

SPECIAL MEETING
SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE
State-of-the-County
February 3, 2010

THE STATE-OF-THE-COUNTY WAS HELD AT THE
CHARLES B. WANG ASIAN-AMERICAN CENTER
STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY
STONY BROOK, NEW YORK

Minutes Taken By:

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Verbatim Transcript Prepared By:

Kimberly Castiglione - Legislative Secretary

(THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER AT 5:42 P.M.)

P.O. LINDSAY:

Welcome everybody to the special meeting of the Suffolk County Legislature for the purposes of hearing the State of the County Address by our County Executive. I would like the Clerk to call the roll please.

(Roll call by Ms. Ortiz - Chief Deputy Clerk)

LEG. ROMAINE:

Yes.

LEG. SCHNEIDERMAN:

Here.

LEG. BROWNING:

Here.

LEG. MURATORE:

Here.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

(Not Present)

LEG. EDDINGTON:

Here.

LEG. MONTANO:

(Not Present)

LEG. CILMI:

(Not Present)

LEG. BARRAGA:

Here.

LEG. KENNEDY:

(Not Present)

LEG. NOWICK:

Here.

LEG. HORSLEY:

(Not Present)

LEG. GREGORY:

Here.

LEG. STERN:

Here.

LEG. D'AMARO:

Here.

LEG. COOPER:

Here.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Here.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Here.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

Madam Clerk, present.

MS. ORTIZ:

Fifteen.

P.O. LINDSAY:

I would ask everybody to rise for a salute to the flag led by Legislator Cooper.

(Salutation)

As is the custom at all our meetings, I would ask that everybody remain standing for a moment of silence and keep in mind all of our men and women that are in harm's way that have given their life for this country.

(Moment of Silence Observed)

Thank you. The purpose of starting this meeting at 5:30 was to hear public comments and I have one card, Denise Caracappa. Denise, are you -- we can't see, we have lights in our eyes. Are you here, Denise.

I'm sure Denise will be right along and we'll wait for her. That's the only card I have. Is there anyone else in the audience that would like to speak? Oh, come on forward, Denise. Denise, we have along line of speakers here. I'm only kidding, you take your time.

MS. CARACAPPA:

You better be nice. I will see you at that beach party. Is it all right if I put this in here?

P.O. LINDSAY:

Go right ahead.

MS. CARACAPPA:

Okay. Sorry for the delay. My name is Denise Caracappa. I'll spell the last name; C-A-R-A-C-A-P-P-A.

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

Speak a little closer to the microphone, Ma'am.

MS. CARACAPPA:

Closer, okay. Thank you. Oh, it's dark over here; it's very hard to see.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Your time is going, so.

MS. CARACAPPA:

Okay. But I can't really see, so.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Why don't you take the mike, it's a portable mike. Sit underneath the light and then read your comments. Is that better, Denise? Can you see now?

MS. CARACAPPA:

Yeah, now I can see. I'm speaking on behalf of 200,000 plus disabled people that are living on Long Island, okay, and really they don't have any voice or power. And my passion has been from my brother, who is disabled, and they really want to be financially independent and progress and be part of the economic engine of Suffolk County.

I want to thank Legislator Steve Stern, who really has been helping me in this regard, and I hope that you will take on some of his passion and make some positive changes. So that's the main focus of my short speech which I'll stay within the three minutes.

Basically why should we do this? Well, President Obama has empowered Americans with disabilities, that's part of his mission, and he would like to see persons working with disabilities, who now are three times more likely to live below the poverty line than non-disabled counterparts. So we have to keep in mind what he has on his agenda. So it's the right thing to do as far as our President goes.

Second is the legal aspect. Can everybody hear me?

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

Yes.

MS. CARACAPPA:

Okay, the legal aspect, that according to the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act, Section 503, there are legal mandates to do so. And President Obama also stated in his State of the Union Address that he wants the Justice Department to work to see that employment discrimination is not, you know, not implemented.

And then I have to also give some accolades to our new economic development person who spoke at one of the meetings a couple of weeks ago. He had said that he would like to utilize the skill set of people such -- who are disabled and other people who are marginalized. Okay. We talk about the brain drain of Suffolk County, so along these lines it is important to say that qualified disabled people are having an opportunity to spend money and to be tax -- contribute to the tax base.

So here are some of my concrete things that I think that we need to do in order to take action to get economic empowerment. One, they need to be part of the economic plan and we should -- and we need to work with our Commissioner. The most important thing is that there is a jobs creation tax credit already in place, a jobs credit law, and people don't even know about this. So I think we need to work with the Commissioner to get a communication statement out that the tax credit that's there already, if you hire somebody who is disabled in the private sector, we need to have a better communication about this sort of -- you know, PR campaign if you want to say.

Okay. Next is I would suggest that if a company, a private sector company, if they get a Suffolk County contract, I think that this company needs to have a mandate, affirmative action mandate, that they hire a certain amount of disabled persons, and if there is a precedent there already for other minority groups.

And lastly, there's a law in place called the New York State Civil Service Law, Section 55A, where people who are qualified disabled can work in a County government without taking a Civil Service test. I know it's not the climate for that right now, however, in the past it really hasn't been that embraced as well.

