due to our lobbying effort, the Governor has proposed a 400 million dollar allocation in his budget for affordable housing purposes. If the State Legislature is to confirm our proposal, it could have the result of being the most significant housing initiative in the state since the advent of the SONYMA program in the 1970's.

Applause

As I noted earlier, we are facing some very difficult economic times. We need to further eliminate inefficiencies in government so that we free up the money we need to carry out the more humane purposes of government. We in Suffolk are generally very fortunate, and relative to other parts of the nation, a wealthy community. But let us not forget that we have so many within our midst who are struggling, and still others who are living in poverty. The high cost of living has led to many of our singles and families without a place to call home.

Over the last several years, our Department of Social Services, at my direction, has continued a policy of contracting with not-for-profit entities to ensure that our homeless families do not have to stay in cramped motels. Five years ago there were up to 190 families in these motels. Today that number is near zero.

Applause

Nevertheless, we must continue to care for our most underprivileged. That's why I'm announcing today Suffolk County will be working in conjunction with the Nassau-Suffolk Coalition for the Homeless in preparing a ten year plan to end homelessness in Suffolk County.

Applause

The committee will develop an action plan enabling us to become eligible for federal grants to provide the utmost care for those who have lost their homes.

Let us also endeavor to involve our young people in cultivating a sense of responsibility toward their fellow man. I will therefore be asking the Legislature to pass legislation called Credit for Caring at our community college, to provide a semester's worth of free tuition to students who are willing to serve the poor in food kitchens, homeless shelters or similar humanitarian causes.

Applause

And we will be establishing a homeless hotline that will be capable of receiving a phone call from any resident who has knowledge of an individual who is living exposed to the harsh elements. I have instructed our police officers to physically go to the site and our social workers to help individuals avail themselves of every service for which they're eligible. It is 2008, and no human being should die because he or she froze to death.

Applause

Additionally, we will increase to twice per year our Operation Stand Down, where our Veterans Service Agency workers will find any and every homeless veteran, bring him or her to our seminar and provide access to over 30 different services at this one site. And every veteran returning from

combat will be contacted by our agency to apprise him or her of all of our services that can help them readjust to civilian life.

Applause

We simply cannot allow these brave men and women to return to the land they protected only to find themselves hungry, alone, cold or homeless.

Applause

All of our citizens deserve an airtight roof over their heads. They should also have access to quality healthcare. America's healthcare system is facing enormous challenge. This great nation remains the only industrialized country in the world that does not provide adequate healthcare for all of its citizens. The lack of comprehensive federal healthcare policy has left it to the local counties through our health clinics and private hospitals to foot the bill. While reimbursement is available for some of our uninsured, at least half of these clinic visits are not reimbursed a dime from the state or federal government. This lack of accountability must end and must end now.

Applause

Yet, there are some things we can do on a local level to try to mitigate these costs while improving healthcare services to our residents. The answer is in part preventive care. The earlier our residents receive treatment or diagnosis, the healthier our county will be. Consequently, we have created a new Division of Preventive Medicine. The division will examine ways we can expand preventive medicine throughout the county. First, efforts will be made to educate our own county workers as to the importance of proper nutrition, healthy habits, exercise and early screenings. Second, we will focus on those with asthma to help them get early preventive measures and keep them out of the hospitals. Our pilot program in this area reduced emergency visits by an astounding 75%. Third, we are coordinating a county/school healthcare consortium that will provide an unprecedented level of attention to healthcare amongst our children and teenagers. My staff and I have been meeting with Rosemary Jones, the President of the Suffolk County School Superintendents Association, in order to further this program. A major forum is planned in May of this year to be followed regularly with scheduled health fairs within our schools to address issues including childhood obesity, nutrition and healthy lifestyles. Fourth, we will host a seminar for private sector employers as well to work toward making their employees healthier and their work sites safer.

Applause

You know, one of the most important components of preserving healthcare on Long Island is to preserve our precious and vulnerable water supply. We in Suffolk can be quite proud of our accomplishments. Together in a nonpartisan fashion the Legislature and Executives alike, have preserved property over the last four years the equivalent of six times the size of Central Park and that's not bad.

