

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

SPECIAL MEETING

SECOND DAY  
JANUARY 29, 2009

STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS

MEETING HELD AT FIVE TOWNS COLLEGE  
305 NORTH SERVICE ROAD  
DIX HILLS, NEW YORK

MINUTES TAKEN BY

LUCIA BRAATEN, COURT STENOGRAPHER  
TRANSCRIBED BY LUCIA BRAATEN, COURT STENOGRAPHER  
AND  
KIM CASTIGLIONE, LEGISLATIVE SECRETARY

***[THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 5:45 P.M.]***

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Okay. Mr. Clerk, could you call the roll, please?

**MR. LAUBE:**

Yes.

**(Roll Called by Mr. Laube, Clerk)**

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Present.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

Here.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

Here.

**LEG. BEEDENBENDER:**

Here.

**LEG. LOSQUADRO:**

Present.

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

Here.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

(Not Present)

**LEG. ALDEN:**

(Not Present)

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Here.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

(Not Present)

**LEG. NOWICK:**

(Not Present)

**LEG. HORSLEY:**

(Not Present)

**LEG. GREGORY:**

Here.

**LEG. STERN:**

(Not Present)

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

(Not Present)

**LEG. COOPER:**

Here.

**D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:**

Here.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Here.

**MR. LAUBE:**

Eleven. (Not Present at Roll Call: Legs. Montano, Alden, Kennedy, Nowick, Horsley, Stern and D'Amaro)

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

I would ask everyone to rise for a salute to the flag, but they took the flag. Well, that's great. So we're going to have a salute to the imaginary flag.

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

I have one on my lapel.

*(\*Salutation\*)*

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

And before everybody sits down, I would just like a moment of silence to keep in mind our men and women that are in harm's way and have given life and limb for this country.

*(\*Moment of Silence\*)*

Have a seat. I welcome everybody to the County Executive's State of the County Address, which is officially a County Legislative meeting. My name is William Lindsay. I'm the Legislator from the 8th District and the Presiding Officer of this body, and at every meeting that we hold, we always ask and advertise for the public to come and speak to us and to say whatever is on their mind. And I have several cards that we will go through, and each speaker has three minutes. First speaker is Mary Fredette. Mary, forgive me, the lights are in my eyes. So, Mary, if you're here, you can come down. You have a microphone off to my right.

**MS. FREDETTE:**

Good afternoon. I'm Mary Fredette. I'm an LPN that works at John J. Foley, and I just would like to share with you the most -- one of the most recent, you know, of many thank you cards that we get from the families of our residents. Okay. This particular family was well respected in the community, and the reason they chose John J. Foley was because of the standard of care that their family member would receive.

It says, "To the entire staff of Four South: During this 11-month journey with my father, I've seen many things encounter -- many things, encountered all kinds of people, and received an education I could have done without. There were no triumphs, only tragedies. When you think that you've seen it all, you get hammered from a new direction. It never fails."

"I knew when I brought Dad to you he wouldn't be with us long. So my expectations were only for him to be comfortable and to be treated like a person. That was something that seemed to get lost along the way."

"All of you at John J. did so much to ease these last months. The kindness and heartfelt care that was given to my father was that -- was the best that I had ever seen, and you all are to be commended for it, especially in the last days. The compassion given to us all went far beyond a day's work when you -- what you do means something that cannot be measured in any special (sic)

sheet. It matters -- in any special (sic) sheet. It matters to real people who will never forget what you do. "I thank" -- "I thank you" doesn't really cover it all, but nothing ever really will. With much love." And that was a family of one of our residents, and I don't want to mention their name at this time.

*(Applause)*

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Thank you, Mary.

**MS. FREDETTE:**

You're welcome.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Christopher Ogno.

**MR. OGNO:**

Thank you very much, Mr. Lindsay. I'm here tonight to remind this Legislative Body, not that it needs to be reminded, that these tough economic times that we are going through our entire country is going through. It seems that our economy is in peril. It's the worst it's been in 80 years, something that all of us have not seen. What I'm here to remind you is that we cannot run our infrastructure into the ground. We cannot sell the John J. Foley. It's too important. It's too important to the people of Suffolk County. It stands for more than something. Mr. John J. Foley knew that himself.

Also, the other thing I'd like to remind the entire public is that the deficit at John J. Foley has come under Mr. Levy's watch. It has never been so bad. And now he wants to get rid of us, it makes no sense. I don't understand sometimes what people think, but I know in my heart what is morally correct. I know what is ethical. It's government's job to take care of its people, the people who built our roads, built our communities, to not cast them aside like they don't mean anything. And that's all I have to say. And I'd like to thank each and every one of you for understanding our point of view.

*(Applause)*

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Thank you, Chris. Dot Kerrigan. After Dot is Chris Swendenson.

**MR. SWENSON:**

That's Swenson.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Swenson?

**MR. SWENSON:**

Correct.

**MS. KERRIGAN:**

Good evening. Thanks for having this forum here today. It's nice to see all of you. I was trying to read this so I could be a little bit more polished than usual, but I didn't get a chance. So I have been anxious to speak here tonight in hopes that our County Executive will listen to what's really important to the voters and taxpayers of Suffolk County.

For almost a year now, the residents and employees of Suffolk County's Nursing Home, John J. Foley, have been fighting for our home and our livelihood. Our residents have recently become hopeful, that in this long struggle it has not been in vain. We now have competent management

working tirelessly to fill the beds and to create efficiencies at our home.

County Executive Levy, who will speak here tonight, has never made himself available to our residents at the County Nursing Home. He has, to the best of anyone's knowledge, never stepped foot in this well-loved institution, although he did refer to it in a May 2007 press release as one of the many services that Suffolk County is proud to offer its citizens.

We believe in these terrible economic times that we need to do what President Obama has been saying. We need to protect and preserve existing jobs, and stimulate job growth in both the public and private sectors. This County, as with the rest of the country, cannot afford to put more people out of work. We need to keep taxpayers paying taxes, buying retail, buying homes, or if not buying homes, at least able to pay their existing mortgage and taxes.

Our County Exec seems determined to put people out of work, and these people, some of them are at the bottom of the economic ladder, the foundation of our economy. In one wave of his pen, he could wipe out 300 Suffolk County taxpayers from employment. Fortunately, we are a democracy by consensus, there are no absolute leaders in our County. John J. Foley Skilled Nursing Facility has the unanimous support of our entire Legislative Body, and we thank all of you, and we'll do anything we can to have that continued support. It seems that the only person who's really determined to close the John J. Foley Skilled Nursing Facility is County Executive Levy. Why can't such a brilliant man, as he's purported to be, and we know him to be, keep the promises that he's made to Suffolk County residents to keep this place a great -- keep Suffolk County a great place to live and work?

We have all been challenged in these difficult economic times, and wonder if we can challenge our County Exec to stand out in the crowd to be the unique leader we have hoped for. He can continue to be the politician who, when things get tough, cut, cut, cut. Cannot this man, who will come before us tonight, paint a picture of hope and promise as our newly elected President has, or will he, against the will of all, close this wonderful County facility?