So I invite the Legislature and Steve Levy to really take some action with accountability. There's a

lot of job fairs, there's a lot of PR statements, brochures, but really nothing is done. So I feel it's the right thing to do. We really need to make it this year because in today's economic climate people who are qualified and who want to work and who are disabled really should be working and contributing to the economic engine here in Suffolk County. And Steve Stern has really been behind me and I would like to see that we get the leadership going to do this this year. Okay? So I want to thank you again. Can you hear me?

LEG. LOSQUADRO:

It's fine.

MS. CARACAPPA:

We need to really work for this and I think the new tag line with regard to hiring qualified disabled persons living in Suffolk County should be well, they're not hard to hire, rather we should hire hard. And Suffolk County should be accountable and known throughout the nation that this is our tag line. We hire hard rather than hard to hire qualified disabled persons. I embrace everyone here to really get going with this project because it's just about time. Why should we spend money, government entitlement and all this money. That money should be reserved only for people who really, really need it. People who are really in desperate situations, they can't work, they don't want to work, but for people who really want to work, you can speak to me. Steve knows I'm a walking dictionary and I know the whole topic bottom, up, inside out. So I really welcome the leadership of the Legislature and Steve Levy. Let's get going on it, let's start an action plan and let's see some real numbers progress here. Thank you so much. Bye now.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Thank you, Denise.

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Sorry for the technical problems. Okay. Thank you.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Madam Clerk, do we have any other cards?

MS. ORTIZ:

No, sir.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Okay. Is there anyone in the audience that would like to address us under the public portion? Is there anyone in the audience who would like to address us in public portion? Seeing none, I'll accept a motion to close the public portion. Legislator Eddington, second by Legislator Losquadro. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions?

MS. ORTIZ:

Seventeen. (Not Present: Legislator Kennedy).

P.O. LINDSAY:

Okay. Being that that's our only business before the County Executive's address, I am going to recess -- make a motion to recess the meeting until let's say ten minutes to seven. I think the address is supposed to start at seven o'clock. So if someone wants to --

D.P.O. VILORIA-FISHER:

Second.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Second by Legislator Viloría-Fisher. All in favor? Opposed? Abstentions?

MS. ORTIZ:

Seventeen. (Not Present: Legislator Kennedy).

P.O. LINDSAY:

We stand recessed until 6:50.

(The meeting was recessed at 5:54 PM and reconvened at 6:57 PM)

DR. STANLEY:

So I wish all of you a warm welcome to Stony Brook University. We are honored to host the 2010 State of the County Address and I am pleased to be here both as a representative of Stony Brook University and as a resident of Suffolk County. Stony Brook University is an economic engine of our region, located here in the Town of Brookhaven and Village of Stony Brook. More than 20,000 university faculty, staff and students reside in the town. Our annual economic impact on the region totals \$4.6 billion. We are truly a vital part of this village, town, county and state.

It is our pleasure to have with us this evening the Supervisor of the Town of Brookhaven, Mark Lesko. Mark was elected Town Supervisor in a special election nearly one year ago. I'm sorry to say that Mark is not a graduate of Stony Brook.

*(*Laughter*)*

He instead settled for an education at Yale, where he was varsity quarterback before earning his law degree from Georgetown University. He practiced law and then served as an Assistant U.S. Attorney for ten years, from 1999 to 2009, first in the District of Columbia and then in the Eastern District of New York. As I said, just a little over a year ago he was elected as the Brookhaven Town Supervisor. All of his previous experiences have been key in helping prepare Mark for the enormous challenges he has faced over the past year. He has tackled each obstacle with all of the enthusiasm of a college football player, and he has pressed on in his stalwart efforts to make the Town of Brookhaven a better place for us to be educated, work, live and play. Please join me in welcoming Brookhaven Town Supervisor Mark Lesko.

Applause

SUPERVISOR LESKO:

Thank you, Dr. Stanley. I actually did some research. I had one more year for eligibility, so I think I could have stood up for Stony Brook. Stony Brook is, of course, within the Town of Brookhaven, and the town shares the University's pride in hosting the County Executive Steve Levy tonight for his State of the County speech. You know, Sam and I are both new players on the Long Island stage. In many respects we are still trying to settle into our new jobs. And both of us have talked about that experience and it is very much like diving into fast moving rivers. The challenges are indeed daunting. Budget pressures, management issues, charting a course for a future, and all the while attempting to learn and understand how our complex institutions that we lead work.

But we're not alone as we tackle those challenges because we have a County Executive who's been down a few rivers in his time. He's balanced tough budgets, he's providing strong management and he's provided a vision for the future of this region, and I know that we both rely on Steve Levy for his advice and leadership as we attempt to lead our own institutions. And I would argue that as Stony Brook goes, and for as perhaps our region's most important economic engine and the one that will create the new technology jobs in the twenty-first century. And as Brookhaven goes, with our limitless potential for growth and place where those new workers will live, work and play, so goes Suffolk County. We are the future of the County, and for that matter the region, and I know that County Executive Levy appreciates that. That's why he's here. So Stony Brook and Brookhaven look forward to working with our partner, Suffolk County, and its leader, Steve Levy, and together we can reamend region and lead it into a bright and exciting future. Thank you very much.