Applause

The preservation of these beautiful open spaces not only helps protect our groundwater but leaves a marvelous legacy for future generations who can enjoy the beautiful vistas for which many of us moved here in the first place.

But we cannot do it alone. For the most part the state and federal government have lagged behind in this regard. The state and federal government must step up and agree to match the county dollar for dollar for our purchases as many of our local towns have done.

Applause

The state has done a great job preserving properties in the Adirondacks over the last two decades. Our precious Long Island should be no less a priority.

We can protect our environment through preserving open space and also by encouraging greater recycling. We recycle paper. We recycle cardboard. We recycle plastics and bottles and cans, but when it comes to the most potentially toxic product of them all, our electronic waste, we have few recycling programs at all. It's time to change that. I therefore will be issuing a Request For Proposals for the creation of a comprehensive E-waste recycling program to handle discarded computers, video games and other electronics.

Applause

This project will dovetail on the E-waste recycling efforts being done through a legislative initiative and expand the movement to the private sector.

When it comes to recycling, something else has always confounded me. If we can recycle garbage produced from our homes, why can't we do the same for our businesses, our schools, and our apartment complexes? Did you ever ask yourself that? Why not? That is the largest, a huge, huge component of our waste stream going into landfills or incinerators. That's why we will be joining with Town of Babylon Supervisor Steve Bellone to develop a model recycling program for our businesses, institutions and municipalities.

Applause

And we will work with Town of Islip Supervisor Phil Nolan and Long Island Power Authority CEO Kevin Law and others to expand solar energy usage in Suffolk. We'll do it by putting our county property and Brownfields to good use. Last year we implemented an innovative Brownfield sale that brought in over three million dollars in revenue to the county. Now, dealing with Brownfields has posed a major dilemma for decades, but we can find a silver lining through a program we call Brownfields to Solar Fields. Under this program we will work with either private entrepreneurs or the Long Island Power Authority to place solar panels on those blighted properties or on other county locations to provide clean and renewable electricity. Together let's make Suffolk County, "Solar County".

Applause

Now, in our efforts to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases we generate, one of the most effective steps we can take is to promote the use of alternative fuel vehicles. To help drive the market for these vehicles, I am inviting the towns and the state to work with me, the Long Gasoline Retailers Association and Congressmen Steve Israel to help site alternative fuel pumping stations at various locations throughout Suffolk County.

The key to solving our many challenges here on Long Island is to strike balance. We must continue to expand our open space and environmental programs, but at the same time work diligently to expand our road network. As we speak, there is a tremendous amount of road expansion occurring throughout our county. Prior to Memorial Day of 2008 I will proudly cut the ribbon to open the additional lane on County Rode 39, opening up traffic that flows through the gateway of the East End.

Applause

This project has been dubbed "The Municipal Miracle" because it went through so quickly. We have already enhanced safety and traffic flow on County Road 111 in Manorville. And this year, we will begin our efforts to enhance traffic flow on Nicolls Road in Selden at the Community College, Portion Road in Ronkonkoma and Farmingville, Motor Parkway in Hauppauge, Pulaski Road in Huntington,

Bay Shore Road in Islip, Montauk Highway in Mastic and Shirley, and County Road 58, the gateway to the North Fork in Riverhead.

I will continue to lead us in our efforts to make huge investments in our sewer districts, our road network and our open space preserves. But as with sewers and open space, when it comes to roads we in the county cannot do it alone. Each year the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council, an organization known as NYMTC which is comprised of five county executives and the City of New York, helps divvy up monies that come from state and federal government for roads, bridges and mass transit. Now, in the past the overwhelming share of this money has gone to the New York City transit system. We don't begrudge large allocations for this purpose because it does have tangential benefits to those of us on Long Island as well. But when eight billion dollars can go to an east side access to the railroad, and another six billion to the 2nd Avenue subway, is it too much to ask that we get 200 million dollars for a truck road to run parallel to the Sagtikos Parkway? I don't think so.