I think that's about all I have to say. I could go on --

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Thank you, Dot.

**MS. KERRIGAN:**

-- and on about this. So I do appreciate you listening to us, and I hope you'll consider what we've been talking about this past year. I know you all have in all sincerity. Thank you very much.

*(Applause)*

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Thank you, Dot. Chris Swenson, followed by Chris DeStio.

**MR. SWENSON:**

Christopher, that's me. Good evening, County Legislature, Representative Lindsay. I'm here today to talk about --

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Pick up the mike.

**MR. SWENSON:**

I'm a little tall. Thank you. I'm here today to talk about a transportation issue regarding the Long Island Railroad. This issue is a discrepancy between the electrified and non-electrified portions of this railroad going toward Manhattan Railroad terminal, such as Penn Station. This can be partly alleviated by using Metro North Commuter Railroad Hudson Division as part of the solution. This means that when Metro North operates trains from its Upper Hudson Division, they can continue on

to, say, Port Jefferson, or Speonk, or another non-electrified railroad, which right now the Long Island Railroad offers very limited trains to Penn Station from its diesel lines, and they're peak and there's some holiday service. If Metro North agrees, it would curtail the needs of commuters from non-electrified lines, say, to drive to Ronkonkoma, Huntington, or Babylon to get better service. This would also -- this would have very -- fewer cars on the road, and everybody knows Exit 61, when they drive down to get to Ronkonkoma, and the big, huge parking lot.

This is not a new idea. Amtrak was thinking about running a train between Albany and Port Jefferson. That did not materialize. However, they did run a train between Albany and Shea Stadium, so, theoretically, it can be done, even though the power systems are different. And there was -- in the '90's, Metro North was thinking about running beach trains to Long Island beaches with bus connections. You know, they -- right now, they make the same electric purchases together, they do a lot of other things together, but they don't want to get the hurdle, because there are work rules, there are other things. However, they would save money on staffing, scheduling and future purchases. And people always say to me, "Well, what about the East Side Access?" Well, the East Side Access has nothing to do with diesel lines, because it's just another station they have to change to. Remember the old saying, "Change at Jamaica for Brooklyn and New York." It will be, "Change at Jamaica," or wherever, "for Grand Central." Thank you.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Thank you, Chris.

*(Applause)*

And another Chris, Chris DeStio.

**MR. DESTIO:**

Good evening. My name is Christopher DeStio, and I'm here to speak about the John J. Foley Nursing Home. Today we will hear on how the County Executive -- how the County cannot make the ends -- ends meet because of the shortfall for sales tax revenue. And justifiably so, the economy is tanking. So you have to ask yourself the question, "What are the priorities and what are not?" When a bond rating is more important than taking care of our Nursing Home residents at the Foley Facility, it's time to reevaluate our priorities. How can you take care of the most needy residents of Suffolk County during the good times, then kick them to the curb during the bad? If this is the case, we should just turn the clock back to the Stone Age, because then we haven't learned anything about being a civilized society.

We are told that private nursing homes can do a better or equal job as John J. Foley. The person, whoever made that statement, obviously has never been to too many private nursing homes and doesn't read too many papers. I also have an article with me, which I will give you soon, from the New York Times, dated September 23rd, 2007. It states that large investment groups are buying up all the nursing homes, cutting staff and cutting care, and making money off of our sick and poor, then three years later selling to make millions. This is what will happen to John J. Foley. The residents at our Foley Facility are not livestock to be sold off to the highest bidder, they are people who depend on us to give them the best care possible.

Recently, we had Oversight Committee meetings at our facility, and I was hoping time to time we could be briefed on his progress. I've been up here many times over the last year because I believe in what I'm doing, and I never once broke stride to my commitment to this facility. That's why I respectfully ask the Presiding Officer if he can show me what avenue to take on some of my cost-saving ideas I have. And I feel that these cost-saving measures would be instrumental on helping the committee reach its goal.

Recently, we received a new Director at the facility, and I must say, we couldn't ask for a better man for the job. He has totally turned the facility around and making the impossible possible, and we are very grateful that he is on our team.

And, once again, I would like to thank all the Legislators for their support, and, hopefully, they can navigate us -- navigate this facility through the storm. Thank you very much.

*(Applause)*

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Thank you, Chris. Denise Caracappa. Hi, Denise.

**MS. CARACAPPA:**

Hello.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

You're on.

**MS. CARACAPPA:**

Good evening, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this -- tonight. The topic that I'll be speaking about is improving the lives of disabled persons living in Suffolk County. I have a passion for this due to personal family experience.

I know that the Legislature and the Suffolk County Executive have many things, many topics on their radar screen. However, I feel that even though there are many things that are -- doing many programs that are helpful to improve this situation for equal and more full employment for disabled people here in Suffolk County, I think it could be improved. Can you hear me?

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Yep.

**MS. CARACAPPA:**

Okay. That being said, just a little bit of history. Under President Clinton, he wanted to increase the rate of disabled workers working in the Federal Government, and now, under the Obama Administration, one of his initiatives is to make sure that the employment rate to persons with disabilities is at the same rate of the general population. And I could give you a lot of statistics, but I'll just leave that to the side and you can always just speak to me about that. But, basically, one in six people experience some form of disability, and the statistics do, you know, go to the fact that disabled people definitely are working at a less rate than the general population and have a financial -- they're financially marginalized in many cases. For example, I think there are many things that could be done to improve some of the -- some of the programs that are in place already. And I spoke to Steve about this already and did keep the lines of communication open. I've been in contact with my Legislator as well.

And what I'm saying applies to both here in the private -- the private sector, as well as in the government. For example, just -- these are just some small examples. When we had the -- what was it called? The Community Forum last week, I didn't see services, employment for disabled on a breakout event; I think it should have been there. On the website, we don't have the Task Force for the Disabled listed, it's just eliminated. So I think these -- working for the disabled, particularly in the area of employment, need to be more open and more inclusive.

Also, with regard to employment for the disabled, which is my -- the thrust of my point tonight, disabilities is not just physical disabilities, sometimes they're hidden, and I think we ought to take this into consideration. So I think that the programs we have in place are good, some of them are working, some of them can be improved. And I would like Mr. Levy and the Legislature to look at me as somebody who is sort of an expert in this field. And I think if we're going to have two-way communication and have dialogue, we must engage all the constituents. And if we have people like me, or other people on other topics, you really ought to look to them as experts, and not have a one-way dialogue. And it's been very exciting to me that Mr. Obama really wants to do that, and I

think we should do that right here in Suffolk County.

In closing, we have many qualified disabled people who want to experience the American dream, and, as has been said by some of the predecessors before me, we have to really take care of the most needy and most underserved in our community. Not only is it the right thing to do, however, in a practical sense, we want to make sure that the people who want to work -- I think Mr. Levy said there's 216,000 people living in Suffolk County that are disabled. And we have to look at the fact, you know, we have many programs, but maybe some of those people are not involved in the program. So we have to make sure that we expect more of -- more of the people that are disabled, that they should be working to their highest level of potential, just like the general population. Why is this good? Other than for moral reasons, less reliance on government subsidies, more discretionary income, we'll spend more money --

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Denise, you have to wrap, you're out of time.