Applause

DR. STANLEY:

It is now my great pleasure to introduce to you someone who is really one of our own, Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy.

Applause

Steve Levy has a unique understanding of Stony Brook University. It was here that he received his undergraduate education. Steve entered Stony Brook as a freshman in 1977 and graduated on time in 1981. I'm very grateful for the warm welcome I received from County Executive Levy upon my joining the Stony Brook community. I did wonder perhaps if the kindness he extended me had something to do with my access to his grade transcripts, but then I discovered he graduated magna cum laude so he had really absolutely nothing to fear. As for his major, does anyone want to take a guess? Political Science. Clearly Steve was an outstanding student who translated the time at Stony Brook into a remarkable career. When Steve began his freshmen year here, Jimmy Carter was President, it was the height of the cold war, the Bee Gees were on top with the movie Saturday Night Fever, and the Cowboys beat the Broncos 27-10 Superbowl XII. The band The Who, which will play at half-time at our next Superbowl, released the album Who Are You.

Our current freshman, of course, at Stony Brook, have no firsthand recollection of any of those things, as most of them were born 13 years later. When Steve graduated in 1981, Ronald Reagan was President. Perhaps Reagan was the inspiration for County Executive's do more with less philosophy, a way of life with which we at Stony Brook are very familiar.

Just three years after his graduation from Stony Brook, at age 26, Steve was elected to the Suffolk County Legislature, where he served for 15 years. He then went on to serve in the New York State Assembly until 2003, when he was elected Suffolk County Executive.

As County Executive, Steve's financial management prevented more than a \$200 million projected deficit. The New York State Association for Counties has recognized Suffolk County with 50 innovation awards for service improvement during County Executive Levy's tenure. And the County has received six bond rating increases. He received the Robert L. Woodson award in 2006 from the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development in recognition of his efforts to increase the supply of affordable housing in Suffolk.

Steve, given your administrative accomplishments, we may call you back to Stony Brook University and SUNY as a special advisor to help us deal with our current budget cuts. We could use the help.

On a serious note, I know from my many conversations with Steve that he is very cognizant of the role Stony Brook University plays in the region's economy and quality of life, and very supportive of our efforts to do more to bring innovation and new jobs to Long Island. Together with our partners, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory and Brookhaven National Laboratory, we are poised to create a Long Island Research Alliance that can rival those seen anywhere. A unique combination of federal laboratory, private research institute and state university coming together to capture federal tax dollars to support research and innovation and jobs on Long Island. This is our vision, and I know that it is constant with Steve's vision for our region's future, a Long Island at the forefront of the new economy.

We are waiting for our cue. We are glad to have County Executive Levy back on campus tonight as a living example of the quality and value of the Stony Brook education and where it can lead. He is

one of our most distinguished alumni, and in fact received our distinguished alumni award in 2003. Please join me in welcoming Stony Brook's own Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy.

Applause

COUNTY EXECUTIVE LEVY:

Thank you.

Applause

Thank you. News 12 said we're on a time line. Thank you. Thank you so much, everyone. Thank you, President Stanley, and our gracious hosts here at Stony Brook University -- the jewel of our state system and the school from which I proudly graduated. This school has come a long way since my undergraduate days some 30 years ago, and is now recognized as one of the top 100 universities in the nation. Let's hear it for Stony Brook.

Applause

Thank you as well, Supervisor Mark Lesko, for your kind words and outstanding leadership of our County's largest town. Thank you ladies and gentlemen of the Legislature for your cooperation through these very difficult times. Thank you to News 12 and, for the first time, FIOS, for broadcasting this address live. And finally, thank you to the many residents from Amityville to Montauk for tuning in this evening.

The State of the County paints a verbal picture of where we have come from, where we are now, and where we are headed. Where have we come from? Last year we experienced the deepest recession since the Great Depression. A year ago at this time I warned that it would be a rough year. But even that cautionary speech did not fully foretell the extent to which our national economy would falter. And as the national economy suffers, so does our economy here in our great County.

How bad were the economic conditions in 2009? Well, consider this. Many towns on Long Island both increased taxes and laid off personnel. The State of New York announced that it would have to impose mid-year cuts to education and health care and that it was going to have trouble paying its bills late last year. Pennsylvania furloughed more than 700 workers. Schools in Hawaii reverted to a four-day week. Virginia cut funding to its colleges by 15%. Iowa's governor ordered a nine million dollar cut to public safety. Missouri cut 16 million dollars in aid to the poor, and Illinois laid off 100 of its 700 park workers. And California not only raised taxes and laid people off, but began releasing as many as 6,500 hundred prisoners out of jail because it no longer had the money to guard them.

In Suffolk, we faced similar financial difficulties due to this economic downturn. We lost over 100 hundred million dollars in sales tax revenue. Now, in good times we used to gain 100 million dollars over the previous year. That is a swing of 200 million dollars. And with rising unemployment and higher foreclosures, more people were unable to pay their property taxes, which left us with over 30 million dollars in revenues we did not receive.

Yes, like the rest of the country, the state of our County last year was indeed perilous, but thanks to the immediate, aggressive and decisive action that we took in a bipartisan fashion, we ended the year with a surplus, with all of our services intact and I was able to submit a budget for 2010 that froze County General Fund property taxes for the sixth year in a row.