Applause

I have been calling for a change in the priorities from NYMTC for the last two years but so far we have not seen much of a result. If the pattern continues, it would be my recommendation that Suffolk and Nassau Counties consider breaking away from NYMTC and create our own Metropolitan Planning Organization to receive and manage these state and federal funds. Long Island is larger than 18 states. We should be treated as such when it comes to infrastructure improvements.

Applause

Now as we continue to invest in our infrastructure, let us remember that it is the people of Suffolk County and their diversity that is our greatest resource. The sense of responsibility we owe to the disadvantaged also extends to those of all cultures and religions within our family in Suffolk. It is why we can take pride in passed landmark legislation that created the most sweeping anti-housing discrimination language in the county's history. While we as a nation have made great strides in erasing the vestiges of racism from an earlier time, there still exists a fringe that would seek to harm others because of their race, gender, creed or sexual orientation. Any type of violence, whether perpetrated against one who is white, black, Hispanic or Asian, documented or undocumented, Christian, Jew, Muslim or Hindu, will simply not be tolerated.

Applause

Recently there have been a disturbing number of incidents on Long Island where a noose has been displayed in an attempt to intimidate African Americans. When we sought to charge the perpetrators, we were surprised to learn that the present statute did not qualify this heinous act as a hate crime. We could have done nothing. Instead we joined forces with people of good will throughout the county -- our Human Rights and Anti-bias Divisions, our clergy, and community and civic groups to demand that the State of New York change its hate crimes legislation to make the displaying of a noose an act under the umbrella of hate crimes legislation. The State Legislature has yet to adopt this proposal. Let this be the year that this bill becomes law.

Applause

Tomorrow I will be meeting with our Minority Advisory Boards to discuss yet other ways that we can expand this legislation to create a necessary deterrent against those who would try to intimidate their fellow county residents by denigrating their race or religion.

In law enforcement, videotaping interrogations has been an issue over the past few years. Presently, New York State Law does not require video recording of interrogations. In Suffolk, the District Attorney and Police Department have been electronically recording statements made as a result of interrogations. I have been discussing the matter with District Attorney Tom Spota and Police Commissioner Richard Dormer and I'm happy to announce tonight that they have agreed in

concept to video recording the entire interrogations of those in custody in homicide squad investigations.

Applause

This new protocol will afford the community at large, and our juries, with further transparency and heightened confidence in the criminal justice process.

You know, we certainly have our challenges here on Long Island. As a maturing suburb, we face the inevitable problems of overdevelopment, heavy traffic and a high cost of living, but no problem is insurmountable. We as a county have the talent and the determination to ensure that we not only maintain the type of suburban bliss that drew so many of us out here in the first place, but also to improve our collective condition to hand off to our children a better Long Island than we inherited. And despite some of the problems that we face, let us not forget that this is still one of the most desirable places in which to live. We're within an hour of the cultural and economic capital of the world. We have one of the best school systems in the nation, among the best beaches in the world, and the lowest crime rate of any suburban area in the United States of America.

Applause

Let us put partisan politics aside and remember that before we are Democrats, before we are we Republicans, before we are Independents or Conservatives, we are first and foremost the decendents of folks just like my Mom and Dad who moved to Suffolk County in search of a better life in the suburbs.

Over the last four years, this county government has lowered General Fund taxes four straight times and lowered our crime rate by nearly 11%. We have raised our bond rating to its highest level ever, increased the next generation housing stock, and made the largest investment of open spaces in our County's history. We passed ethics reforms, removed perks, and enhanced professionalism and accountability. We maintained, and often enhanced, the services we provide to our public through Smart Management.

Can this county government do it again? Ladies and gentlemen of the Legislature, when we work together you bet we can. Our residents deserve no less. Thank you very much. God bless Suffolk County. God bless the United States of America.

Applause and Standing Ovation

P.O. LINDSAY:

We stand recessed. Adjourned.

MR. LAUBE:

Seventeen (Not Present: Legislator Barraga).

(*THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 7:47 PM*)