**MS. CARACAPPA:**

Yeah, I'm wrapping it up.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

You're out of time.

**MS. CARACAPPA:**

And, basically, studies have shown that people -- diverse workforces are basically more productive and profitable. So I think that we really need to address this issue, and I've made overtures to Mr. Levy and to my Legislator already. And I think we should just make whatever we have better, so everybody in our community can really be financially viable and have a better life. And that's about it. Thank you.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Thank you.

*(Applause)*

Greg Fischer.

**MR. FISCHER:**

Good evening. I just wanted to bring up a quick point on how policy can have a large effect on the cost of operations of the County, as you well know. The policy that has been changed in recent years has been on arrest policy. The discretion we've given to police has been removed from them. So we've gone from pro arrest policies to almost mandatory arrest policies, which means we're starting to arrest a lot of people that shouldn't be arrested.

Now, if we start to figure out the cost per arrest, it's actually huge. You've got a lot of court officers involved, you've got a lot of plant equipment involved, you've got a lot of transportation involved. We need to start to turn some of the discretion back to the police officers, so that the arrests are not excessive as they are.

I have been involved in several cases recently, witnessing arrests. One example would be in the Courthouse in the Family Court. And there was a woman that asked for protection from the court officers, because she was certain her ex was going to set her up and have her arrested falsely. Well, sure enough, that actually happened and the court officers laughed, ha, ha, ha, it's a safe space, we're not going to arrest this guy. So what she did -- what that ex did instead was run to the Detectives who executed a mandatory arrest. Now, here's a woman sitting tonight in jail in Riverhead, at taxpayer dollars, and the costs have just started. So this is a real problem, it's happening a lot, and we need to start to actually allow police officers to do

their job, not have mandatory arrest by policy, which is now going to pad the number of court officers, police officers, a host of forensics, drug counselors, you name it. It's going to pad the system with bodies, not just now, not just today, these arrests happening today, but for years to come in the form of pensions and other costs. So we have cascading costs, huge costs as a result of poor policy, and that policy, that mandatory arrest policy needs to be fixed, and some of the discretion needs to be returned back to the police officers. Thank you.

*(Applause)*

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Cheryl Felice.

**MR. FISCHER:**

One more thing. I'm now publishing a newspaper called Political Patriot, and, as far as we know, it's the only Suffolk County-wide newspaper, and it will be a weekly. It will take the place of Suffolk Life.

**MS. FELICE:**

Good evening, Presiding Officer, Members of the Legislature. My name is Cheryl Felice. I am the President of the largest independent union in Suffolk County, the Association of Municipal Employees.

*(Applause)*

I came here tonight, as we do every year, to listen to what the County Executive has to tell us about the state of our County. And, as the Union Leader, I could talk about a number of things. I could talk about John J. Foley and the facility, and the fine workers and residents that are there. I could talk about Social Services and how they're doing more with less each and every day, giving services to those who are in need. I could talk about the stage that's being set for negotiations, and the demands that are being made before we even get to the table. But what I'd like to speak to you about is how history repeats itself. And in looking at one of the AME newsletters from 12 years ago, I'd like to read to you a letter that was sent to us from a local Legislator, and it starts out by saying:

"The hardworking and under-appreciated members of the Suffolk County workforce are often in the newspapers and at times surrounding contract negotiations. Unfortunately, there are too few articles written about the work you provide on behalf of Suffolk County residents which improves our quality of life on a day-to-day basis.

There have been countless times when, at 4 o'clock on a Friday afternoon, a person walks into a Legislative office hungry and homeless, looking for some assistance to keep them fed and sheltered over the weekend. Immediately, the folks at the Social Service Hotline spring into action. On another occasion, a constituent is furious that a home contractor left in the middle of a job after taking all of the money. After weeks of haggling with the contractor, the individual calls his or her Legislator, who knows to call the Office of Consumer Affairs. The investigator tracks down the contractor, levies a fine, and helps compensate the aggrieved homeowner through the Suffolk County Home Contractor Restitution Fund. In another instance, a severe winter storm imposed havoc on a residential County road. A crew from Public Works is there to promptly repair the damage. And still another matter, scores of residents are complaining that an intolerable number of mosquitoes are on the shore. One quick call to Vector Control and the truck is spraying the area.

These are just a few of the examples of the exceptional efforts given by our County workforce on a daily basis. There are so many employees in so many other departments who cannot be mentioned here due to the limited space. So many have come in the clutches for our constituents. The quality of life for thousands of residents are in good hands, thanks to the teamwork and compassion of the unsung heroes of County government, our workforce. Even though you may not hear it as much as you should, please know that your efforts are noted and appreciated. Sincerely, Steve Levy, Suffolk

County Legislator, October 1997."

***(Applause and Standing Ovation)***

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Thank you very much. I don't have any other cards. Is there anyone else in the audience that would like to address us? I can't see. You'd have to wave your hand if you want to address us.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:**

We have a speaker.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Okay. Come on down. Come on down. Please identify yourself.

**MR. MASTANDO:**

Peter Mastando. I work for John J. Foley.

**LEG. LOSQUADRO:**

Pull the microphone up a little.

**MR. MASTANDO:**

Peter Mastando. I work at John J. Foley Nursing Facility. And I want to wish our newly elected President, Mr. Barack Obama, good speed and good luck in the new task he's got for four years to build the United States of America. We have to build from the bottom up. He's fixing it from the top down. Keep our sick, weak people in the nursing home with care. They need help, we can't just throw them out. Where's our stimulus? Don't we get any in Suffolk County? We gave it to the automobile industry, we gave it to the banks. I think the sick need it also. Thank you.

***(Applause)***

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Thank you. Again, is there anyone else out there that would like to address us? Okay.

**MS. MURDOCK:**

Good evening. I'm Sonia Murdock, and I'm the Executive Director of the Postpartum Resource Center of New York. I am thankful for this opportunity to speak before the Suffolk County Legislature to share with you something very important that may save a Long Islander's life. I'm speaking up about perinatal mood disorders, including depression and anxiety during pregnancy, postpartum depression, and postpartum psychosis. This is a societal issue that needs to be continually addressed by the whole community. I know from 12 years of experience in serving the Suffolk County community in this field.

I care, because I supported my sister through postpartum psychosis and severe postpartum depression, which led me to cofound the Postpartum Resource Center of New York, so no other families would suffer like we did. We are the organization within Suffolk County and New York who is solely addressing perinatal mood disorders. We have been honored by Postpartum Support International as a model perinatal depression parent support network for the United States and worldwide in helping women and families get to the help they need.

There are three key points for everyone to know, everyone here, it's very important. Number one, perinatal mood disorders are the number one medical complication related to childbearing. In the County of Suffolk -- in the community of Suffolk County, at least 4,000 families and their loved ones, and all of us, including the medical community and Long Island employers, need to be caring about this illness. It is a high priority public health concern.

Number two, this is a serious medical condition that may have life-threatening consequences, so it is something everyone needs to be aware of. We are seeking to prevent further child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, substance abuse, disability, unemployment, homicide, suicide, and the loss of children through infanticide and filicide.