Applause

Now, think about it. An Executive budget with no tax increases, no layoffs and no disruption of our services. How did we do it, while others could not? Well, early last year, upon learning of our steep drop off in sales tax collections, I immediately called for a 10% across-the-board reduction in

spending. We tapped some money from our rainy day fund. Now, it's important to remember that during the good times, while some governments went on wild spending sprees, we spent conservatively and set aside money into a stabilization fund. Last year, we used just enough money to stabilize our taxes, without jeopardizing our historically high bond rating.

We asked our hardworking employees to be part of the solution, and they delivered. To prevent layoffs, employees banked two weeks of salary until retirement. To lead by example, I and all the members of this Legislature were the first to agree to this lag payroll. It was a difficult thing to do, to ask from our employees, but in retrospect it was the right thing to do.

It is essential that government continue to tighten its belt, just as private businesses do and just as our families do.

Applause

When we shrunk the size of our government through an early retirement program, we exercised strict position control. We must continue to hold the line on refilling or adding positions, despite the pressure from special interests to spend and hire, hire and spend. You know, in a vacuum, that sounds good. In the real world, however, that results in one thing: Huge tax increases to the public we serve who cannot afford. These are tax increases that the people in this County, who are so overburdened, are asking us to please refrain from raising. We will not raise taxes if we don't have to. We are going to continue to hold the line to the best of our abilities.

Applause

Now, Aesop taught us the fable of the grasshopper and the ant. While the grasshopper sang, danced and played all summer long, the ant worked diligently to store food and prepare for the winter. We in government must always be aware that even in the good times our role is that of the ant -- to prepare for the difficult times ahead.

For we did not weather the economic crisis of 2009 just in 2009. We prepared for the oncoming storm in 2008, and 2007, and the years before that by shaping a leaner, more efficient government.

A smarter government means we don't have to have a larger government. While many municipalities these days are doing less with less, Suffolk County has been able to do more with less.

Applause

Our smart government policies actually enable us to maintain, and in many cases, enhance our services, while not having to always ask the taxpayers to dig deeper into their pockets.

It was these smart government policies that we began implementing in 2004 that helped soften the blow of this brutal recession.

Upon taking office, we placed our employee health care system out to bid, injecting competition into the system and professionalizing its oversight board. What did this mean? It meant we were able to save a collective 100 million dollars over the last six years.

Applause

Imagine where our budget would be today without these savings.

We adopted the best practices of the private sector and required our health care system to use generic rather than name brand drugs, saving an additional 12 million dollars a year. No loss of service, yet a 36 million dollar savings over the past three years.

Applause

We overcame special interest objections and stopped competing against the private sector in the HMO market. Privatizing our HMO services not only injected us with an immediate 18 million dollars, but thereafter gave us an additional nine million dollars over the past three years. The patients were easily absorbed by existing agencies, and again we saved money without disrupting care.

Now, service was enhanced at some of our health centers with a new point of delivery model, which again borrows upon the best practices of the private sector. When you or I go to our physician, we are seen in one exam room by a nurse and a doctor. But believe it or not, in the past at our health centers it was the patient who had to travel from room to room several times during the course of a visit, with long waits in the lobby in between. Our new system has lessened the time patients spend at health centers - allowing us to serve 20% more patients and lowering our annual costs.

Now, working with the State of New York, we uncovered potentially fraudulent practices in the Medicaid Program and saved taxpayers five million dollars this year alone.

Applause

We opened our prescription drug purchasing process to the general public regardless of one's age or income. This helped our residents save more than 1.2 million dollars with discounts of up to 50% on their prescriptions while also expanding our pool of users, thereby saving the County a million dollars.

The Alternatives for Youth Program that we created rescues families in crisis. This innovative program seeks to keep children with their families, rather than sending children into very expensive, de-personalized institutional care. And it saves taxpayers millions of dollars each year.

This past year we expanded that same concept to the foster care system, working with families to avoid foster care placement where appropriate. And thanks to our program, Suffolk County's placement rate of children in foster care is one-half that of the rest of the state.

Applause

Once again, families are made stronger, and the County saved five million dollars in 2009 for our taxpayers.

So, to the people who say you can't enhance a service without inflating the size of government, increasing spending or raising taxes, I say "Take a look at what we have done in Suffolk County."

Applause

We cut the red tape and improved cash flow to our many contract agencies that help us serve people in need. By listening to and partnering with these agencies, we took a process that was once six or seven or eight months long and streamlined it into as little as six weeks. This places the money in the hands of these agencies faster -- decreasing the amount they pay for borrowing, and increasing the amount that is available to serve their clients.

And at a time when many municipalities have cut aid to food pantries, my 2010 budget actually increased funding to these vital agencies.

Applause

Caseloads have been reduced in Child Protective Services and in our Medicaid Application Unit, enhancing our responses to these vulnerable populations. And working with the Legislature, we

began evening hours at four Social Service centers to better serve our working families, without incurring overtime expenses. And Suffolk County continues to collect more in child support than any other suburban County in the State of New York.

Applause

You know, last year in my State of the County Address, I outlined an initiative with our school districts to ensure that students eligible for the Federal Free Lunch Program were enrolled. Today, we work with 47 districts on this program and have ensured that hundreds and hundreds more students are properly nourished. No student should be distracted from learning because he or she is hungry.

Applause

You know, indeed, these difficult economic times have not prevented us from following through on our core responsibilities as a government. But it is only through years of preparation and responsible fiscal management that we have been able to maintain our services without massive tax increases.

Different levels of government provide different core services, yet all levels of government have some very common needs when it comes to purchasing supplies and equipment. In the upcoming month I will be developing the Long Island Purchasing Consortium. I will be inviting Nassau County, other municipalities, school districts and even not-for-profit organizations to enjoy the same economies of scales we create when purchasing in bulk. Our local consortium is likely to produce more competitive pricing from local or regional firms than is found on the statewide lists, and it can supplement purchasing efforts under way by BOCES. While the statewide list can provide a discount, our consortium will bring many governments together as one entity to maximize our economies of scale and encourage vendors to sharpen their pencils. This is not reinventing the wheel; this is making the wheel larger for maximum efficiency.

Applause

We have put stimulus funds to good use here in Suffolk, creating jobs in the construction industry with road projects on Motor Parkway, Commack Road and the Expressway Service Roads. And we're keeping people working with County improvements on Nicolls Road, Portion Road, Patchogue-Holbrook Road and Route 58 in Riverhead just to name a few.

And by securing more than 13 million dollars in federal stimulus funds, we are expanding our Neighborhood Stabilization efforts in many communities hardest hit by the recession. These funds allow us to acquire foreclosed homes, renovate them and get them back on the tax rolls with qualified buyers. I'm pleased to recognize here tonight one of the first home buyers in this program, Tamara Wheeling of Brentwood, who this month will be moving into her new home thanks to this program.

Applause

To sustain us into the future, these are the times we must continue to enhance economic development, expand our tax base and keep our economy thriving.

Last year, Canon was reconsidering its decision to locate its North American headquarters to Melville. Facing the loss of 2,000 high quality jobs, my administration, working with the Town of Riverhead, took immediate action to transfer additional Empire Zone credits to the property, and that ensured that Canon would indeed build right here in Suffolk County.

Applause

It was further good news in 2009 when I cut the ribbon for the opening of Leviton, which relocated

from Queens and brought in 400 high-tech jobs.

We signed the lease for the revitalization of the Westhampton Airport that will create another 600 to 700 careers at the high-tech economic hub.

At the Hampton Business and Technology Park we will seek to attract a film studio, where world-class films and television shows can be produced on the South Fork. In the past we have successfully lobbied for tax incentives of 30% on film production here in Suffolk. And in 2010 I will be inviting producers from the New York area to visit eastern Long Island to see all we have to offer.

Applause

On the North Fork economic development occurs in the form of agri-tourism. We have worked in conjunction with the Long Island Farm Bureau to develop the popular Jazz on the Vine series which brings visitors to many of our vineyards in the winter months.

Additionally, we are beginning to reap the dividends from investments we made in aqua-culture -- the farming of shellfish within our bays. Brown and red tides, over-harvesting and pollution decimated this once thriving industry. But we have cleaned our bays and stocked the waterways with millions of clams and scallops, and our shellfish populations are beginning to go show hopeful signs of sustainability.

Applause

And we're also working to protect our coveted fishing industry. Over the last decade, federal quotas, which were based on arbitrary and inaccurate data from the 1980's, have been terribly unfair to our commercial fisherman. As a result, fisherman along the rest of the northeast coast are able to take far more fish than our Long Islanders. I have commissioned a study that will detail this inequity to the federal government. Long Island's own Billy Joel has romanticized the allure of this marvelous trade which is deeply engrained in the history of this great County. We live on an Island, and it is vital to our economic well being that we restore our commercial fishing industry to its former glory.

Applause

Another symbol of our rich history is the duck. As in the Long Island Duck. As in the Long Island Ducks baseball team. The great experiment of bringing a minor league baseball team to Long Island has been a phenomenal success, and provides one of the most affordable forms of family entertainment around. Hundreds of thousands of families each year enjoy the national past time in its purest form in Central Islip. In 2009 I proudly signed an extension to keep the Long Island Ducks here in Suffolk County for another ten years.

Applause

This year we will continue our quest for an arena in Yaphank that can host a minor league hockey team, professional lacrosse and indoor soccer, and can be a venue for world class concerts. And who knows, if Nassau doesn't seal the deal for the Islanders, we will be happen to take them right here in Suffolk as well.

Applause

And let us not forget our downtowns and the vital role they play in our economy. Downtowns shape the image of an entire community. When a downtown is thriving, both surrounding property values and civic pride rise. But when a downtown is littered with abandoned buildings and struggling businesses, it can be devastating to a hamlet. The first question is, can downtowns come back? The answer is clear. You bet they can. We've got the evidence. Patchogue and Bay Shore are two

prime examples. And over the upcoming year, we'll continue to partner with many of our towns to invest in the revitalization of downtown corridors.