Number three, and lastly, the good news is that perinatal mood disorders are treatable. We need help with making sure the community and families have the most up-to-date information, and that treatment and support services are available.

I thank you for your past support, and I encourage you to continue to support the work of the Postpartum Resource Center of New York, as well as our collaborative efforts with the Suffolk Perinatal Coalitions, Perinatal Mood Disorders Task Force, and the Suffolk County Executive Office of Women's Services. When it comes to addressing perinatal mood disorders, I am asking for the proactive help of each Legislator here, so we may continue to save lives in Suffolk County and continue to build a healthy community. Thank you very much for your time.

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Thank you very much.

**MS. MURDOCK:**

Thank you.

*(Applause)*

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Is there anyone else who would like to speak? Anyone else? No? I don't see anybody waving their hand, so what we're going to do is call a short recess. I would ask the Legislators to be back on the stage at ten minutes to seven for the County Executive's address. We stand recessed.

***[THE MEETING WAS RECESSED AT 6:20 P.M. AND RESUMED AT 6:53 P.M.]***

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Okay. Mr. Clerk, would you call the roll? Would everybody please take their seats.

**(Roll Called by Mr. Laube, Clerk)**

**LEG. ROMAINE:**

Present.

**LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:**

Present.

**LEG. BROWNING:**

Present.

**LEG. BEEDENBENDER:**

Here.

**LEG. LOSQUADRO:**

Present.

**LEG. EDDINGTON:**

Here.

**LEG. MONTANO:**

Here.

**LEG. ALDEN:**

Here.

**LEG. BARRAGA:**

Here.

**LEG. KENNEDY:**

Here.

**LEG. NOWICK:**

(Not Present)

**LEG. HORSLEY:**

Here.

**LEG. GREGORY:**

Here.

**LEG. STERN:**

(Not Present)

**LEG. D'AMARO:**

(Not Present)

**LEG. COOPER:**

Here.

**D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:**

(Not Present)

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Here.

**MR. LAUBE:**

Fifteen. (Not Present at Roll Call: Legs. Nowick, Stern, D'Amaro and Viloría-Fisher)

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Okay. I'm going to ask everyone to quiet down again. It's my pleasure to introduce our host. This is Five Towns College, and David Cohen, the Provost of this fine school, is going to welcome us. Please, Mr. Cohen.

***(Applause)***

**MR. COHEN:**

Thank you very much. Ladies and Gentlemen, as was just announced, my name is David Cohen, and I'm the Vice President and Provost of Five Towns College, and it is my pleasure to welcome you to our Dix Hills Campus this evening.

Five Towns College serves the course of Music, Media, the Performing Arts and Teacher Education. And while our students hail from across the United States, the fifteen hundred men and women who comprise our faculty, staff and student body represent every community and every school district here in Suffolk County.

In 1992, when Five Towns College relocated to the Town of Huntington in the midst of an earlier economic downturn, it was Supervisor Frank P. Petrone who helped the College to succeed. Because

of his unyielding efforts on our behalf as an academic community, it is always my great honor to introduce him when we are fortunate to have him here on campus.

Under the thirteen-year leadership of Frank Petrone, the Town of Huntington has experienced a complete fiscal recovery. His bold stewardship has raised the bond rating of our Town from one of the lowest on Long Island to one of the highest. His foresight and vision has positioned Huntington well in the current economic climate. In addition, Frank Petrone has implemented numerous initiatives to enhance the quality of life for Huntington residents.

A champion of the environment, he sponsored both the historic 1998 Open Space Bond Act and the 2003 Open Space Park Improvement Bond Act. These initiatives protect our natural heritage and enhance our recreational facilities.

I could go on and on telling you about our Town Supervisor. Suffice it to say, that from initiatives to expand activities for our senior citizens and children to supporting legislation to enhance child care for Huntington's working families, Supervisor Frank Petrone has made Huntington a great place to live.

As Chief Academic Officer, I would also be remiss if I didn't mention that because of all he has done, Frank Petrone is the recipient of an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from the faculty here at Five Towns College. Ladies and Gentlemen, now you know why I ask that you join with me by giving a warm welcome to the Supervisor of the Town of Huntington, the Honorable Frank Petrone.

***(Applause)***

**SUPERVISOR PETRONE:**

Thank you, David. Too bad we're not on the air, but what can I say? Members of the esteemed Legislature, Ladies and Gentlemen who are here for this wonderful, wonderful evening where we're going to hear our County Executive, it really is my pleasure as Supervisor to welcome you to this, the County Address of the State of our County by our esteemed County Executive Steve Levy.

Tonight you're here at Five Towns College. David has talked about the College, he's mentioned a few things to you, but you can only read the papers and watch the media and you'll know that we have a thriving College here in this Town that really does great things within the community, so I want to thank David for those kind remarks.

Huntington is really pleased to host this address. As Supervisor, I'm proud of the close relationship that we have with this great Legislature and with our County Executive. Our Town and County partnership has protected important tracts of farmland and open space that, yes, still exist in the west end of Suffolk. We have worked together to revitalize communities and provide better housing opportunities for all. And I'm very, very proud of the fact, with the County Executive's guidance and support, our local economy will receive a tremendous boost when the World Headquarters for Canon is built here, right in the Town of Huntington.

And how fortunate the people of Suffolk are to have a County Executive who has shown great fiscal responsibility since he first took office in 2003. Certainly, he has never lost touch with the ideals and beliefs of the people we all are elected to represent. Steve Levy, of course, is that special type of person. Each of you have a different type of relationship with him. Many people are not too happy sometimes in terms of what he has to do fiscally, but, certainly, his heart is with the people, his heart is with this Legislature, his heart is with his County, other elected officials that he works so diligently with. Steve Levy has proven to be a tremendous leader for this County, for Long Island, and has moved forward with so many, so many innovative programs. Fiscal responsibility is important, but also is the environment and open space, and he certainly, certainly towered much of that over the years that he has been in office.

I'd be remiss if we didn't recall those days when he was on the Legislature himself, and there, too,

felt much of the anxiety when budget time came. I would also be remiss if we didn't look at the days that he was in the Assembly, where there he had to deal with budgets, and we know what is happening today in New York State and we know what that budget's about. Steve Levy has taken on these challenges and taken them on real well. Steve Levy is someone who certainly is respected in Suffolk County and, as I said, on Long Island, and we know that he will solve many, many of the problems that are coming forth behind us and in front of us.

I, as an elected official, enjoy a good relationship, as I mentioned, with him and the County Legislature. I know how difficult it is to balance a budget, I know how difficult it is to satisfy a given community at any given time, and I also know how difficult it is to do the right thing, but we know we have a County Executive who does that. He may not be so popular with many of those decisions, but he certainly can put his head on the pillow at night and know that he's attempted to do what is right for all the people in this wonderful, great County that we live in.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure and honor to introduce to you the County Executive of the County of Suffolk, the Honorable Steve Levy.