While downtown Riverhead has had its challenges over the years, exciting plans have been laid out for a revitalized riverfront, including 52 units of workforce housing the County has helped fund that will improve the aesthetics and bring ready-made patrons onto Main Street.

Applause

And an exciting new vision is emerging from the Ronkonkoma transit hub as we work with Brookhaven Supervisor Lesko, Islip Supervisor Phil Nolan and state leaders to plan a transit-oriented development that will include hundreds of residential units above street level retail space -- all within walking distance of the Ronkonkoma station.

Applause

The Long Island Index said this type of development is the vision of the future. Well, here in Suffolk, the future is now.

Applause

Our County investments in our downtowns are contagious. When people see money being poured into a community they have a greater incentive to take root and invest their own money because they know that better days are ahead.

We are working with Supervisor Steve Bellone to reconfigure Straight Path from a double lane highway into a single lane, walkable retail corridor.

As part of this project, we are partnering with the Town of Babylon and the federal government to put in place needed sewers for business growth in Wyandanch's main corridor. But the development of Wyandanch can only occur if it is economically feasible. And it is not economically feasible with the millions of dollars in sewer hook-up fees that would be required. We can't waive these fees for everyone -- the Sewer Fund would be depleted.

But this is a unique opportunity where the sewer development is part of an urban renewal program, with the local town paying to install the sewers.

So tonight I propose a new policy in Suffolk that will allow hook-up fee waivers where a sewer project is part of a transit-oriented redevelopment in a distressed area where the town is a partner.

Applause

I firmly believe that 20 years from now, when we look back at the renaissance of Wyandanch, we will point to this County investment as the place where it all started, along with our Town Supervisor, Steve Bellone.

Applause

Last year I convened a consortium of Long Island's top business and academic minds to help us build upon the many success we have had in bringing companies here to Suffolk. My Economic Development Consortium will be issuing shortly a series of recommendations that will help us promote our County as business-friendly and encourage existing and emerging industries alike to grow here.

Our consortium will match local venture capitalists with growing Long Island companies. We will promote specific courses at our local colleges to match the needs of these identified industries. We will create a welcoming committee of government officials and business leaders to meet visiting

firms on the airport tarmac to show them what incentives we have available. We'll provide a checklist of important milestones and appoint specific individuals in the government to mentor and shepherd them through the process. The days of Long Island having an anti-business image must be a thing of the past.

Applause

There is one sector in which we know jobs will flourish in the upcoming decade -- technology. Our nation led the globe into the Industrial Age, and then into the Computer Age, and we must be poised again to lead the world -- into the Green Age.

Applause

Green technologies can wean us off our dependence on foreign oil and provide cleaner and more affordable energy. And in this nation, it should be Suffolk County that leads the way. Why not? Suffolk County has the brain power between Brookhaven Lab, Cold Spring Harbor and right here at my alma mater, Stony Brook University.

It's not just our professional institutions where we can find the best and brightest. Our County produced three national Intel Scholarship finalists. Ward Melville High School produced two finalists in collaboration with sponsoring Stony Brook University professors.

Suffolk will continue to partner with our academic and high-tech hubs to encourage my policy that I term Green Economics. We were the first in the state to waive sales taxes on the purchase of solar equipment. We installed solar panels on our police headquarters and the new Fourth Precinct. In April, I signed a landmark Executive Order that requires that any new County government building over 10,000 square feet must include solar panels to help generate the electricity for the building.

Additionally, as I announced recently, Suffolk County is partnering with a private company, enXco, to install more than 60,000 solar panels atop carports they will build, at their expense, in parking lots at County buildings and Railroad stations. By turning parking lots into power lots, this public-private partnership will provide enough clean energy to power more than 1,800 homes.

The push toward green technology will be boosted by our proposed Legacy Village in Yaphank, which would include in its high-tech vision a solar generating system able to provide enough clean energy to run the entire Legacy Village site. It will be the largest net carbon zero footprint in the business sector in the entire United States of America.

Applause

Now, how Suffolk County will look in the year 2035 will greatly depend on the decisions we make in the next few years. Where will people work? Where will people live? How will they get between the two? What will be the condition of our groundwater and our waterways? To help us identify our goals and determine how we will achieve them, I have ordered an update to the County's Comprehensive Master Plan. The first step in this process will be a series of forums hosted throughout the County this year, and we welcome all residents to participate because ultimately, this is your plan.

We have shown time and time again that we can grow our economy and protect our environment. Our policy of Green Economics means preserving as much environmentally sensitive property as possible, while also identifying appropriate areas for economic development and redevelopment to provide our next generation with the opportunity to take root right here on Long Island.

When it comes to preserving open space and farmland, no county in the United States can match

Suffolk. Not one.

Applause

Over the last six years we've implemented a Save Our Open Space Program, an Environmental Legacy Fund and an extension of the Water Quality Protection Act to 2030. All are designed to give us the money we need now, to protect our future supply of groundwater and preserve our suburban life-style. More investment has been made into open space in the last six years than in any similar period since the program was implemented back in the 1970's.

Applause

We preserved thousands of acres and almost 70 farms just in the last six years alone.

We are now heading into a critical stage for preserving what's left. Over this upcoming year I will engage with not-for-profit environmental organizations to identify as many environmentally pristine properties as possible, and ask these agencies to work with property owners to get us to contract.