***(Applause)***

**COUNTY EXECUTIVE LEVY:**

Good evening. Thank you all. Thank you so much. Thank you, Stanley, and David Cohen, and the staff here at Five Towns College for hosting us tonight in the Town of Huntington. And thank you, Supervisor Frank Petrone, for your warm introduction. I look forward to our continued work together. Also, I extend my thanks to News 12 for televising this speech tonight.

Presiding Officer Lindsay, Members of the Legislature, tonight I deliver this State of the County in an economic climate not seen on Long Island in the last 80 years. Our national economy is as weak as it has been since The Great Depression. The State of New York is awash in deficits that dwarf even those experienced after the collapse of the Twin Towers.

The challenges we face here in Suffolk County are extraordinary. Weathering the storm ahead will take enormous resolve. These are the days when we are put to the test.

All of the laudable goals that we harbor as officials will hinge on whether or not we can overcome the enormous fiscal challenges ahead. Our desire to increase bus service, to buy state-of-the-art digital mammography equipment, and to improve our environment will be exceedingly difficult if we don't even have enough money to meet the core services of County government.

How large is this problem? Consider this. The Federal Government is printing almost a trillion dollars to save the financial and auto industries. The Governor of New York presented a budget which cuts aid to schools and hospitals, while contract agencies that assist the poor may be shuttered. Raises for State employees may be rescinded, and thousands possibly laid off. California has asked the Federal Government for a bailout just to meet its payroll. The Mayor of New York cancelled the hiring of a thousand new police officers, and has talked about laying off over 3,000 employees.

The slowdown in the national economy impacts Suffolk County as well. We lost millions in State aid last year and we'll lose millions again this year. People here are losing their jobs, their 401K's, and their ability to keep their homes. Taxpayers have been unable to pay over 30 million dollars in property taxes due to Suffolk County. That's 30 million dollars we do not have to meet our payroll to keep our health centers open. But, as painful as this loss in property tax collection is, we are impacted far greater by the steep drop off in sales tax collection. Sales taxes account for over a billion dollars in our budget. Consequently, a mere hiccup in the economy can have a significant impact.

In the good old days when the economy was booming, it was not unusual to see sales taxes

increasing by six, eight or nine percent annually. But, in 2008, sales tax collections actually dropped from the previous year for the first time in almost 20 years. To understand how deleterious this is on our ability to govern, realize that every one percent in sales tax growth equates to approximately 11 million dollars in revenue to our budget. The nine percent increases of the 1990's meant roughly a hundred million dollars in extra money for the following year's budget. That kind of sales tax growth helped offset the dramatic yearly rise in healthcare, energy, Medicaid and preschool handicapped services. In 2009, these costs will continue to increase rapidly. And with the slow economy, we can expect to see an increase in people utilizing our Social Services. Yet, our sales tax revenues will probably decline again.

Sales tax collected in December showed a twenty percent decrease in revenues over of the same month in 2007. This is a frightening statistic. The sound of the alarm is out to anyone still questioning whether or not we are in uncharted budgetary waters.

We have shown in the past, when faced with crisis, we unite in a bipartisan fashion to do what has to be done to protect our taxpayers and preserve services that are so needed by the public. That coordination, cooperation and sense of purpose must be stronger than ever.

***(Applause)***

We can weather this storm only by preparing right now, only if we are united, and only if we are willing to make the tough decisions that have to be made.

***(Applause)***

Decisions that might have been considered too controversial a year ago will have to actually be implemented this year if we want to make our payroll, preserve our core services, and prevent a major tax shock to the people we serve.

Albert Einstein once said, "In the middle of every difficulty lies opportunity." Often we hit a fork in the road that forces us to choose one of two directions. One direction is that of short-term gratification. It allows one to defer tough decisions, to live for the moment, to buy on credit, and to indulge in anything that feels good. But at some point it catches up to you, just like a Bernard Madoff Ponzi scheme, and it all crashes down. That's why proper budgeting counts.

Mr. Madoff promised his investors the moon. They got instant gratification. All the more responsible brokers couldn't compete with guaranteed double-digit returns. They might have lost some business in the short-term, but when the market collapsed, those companies that abided by basic common sense accounting principals were left standing, while those espousing the quick fix left behind a trail of financial devastation.

Likewise, it is easy for elected officials to say yes to everything. Those who say no sometimes get the reputation of being the grinch, the scrooge, or simply cold-hearted. In fact, it's just the opposite. The official who says yes to everything is leading people off the same cliff that Mr. Madoff did. The prudent investment companies who stayed true to basic fundamentals in the long run were the compassionate ones. The yes-men, such as the Madoffs, were the enablers that lost everything for the investors who placed their trust in them.

Over the last few years, I have been warning about a dangerous pattern that has developed. Some officials have continued to resist the need to cut anything and have become incapable of saying no to any additional spending. We must follow the basic rule of economics. You cannot increase spending if you can't pay for it.

***(Applause)***

We can't add more police, restore museums, and add hundreds of contract agencies to the budget

without a viable source of revenue to pay for them. Coming up with phantom revenues won't do. This is what creates deficits. This is what creates structural imbalance. This is what creates a house of cards that will eventually fall. Not on my watch.

***(Applause)***

We can't do it all, but we can continue in our quest to maximize efficiency and eliminate waste. Indeed, it was these efficiencies and smart government principals that together we implemented last year to help us in Suffolk County avoid the draconian cuts or the massive tax increases that were resorted to by many jurisdictions around the nation. We accomplished this by tackling the problem head on early in the year. While some jurisdictions waited until the late summer to address the economic slow down, we took action in February and created a cost-saving package that saved our budget, saved our services, and saved our taxpayers.

***(Applause)***

I want to thank the group of bipartisan Legislators who worked with me on this process last year. Now, think about it. We started the year with 150 million dollar shortfall, yet because of our proactive approach, we ended the year with services intact and a budget presented to this Legislature that included no tax increases for 2009.

***(Applause)***

This was the fifth consecutive year of no General Fund tax increases.

***(Applause)***

We shrunk the size of government, not through layoffs, but with a sensible Early Retirement Program. We restricted hiring, despite enormous pressure from special interests to fill every possible position, and we eliminated numerous car purchases. In a rare feat in government, I presented a 2009 budget that actually cut spending from 2008. And while so many other governments had their bond ratings lowered, we in Suffolk received yet another increase to the highest level in our history.

***(Applause)***

Now, this Fall, when some jurisdictions were issuing bonds at six-and-one-half percent interest, we were able to attract an outstanding zero-point-eight percent interest rate on our short-term notes. That's real savings to our taxpayers.

***(Applause)***

You know, to me it doesn't make sense to keep doing the same old thing simply because that's the way they've always been done. You should do what makes sense and change what doesn't make sense. In this financial climate, we no longer have the luxury of clinging to the status quo. We needed then, as we need today, to take bold action to save our taxpayers and our services.

We said privatize the management of Suffolk's Health Insurance Agency. Naysayers claim the action would cripple delivery of healthcare services. The result, the privatized plan provided us with an additional three-and-a-half million dollars annually that we can apply toward enhancing healthcare for the poor. We said Suffolk Police shouldn't patrol State-owned highways. Naysayers claim, "You can't change that, public safety would be threatened." The result? Over fifty officers were redeployed to enhance our neighborhood protection, and the Deputy Sheriffs have stepped in to do a magnificent job, as they have done on the East End for many, many years. And this --

***(Applause)***

They deserve it. And, as you know, that redeployment helped alleviate the need to spend 8 million dollars for new officers.

We said we could lower medical costs by requiring the use of generic prescriptions. Naysayers claimed our employees' health would suffer. The result? Employees are still getting the medications they need, and we are saving 12 million dollars a year. Now, some of these initiatives were indeed controversial, but make no mistake, had we not exhibited the leadership in making these necessary changes, County taxes would have soared or core services would have been severely cut. These actions gave us the cushion we needed to help offset the losses in this sluggish economy.

Now, the day after we finalized our 2009 budget we began preparing for 2010. Every new year requires that we come up with 35 million dollars in extra revenue just to pay for contractual salary increases, 10 million in pension costs, 8 million in new Medicaid costs, and the list goes on and on. In total, it's over 150 million dollars in new money that we will have to find just to keep the same level of services intact. That daunting fact, combined with the bleak sales tax picture and the possibility of continued State cuts is why two weeks into the year I ordered my Budget Office to set aside 10% of all non-mandated expenditures in every department. This money will be held in reserve as we continue to monitor the economic picture.

We are looking at every corner of the budget for ways to provide services and save money at the same time. That is why I brought to the forefront the millions of dollars in losses we experienced each year with our County-owned nursing home. Now, New York State is encouraging counties to get out of the nursing home business, and for 20 years County Executives have been urging the County to do the same. And right now, seven counties in New York are considering sale or closure. Now, naysayers claim patients will be kicked out onto the street. I say it's time to debunk the myths and embrace the facts. Every patient in his or her bed can remain there after privatization. The County can save 10 to 15 million dollars a year, and that money will soon be desperately needed to prevent the closure of our health centers or the elimination of day care programs.

Yes, in the 1880's the nursing home was built for those with no other place to go, but back then there was no such thing as a private nursing home or Medicaid. Today there are over 40 licensed private nursing homes in Suffolk that can provide the same type of services as our public facility, but at a cost that's much more affordable.

It's easy to preserve the status quo, even if it's not working well. It's hard to reform, to call for change. Let's not put off the difficult decisions, because ultimately no one benefits from that.

Now, one type of smart government -- that type of smart government not only saved our taxpayers millions, but actually enhanced services. Together, we ran a government that was the recipient of over 30 awards from the National Association of Counties.

Our Child Support Collection Bureau continues to collect more money from delinquent spouses than any county in the State outside of New York City.

***(Applause)***

Our new Point of Delivery Service Program has reduced patient waiting time by 23 minutes, and increased the number of patients served at our health center in Shirley by 8 1/2%.

Our new Preventive Medicine Program is becoming a model for other departments throughout the State. Our healthcare providers travel into the community to care for the underserved, and prenatal deaths in minority communities were reduced significantly, and asthma-related emergency room visits declined by 75%.

***(Applause)***

Our "Butts Out" Program continues to combat teenage smoking, and our award-winning AIDS Prevention Program has illustrated that one of the most effective educational tools is to have older students counsel their younger peers under professional supervision.

There are further measures we can take to both enhance healthcare for our residents, while also providing us with long-term savings. I will soon be submitting legislation to create an electronic medical records system for our Health Department. Competition within the field has brought the cost of this program down 70% over the last four years. This system can help avoid medical error, which remarkably is the eighth leading cause of death in the United States. A patient's entire medical history can be available to healthcare practitioners at the click of a button. Chicken-scratch prescriptions will no longer be misread, and important medical conditions will not be overlooked. Overall liability to the County will be significantly reduced, and ultimately both lives and taxpayer dollars will be saved with this innovation.

And when it comes to prevention, the best way to start is right in our own homes. Experts tell us that there are everyday steps we can take to avert cancer risks, some as simple as ridding the cabinet under the kitchen sink of hazardous products. I am, therefore, charging my Cancer Awareness Task Force with the duty of developing a comprehensive educational program as to what families can do to lessen cancer risks. Information related to sun exposure, one's diet, and toxins in the environment and in our homes will all be part of the program that will be readily available to all. Now we can further enhance the health of our children by ensuring their nutritional needs are met. No child in Suffolk County should go hungry because of a lack of financial resources at home.

***(Applause)***

The federal free school lunch program has been a major success since it was established decades ago. However, not every eligible student is enrolled in the program.

A successful model we implemented with the Sachem Schools helped improve enrollment in the free lunch program. If 30 children alone in Sachem could be helped, think of how many others could be ensured of proper nourishment County-wide. I am, therefore, directing my Commissioner of Social Services to expand our program into other districts. This is a program that has no cost to the County, yet yields great results for our kids.

***(Applause)***

The bottom line is this. The healthier we are, the less expensive will be our health care costs. That pertains not just to our personal healthcare expenses, but those borne by the taxpayer as well. That is why it makes sense financially to try to keep our County employees as healthy as possible.

Therefore, I will be creating a pilot program for County employees called SHIP SHAPE that would improve their health and help control medical, hospitalization, and prescription drugs. The way to change behavior is through incentives. We will bring up five hundred employees into the program and actually pay employees up to \$500 if they are able to increase their health, to lower their cholesterol, their blood pressure, or bring their weight to a medically acceptable level. It is very possible that at the end of the year-long program, a small investment may help us reap major dividends.

***(Applause)***

We have allowed all residents to buy prescriptions through our large-volume purchases at the County, saving some individuals over twelve hundred dollars a year. To date, over 72,000 prescriptions have been filled through our SCRIPTS Program, which, by the way, costs nothing to join and has no age limits. Creating a larger pool of purchases not only helped private individuals,

but also gave us in the County more leverage in negotiating with our vendor, thereby saving taxpayers over one million dollars.

***(Applause)***

We embarked upon a ten-year plan to end homelessness and brought over fifty service agencies to one setting to serve over five hundred homeless individuals, with everything from haircuts, to job counseling, to health screenings. For many it was the first checkup in decades, and for three, who were diagnosed with severe conditions, it might have been lifesaving.

Another way we can care for those in need will be through a not-for-profit program called Rock and Wrap It, where we will coordinate with hotels and universities to ensure that food, toiletries, and other surplus items do not go into the waste stream, but rather to agencies that help the less fortunate.

***(Applause)***

We now affirmatively reach out to our veterans returning from service overseas. We no longer wait for the veterans to contact us, we contact them. We help them find jobs, earn a degree, obtain loans for housing, and receive needed healthcare, especially in dealing with Post Traumatic Stress. We're elated that several returning veterans have found jobs from the Employment Fair we hosted last September. Our veterans are being helped even further by the East End veterans' satellite clinic we're building in Riverhead. And this Tuesday, the Legislature can pass a bill I presented that will give preference in affordable housing programs to our veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

***(Applause)***

Our World War II veterans were greeted with the G.I. Bill. Our Vietnam veterans were basically ignored. Never again. Not in Suffolk County.