In the meantime, we will continue with our Pesticide Reduction Program, which is on target to reduce the County use of pesticides significantly throughout the decade. This comes on the heels of the legislation we passed in 2007 to reduce fertilizer use in both the public and private sectors. And, just this past year, our Cancer Awareness Task Force completed a brochure and website to educate families on what they can do to make their homes free from cancer causing agents.

We also saw great success in our e-waste recycling program that has removed more than 34 tons of old computers, printers, monitors, televisions, fax machines and other gadgets from the waste stream.

Applause

In health care we became one of the first counties in the state to embark upon an electronic medical records program. We have enhanced delivery of care through a new state-of-the-art digital mammography system.

And In 2010, we can again pursue a path that simultaneously saves money and enhances health services. Here's how. Federal law allows for local governments to establish Federally Qualified Health Centers in diverse and economically challenged areas. These centers are eligible for additional aid; money that will allow us to enhance service. We convened a task force that will shortly be reporting its analysis of this system. Let this be the year that this well proven system of enhancing care, improving quality of services and including members of the community comes to Suffolk County.

Applause

Perhaps nothing has been a greater threat to the health of our public over the last few years than the alarming increase in heroin use. Heroin is right here in the suburbs. It's accessible. It's cheap. It's addictive and it's deadly. The problem must be attacked from three sides. Education. Treatment. And law enforcement.

Parents must know that heroin is available for as little as five dollars a bag. Our youth do not have to shoot it up with a needle, they can now snort it or inhale it. Youngsters must know that it can get you hooked immediately and it can kill you. Even on the first try. Our Police Smart Program in the schools has incorporated a special curriculum dealing with the dangers of heroin to give our children the facts they need to make intelligent choices. I have provided the Prevention Resource Center at South Oaks with \$175,000 to help in its mission to promote prevention. We have developed our

own resource guide to help parents identify signs of drug abuse and find vital resources in their communities. And the first of our regional HELP Forums will be held in mid-April in East Islip.

But when our youth are gripped by addiction, they need our help more than ever. Improvements in the medical field now allow some addicted patients to receive treatment from their own family doctor. A drug called Suboxone has been shown in some cases to be more effective than methadone, and it is available through a simple prescription. This medication blocks the high of heroin and opiates and helps suppress the craving. We will be embarking on a groundbreaking initiative to make Suboxone available through our health centers, coupled with support and counseling. When it comes to getting our youth off of heroin, we will not raise the white flag. We will be victorious.

Applause

Parents have also been frustrated by the inability to get in-patient treatment for their children. Let's commit together right here and now as a top priority to insist that the State Legislature change the insurance law and help more of our addicted sons and daughters have immediate access to the treatment they desperately need.

Applause

The law enforcement battle against heroin does not stop at the County borders. That is why at the first meeting I had with Nassau County Executive Ed Mangano, we vowed to share information, resources and personnel to beat this scourge once and for all. The importance of our aggressive law enforcement component cannot be understated. The drug king-pins and two-bit dealers who prey on our children at the local schools must know they will be caught. That is why last fall Police Commissioner Richard Dormer established a centralized Heroin Special Unit within the Narcotics Section, bringing in detectives and officers from all precincts to focus on all facets of heroin distribution networks. In just the first three weeks of this year alone, our task force has made more than 60 undercover buys, and arrested more than 100 individuals.

Applause

By the way, that's a 120% increase a heroin arrests over the same period last year.

While we are fighting so hard to keep drug dealers off the street, be forewarned that problems lurk ahead if the new Rockefeller drug law reforms are left unchecked. Those reforms that eliminated draconian 25 year sentences for a simple drug possession were indeed justified. But these changes went too far, so that now a violent drug dealer can often avoid jail time by simply declaring that he is an addict. And get this, he can even have three previous criminal convictions expunged from his record. Both District Attorney Tom Spota and I want to promote rehabilitation. We want to give people a second chance. But what we don't want to do is give a violent drug dealer a get out of jail free card.

Applause

Without the threat of a serious jail sentence, a hardened drug dealer has no incentive to give up information on his network. Some parts of the Rockefeller drug law reforms were well intentioned and laudable. Nevertheless it is time to reform the reforms and give back to the District Attorneys the discretion that they need to keep us safe.

Applause

Let's also give our prosecutors the greatest ability possible to crack down on violent gangs. Gangs today are not like those depicted on Happy Days or Grease. They are in many ways organized crime operations. They are big money enterprises, and they are downright ruthless. These gangs seek to take over entire neighborhoods. We can not and will not allow this to happen.

Applause

Gangs must be treated like organized crime under the law. We loosened the grip of organized crime through federal racketeering statutes. We should do the same when it comes to combating gangs. Harsher penalties should be put in place for any crimes that are committed in furtherance of gang activity. The best way to keep our streets safe from gangs is to get gang members off of our streets.

Applause

To further combat this problem, last summer we centralized our Police Department Gang Unit, taking officers that were spread out over seven precincts and consolidating them into a single working group that could be deployed to the major hot spots of gang activity. The results? An astonishing 365% increase in the number of gang members arrested.