***(Applause)***

We owe our freedom to our brave servicemen and women, and we're fortunate to have here tonight Lieutenant Louis DelliPizzi, Bravo Company Commander from the Fighting 69th and his wife, Beth, who is President of the Fighting 69th's Family Readiness Group, and Purple Heart recipient, Specialist Sheamus Burns. I ask you to join me in welcoming home all the brave men and women of that unit.

***(Applause and Standing Ovation)***

To our friends at News 12, if we go over it was all for a good cause. I also ask that we remember the sacrifices of military families in Suffolk County, most especially those who have lost a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, a parent, a spouse, or a loved one, in protecting our nation.

Our many successes are not limited to these enhanced efficiencies in the delivery of services. We can also be very proud of how we have protected our public's precious environment. This County has taken the lead nationwide in environmental protection and preservation.

When Connecticut sought to dump its metallic dredge spoils in the Sound, we said no and stopped it. When Broadwater sought to industrialize our Sound, we rose up together in bipartisan fashion and stopped it.

We continue to invest extensively in stormwater remediation. And we're also committed to cleaning our waterways through old fashioned, natural means. Revitalizing our once vibrant shellfish population provides us with the most basic way to filter out pollutants within our bays. Shellfish are more than just a tasty treat. Clams and scallops act as natural filtering devices in our bays.

There was a time only three decades ago when our County produced one quarter of the nation's scallops and one half of all of its clams. That industry was decimated by pollutants. While others accepted this demise as inevitable, we said we would embark on the most ambitious program in the nation's history to restore our vibrant shellfishing industry to our County. With over two million dollars invested through the Water Quality Protection Program, we seeded three-and-a-half million scallops and three million clams in our waterways. The result? Recent reports show a 3,000 percent increase in the scallop population, and a 4,000 percent increase in young clams.

***(Applause)***

You may wonder, if we're so strapped financially, how can we continue to move forward with these programs. Well, the programs are not funded by property taxes, but rather from the Quarter Cent Sales Tax Program that is segregated strictly for environmental improvements. That's the same program that reserves millions for our open space purchases.

Over the last five years, we have preserved land totaling over six-and-a-half times the size of Central Park and get this, over 60 farms.

***(Applause)***

I'll bet there are viewers who didn't know we had 60 farms in total in Suffolk County. The Farmland Program is 33 years old, but more than one quarter of all the farms preserved over that time have been in just the last five years.

These investments have long-term economic and ecological benefits as does our unprecedented investment in alternative energies. As early as 2005, this county was being recognized as a leader in going green. We were the first in New York State to adopt the Sierra Club's standards for clean counties. We were the first to adopt the highest standards for green building construction. And this spring we will host the first County level electronic waste recycling drop off day.

We were the first county to offer a sales tax break on the purchase and installation of solar equipment. We are making our rooftops and surplus properties available to private companies seeking to harness the sun's power. And with legislation I will soon submit, we will seek to be the first county in New York, and possibly in the United States, to require that every new County building over 10,000 square feet be fitted with solar panels.

***(Applause)***

We're also among the leaders in converting to hybrid and alternative energy vehicles, and in reducing particulates from our bus fleet by over 85%.

We took the lead in retrofitting our County buildings with energy conservation projects. This program not only put people to work, but reduced our energy consumption and carbon emissions. Our program to reduce the public use of fertilizers in the ecosystem is now in effect and we remain on track to reduce 75% of pesticides used by the County over the next decade.

***(Applause)***

Now, our environment can be improved even further by expanding mass transit, something long overdue. But if we want to expand further, the Federal and State Governments must stop treating Suffolk as a second-class county when it comes to transportation aid. We are geographically three times the size of Nassau and twice as big as nearby Westchester. Yet, while Nassau receives \$58 million in subsidies and Westchester receives 48 million dollars, Suffolk County languishes far behind, receiving only 22 and a half million dollars to run a transportation program.

Now, some say we don't receive as much funding because our system is not as elaborate. It's just the opposite. We're not as elaborate because we don't receive the same type of funding.

***(Applause)***

So I ask you to join me as we ask our friends in the State Government to give us a deservedly bigger slice of the pie for expanding our bus system. Let us work together to implement Sunday bus service and provide longer hours with more routes to accommodate our growing population.

***(Applause)***

Now, both our environment and economy are also helped if we continue our work toward alleviating traffic congestion. The ambitious road expansion projects of the last year have illustrated the importance of a locality priming the pump.

It is important that we continue to hold the line on taxes and control spending in our Operating Budget. In the Capital Budget, however, we float bonds for long-term projects, such as road and sewer expansion. In these times of economic stagnation, it is not contradictory to say that we should hold the line on the Operating Budget, which directly impacts property taxes, and yet expedite as many road and sewer expansion projects as we can, to put people to work and prime the pump. These investments reap significant returns.

***(Applause)***

Just look at what we've done so far. This past spring I cut the ribbon to open the new eastbound lane on County Road 39, the gateway to the Hamptons. We extended and improved Nicolls Road at the Community College, alleviating major gridlock there. We did the same at the intersections at North Ocean Avenue and the Long Island Expressway, and County Road 111, which had been overrun by Friday and Sunday night East End traffic.

In the coming year we will see even more expansion, including Montauk Highway in Mastic, Portion Road in Farmingville, Bay Shore Road in Islip, Pinelawn Road in Babylon, and a new lane on County Road 58 in Riverhead -- our gateway to the North Fork.

***(Applause)***

This past year we began expansion of the Southwest Sewer District to accommodate economic growth in western Suffolk. We're expanding the Hauppauge District to add nearly 250 properties to one of the most thriving economic centers in our County. We expanded the sewer system in Port Jefferson, and in the upcoming year, we will seek Federal funding to expand or create sewers in Kings Park, in Yaphank, at Stony Brook University and in Rocky Point, just to name a few.

We will continue to prime the pump in our economy by creating centers of business growth. Our innovative biotech growth industry plan helped 67 biotech companies here in Suffolk apply for research and development grants in the Federal Government. And as Supervisor Petrone said in his introduction, we look forward to cutting the ribbon on the Canon world headquarters right here in the Town of Huntington, which will provide 2,000 high paying jobs for Long Islanders.

***(Applause)***

Now, last week we proposed a multi-million dollar investment plan to further revitalize the heart of downtown Patchogue with a hotel, apartments, and a center square replacing the abandoned Swezey's Department Store. And next month, we will select a developer of our planned destination center in Yaphank. These investments will reap both economic and social returns.

Late last year we chose Rechler Equities to redevelop the Hampton Business and Technology Park in Westhampton. This industrial park will concentrate in the areas of alternative energy development, high tech industries, and film and digital media production and provide six to seven hundred high paying career jobs.

***(Applause)***

You know, so many of our biggest stars live and vacation on Suffolk's East End. Why not encourage them to work out here as well? That can generate a lot of money for our local economy. The film and television industry is also aided here by the 30% tax credit we obtained from the State, the same tax credit enjoyed by New York City, making us more competitive. Additionally, I will be unveiling a program to work with local colleges, such as Five Towns right here, to provide our local students with specialized training needed for film and television production jobs.

The economy has hit our region hard. When the county takes a home for failure to pay taxes, the land is ultimately auctioned off. Often those purchasing these homes have no plans to plant roots in the community. As a result, crime, transiency and a lack of upkeep can begin to plague a neighborhood.

Therefore, I will partner with community leaders in administering our new Community Pride Program. This program will help us maximize Federal funds available to recycle foreclosures into the homes for young families that will take root in the community. We will also expand to other areas the success we've had in North Bellport taking selected properties off the auction rolls and instead dedicating them toward a community vision. This program will keep properties away from the speculators, and will instead use them for home ownership, parks, day care and youth activities that help enhance the sense of neighborhood.

***(Applause)***

Our neighborhoods are very desirable, in part because Suffolk is one of the safest suburban counties in the nation.

Our Police Officers are the quintessential professionals who are extremely dedicated and whose good work has helped make this such a safe place to raise our children. A great department was made even better over the last several years by our innovations and reforms. We reversed the old philosophy that said the only way to bring crime down was to bring taxes up.

Proponents of the status quo said we must constantly increase the size of the department regardless of the cost. We said the problem was not a lack of personnel, it was that too many officers were relegated to desks or white and blue collar jobs, such as working on computers, personnel or auto repair. Civilians can do the job cheaper and so we hired them to do so. That freed up officers to be redeployed to our street patrol where we need them most. The result? While we may not have as many Police Officers on the payroll today as we did five years ago, the important point is that we have 140 more officers on our street patrol today than we did at that time.

***(Applause)***

Now, what does this mean? It means that we've been able to save money and simultaneously bring crime down by a healthy 6% over this time, and violent crime has been reduced by 10% over that period.

Still, there is a knee-jerk temptation to latch on to that discredited philosophy that spending more and more money is the only way to maintain levels of safety. This is perhaps the worst time to adopt such thinking. Our economy is in turmoil. We cannot be taxing people out of their homes. We must resist the pressure from special interest groups and do what is best for the people of this County.

***(Applause)***

We don't save taxpayers money through platitudes. We save them money by making tough decisions. Let's not go backwards.

While we're making our community safer, we're also making our department more responsive to our community's needs. In an effort to be as sensitive as possible to our minority communities, we implemented a new civilian complaint policy, which closely tracks complaints against officers to identify patterns early on. This process has helped reduce civilian complaints by over 50% over the last two years.

***(Applause)***

We're also on our way toward greater diversity in the department, not by creating quotas or watering down standards, but by being more aggressive in recruiting more minorities to take our exam. In our most recent exam we doubled the number of minorities who qualified in the top three tiers.

***(Applause)***

More diversity in the pool will mean a Police Department that looks more like the people we serve.

Our emergency response system provides a level of professional service second to none. The most recent example of that, a story that gained national recognition, is the one of Christine Springer, one of our Medical Services Dispatchers who talked an expectant mother in early labor through a successful breach delivery over the phone. Christine's quick, professional and calm response saved a life and made us all in Suffolk County government very, very proud. I ask you all to recognize Christine Springer who's here with us today, and incidentally due herself in a few weeks. Christine, will you stand?

***(Applause and Standing Ovation)***

It took her a while to get up there I noticed. Good luck.

Our 911 emergency system now answers 95% of all calls in under ten seconds, far better than the national standard. Still, the best way to keep these lines from being clogged up is to distinguish those calls that are not emergencies. Thanks to our new 852-COPS line, that is now being done.

So when there's a true emergency, call 911. But when it's a nonemergency, such as a complaint about a barking dog, that's when you call 852-COPS.

In these dire financial times, we will be asking for sacrifice from all sectors. Folks in the private sector are hurting. Many are losing benefits, contributing more toward their health care, working longer, and far too many are losing their jobs. The public sector cannot be out of touch with our friends and families in the private sector.

People in the private sector do not comprehend the concept of storing up sick days to cash in upon retirement. In the private sector, sick days are for those who are truly sick. The system has become so out of whack in government that some retirees leave with a check in the hundreds of thousands of dollars for used time. While I know this cannot be changed without the give and take of negotiation, we have been successful in reforming the process in three of our recent contracts. Incoming employees in these bargaining units will no longer be able to cash out these exorbitant sick day bonuses. On the other hand, they will not be constrained by limited sick days if they're truly sick.

And while I cannot unilaterally undo previous contracts, we can change the system for new appointed employees, those not in the Civil Service system.

I am proposing four reforms for these appointed employees. One, salary step increases will be frozen in 2009 for all exempt employees. Two, new employees can no longer bank used sick days for a payout upon retirement. Three, those with other municipal service must accumulate ten years with the County, not the present 90 days before becoming eligible for health benefits upon retirement. And four, we will for the first time require incoming appointed, exempt employees to contribute a percentage toward health care benefits, as most in the private sector do.

While the short-term savings for these programs are modest, the message, tone and example that we set with these actions are enormous in the eyes of the people we serve.

Now, I began this speech saying that this is the most daunting fiscal crisis we've faced in some time. But let me conclude by sharing with you why I am confident that we shall persevere and come back as strong as ever.

Winston Churchill once noted "The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity; the optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty."

When we faced difficulties before, we bonded together, not as Democrats and Republicans, not as Executive and Legislators, but as residents of this great County, who share those same ideals as every family from Maine to California. The wonder of America is that we can achieve any goal we set our mind to, whether it's digging a canal connecting two oceans, putting a man on the moon, or creating an information superhighway. Americans have led because of our optimism, our innovative spirit, and our hope for a better tomorrow.

The best evidence that we will rebound is ingrained in our very own history. The dogged determination of our forefathers simply would not allow obstacles to stand in the way of progress. Early settlers weathered discomfort and disease in traveling the high seas and they persevered. They saw their crops wiped out in devastating winters and persevered. They fought a revolution and persevered. Americans survived a civil war that pitted brother against brother. And in the twentieth century, we fought two world wars and the threat of communism, and again, we persevered. We found ourselves in a deep depression in the 1930's but wound up as the world's superpower at the end of World War II. In the early '80's, we saw 17% interest rates and major unemployment, yet by the mid '80's we experienced an economic resurgence. In the early '90's we again were in serious economic downturn, yet by the end of the decade we were in the midst of the largest economic boon in our nation's history. And in 2001, we witnessed a crumbling of our Twin Towers, but not the crumbling of our resolve to rebuild and come back stronger than ever. Does anyone really believe that this crisis will do us in? No way, no how.

***(Applause)***

We are the proud residents of a great County and a great nation steeled by the work ethic and determination of earlier Americans. We have the solutions, we have the leadership, and we have the will to get the job done. So let's together -- Democrats and Republicans; labor and management; developer and environmentalist; all races and all creeds -- do what we as Americans do best. Let's roll up our sleeves and get to work.

Thank you all very much. God bless Suffolk County, God bless the United States of America. God bless you.

***(Applause and Standing Ovation)***

**P.O. LINDSAY:**

Okay. Thank you very much for your attention. This meeting is officially adjourned.

*[THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 7:57 P.M.]*