Applause

We are so fortunate in Suffolk to have one of the best Police Departments in the world. How effective are they? Suffolk County is continuously cited as among the safest suburban communities in America. Over the past six years, total Part I and Part II crimes have been reduced by 20%.

Applause

This past year, according to the New York State Department of Criminal Justice statistics, Commissioner Dormer and the Police Department lowered major crime another 8.3%. Congratulations.

Applause

I have long stated that our Police Department needs to mirror the community it serves in order to be most effective. That is why it is truly disconcerting that here in 2010 African Americans comprise a mere 2.5% of our police force. Hispanics, only 8%. We set out several years ago to correct this inequity, not by imposing quotas, but by working with our community churches and advocates to encourage more minorities to take the police exam. Well, we doubled our outreach and the result is that we doubled the number of minority applicants who scored in the top three levels. As we hire more officers in the coming year it is our hope that we will start to see the department becoming more diverse.

Applause

Our diversity is a wonderful thing. This is a message that could never be overstated to our younger generation. It is what makes this nation so special; it's what makes this County so great.

We celebrate our diversity in Suffolk County and we must continue to speak loudly and strongly against those who promote hatred or intolerance. That is why last year I established a Student Congress for Justice. This organization, with representatives from 35 school districts, is meeting regularly to share ideas on how our youth can work together to foster acceptance in their schools and communities. We're fortunate to have six student board members here with us this evening. Please join me in acknowledging their efforts. Actually we have eight.

Applause

We created a Stop the Hate public service announcement airing on cable television. We commissioned and distributed the Broken Identities video -- the story of a young Hispanic girl and the challenges she faced in assimilating with her new friends. It is a touching and profound piece

that is sure to inspire dialogue in any classroom, and I invite every one of our school districts in Suffolk to obtain this video.

Certainly we face our challenges, but we have cause for a celebration as well. On any particular day we can marvel at the bravery of our servicemen and women protecting our freedoms abroad, or the valiant efforts of volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers protecting our families here at home. Too often the term hero is used in our culture to describe athletes or rock stars. True heroes are those who put their health and their lives on the line for our protection.

Applause

Out in front of the Dennison Building in Hauppauge we dedicated two memorials last fall, one to the victims of September 11, and one to the Gold Star families who lost a family member in service. I ask you all to join me in recognizing the extraordinary sacrifice of all of our Gold Star families.

Applause

As one way to say thank you to our heroes, we in Suffolk passed a law to give priority in our affordable housing program to returning veterans. In the fall of this year, we will proudly cut the ribbon on the VA satellite center in Riverhead to better serve our East End Veterans. And I will be asking the federal government to provide VA counseling for family members who have lost a loved one.

For our brave volunteers, the men and women who answer fire and ambulance calls at all hours of the day and night, we developed a program to provide tuition assistance at Suffolk Community College. These programs are not enough in and of themselves to bestow our full appreciation, but they are a way for us at least to say we will never take their selfless sacrifices for granted.

Applause

A great deal was accomplished last year. Even though we faced a horrendous recession and lost 100 million dollars in revenues, we pulled together as Democrat and Republican, Executive and Legislator, management and union, to make the tough decisions. I submitted yet another tax freeze budget. But while we fared better than most in 2009 due to our strong fiscal management, no one really knows yet how quickly the national economy will recover. And in 2011 we face an unstable state budget, a huge increase in pension costs mandated by the state and a potential loss of over 40 million dollars in federal stimulus money. We must again work like the ant and prepare for the worst, even as we hope for the best.

We have cut new spending from the previous year's totals for the last two years -- something that is unprecedented in Suffolk government.

Applause

We must continue on this path, because if we do not start preparing right now for what is to come in 2011 we will be doing a great disservice to our taxpayers. To the many organizations that are funded by the County, I ask you to remember this plight we face. To the County workers who helped us weather the storm in the past year, we ask for your continued cooperation in understanding why we must remain vigilant with tight position control. And to my legislative colleagues, I ask that you continue to work with me in the most cooperative form possible to recognize that everything must be on the table for cost containment. When you seek more spending, be prepared to show the revenue to cover that spending. And where you seek the easy glory of eliminating a revenue, you must have the guts to show what services you will cut to offset that lost revenue.

Given the many unknowns in the year ahead, I have again ordered departments to set aside up to 10% of their expenditures in reserve. Innovations such as private-public partnerships and consolidations must all be discussed. None of us have all the answers. But collectively all of us must have enough answers to save this County from going the same route as New York State, California and municipalities around the nation that have dramatically increased taxes or imposed severe cuts.

For the past several years our management style has served as a model for others around the country. Six straight years without a General Fund tax increase. The highest bond rating in our County's history. Twenty percent lower total crime rate. More affordable housing starts than ever before. A record investment in open space preservation. Leading the state in alternative energy development. Bringing in thousands of jobs from companies such as Canon and Leviton. And most importantly, showing the people we were elected to serve that we too are proud residents of this great County who will put aside our partisan differences to help make Suffolk County the greatest County in the greatest nation on God's green earth.

Thank you all, thank you all very much. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, Presiding Officer. God bless you. Thank you.

Applause & Standing Ovation

Thank you.

(THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 8:00 P.M.)