

**2010 State of the County**  
**Onondaga County Executive Joanne M. Mahoney**

Good evening, I am pleased to welcome you all to Storer Auditorium at Onondaga Community College for the 2010 State of the County Address. Thank you to the OCC faculty and Staff for being our hosts tonight. I appreciate your hard work and hospitality.

Dr. Sydow, thank you for your kind introduction. Your accomplishments at the college are many and the results are clearly seen in the record number of young people at OCC pursuing higher education and preparing for careers. Thank you very much for all that you do and congratulations to the OCC Women's basketball team, they take their undefeated record to the National Tournament in Minnesota this month.

A special thank you to Byron Lee our soloist. When I heard Byron sing the National Anthem last month at the Special Olympics Winter Games, I was so impressed by his performance that I invited him to be here with us tonight. Byron -- thank you for being here, great job and congratulations on your Floor Hockey Gold Medal.

Chairman Rhinehart, thank you for being our emcee tonight. Welcome also to the other members of the Onondaga County Legislature, especially the newly elected members: John Dougherty, Linda Ervin, and Judy Tassone.

Welcome to my fellow countywide elected officials, District Attorney Bill Fitzpatrick, Sheriff Kevin Walsh, Comptroller Bob Antonacci and County Clerk Ann Ciarpelli, thank you for being here.

We are joined tonight by Syracuse's new Mayor, Stephanie Miner. Mayor, as you know, tremendous opportunities exist for the City and the County to work together and I'm happy we are off to a good start.

I know that many of our 19 Town Supervisors and 15 Village Mayors have joined us tonight, welcome and thank you for being here at this important juncture in our shared history.

We are all aware that 2009 was a difficult year for our nation's economy. The United States saw a decline in GDP of 2.4%, the country as a whole lost 5.3 Million jobs and 48 states faced deficits and an inability to pay their bills.

With a real dependence on Wall Street, NYS bore much of the brunt of the crippled economy. The State Department of Budget is projecting a \$7.4B deficit through 2011 with total deficits through 2013-14 projected to be \$61B. Prior to the 2008 financial market meltdown, Wall Street contributed nearly 20% of the state's tax receipts. Although there has been some recovery in the financial sector, experts indicate that revenues from Wall Street will not recover to pre-recession levels any time soon.

While there are some signs that the national economy is starting to recover, the latest reports on the U.S. labor market are still concerning. Most labor economists believe that national and

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state unemployment rates will go higher before they level off. Many expect these rates to persist even after “The Great Recession” has ended. We in Onondaga County are certainly not immune to this worrisome trend and are planning accordingly.

As joblessness in our region increased last year, the demand for County services such as Food Stamps, Medicaid, and Temporary Assistance also increased dramatically, while sales tax revenues fell sharply.

And while 2009 was among the most difficult the county has experienced, I am proud to stand here tonight and report that Onondaga County has finished 2009 in the black.

This was no small feat, and was not without significant hardship.

Starting in January of 2009, I directed county department heads to initiate strict austerity measures within their departments. The rules were simple; if it wasn’t absolutely necessary, then we had to do without it. And even if you thought it was necessary, you still had to convince Jim Rowley that it was.

Not always an easy task...

The austerity measures we put in place generated \$9.4M in savings. Nearly two and a half times those achieved in previous years. Department heads were not always able to hire replacements when employees retired, they were asked not to purchase any supplies they could live without and travel was severely restricted. Our departments were managed well under the most difficult of circumstances and it’s a credit to our whole county team that we were able to successfully close our 2009 books in the black.

Our county workforce is second to none and the work they accomplished in 2009 in very difficult circumstances illustrates not only the talent they have, but the level of professionalism to which they hold themselves.

On behalf of myself, my senior staff and our entire community, I say thank you to our hardworking county employees.

To our department heads, and to our Department of Management and Budget, thank you for your efforts, they literally paid off this year.

I would like to recognize the Management and Budget staff, the Personnel department and the Law department for your work on the challenging 2010 budget as well. You all did a great job under very difficult circumstances and we are fortunate to have you working with us in County Government.

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When I first campaigned for this office, I said that I was ready and willing to make the tough decisions.

While I didn't expect to face quite so many difficult decisions immediately, I am proud to say that we met the challenges head on and we did make the decisions necessary to keep Onondaga County on track.

We already knew that property taxes were too high, but with revenues shrinking and costs continuing to increase, we could not continue to conduct business as usual.

A popular phrase in recent years has been that we have to learn "to do more with less". County employees have heard that phrase far too many times and I pledged recently that I will stop asking them to do more with less. No, the time for doing more with less has passed.

It's time now that we start doing "less with less".

When we first forecast the shortfall in this year's budget, we set out a clear path for county government. We committed that first and foremost, the solution would come from a reduction in spending.

And we have reduced spending. In 2009, we cut \$21 million from the general fund and another \$28 million from other funds such as WEP and Transportation. And when you consider that fixed costs for salary and fringe benefits rose \$6.8 million we had to cut \$56 million to achieve this reduction. The spending reduction came from austerity savings, program cuts and a smaller workforce.

To minimize painful layoffs, I asked all of our employees to help us through this difficult economy. I told employees that we could get through this year with a small number of layoffs if everyone would agree to work their full schedules at their full 2009 salaries and not take raises this year.

I'd like to very sincerely thank the county's management/confidential team for leading the way. Management confidential employees – M/C's as we refer to them – are working without a raise this year, even though their union counterparts received one. I truly appreciate it, but I do recognize that it's not fair. In future years, I will not ask M/C's to forgo their raises when union employees refuse to do the same.

And, to the unions represented here tonight, I ask that this year you join the Sheriffs Police Deputies, the Building Trades and the MC's in working with us to get through what is going to be another very difficult year.

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To that end, I met with all of the county union presidents last Thursday and outlined our current fiscal situation. The bottom line I explained to them is that unless the economy improves rapidly and contrary to all forecasts, we will once again be facing significant layoffs.

No one said these decisions would be easy, and it is unfortunate that our employees are asked to share the pain, but to be fair, taxpayers are also being asked to shoulder a significant burden.

Because we made many tough decisions, I'm pleased to report that Wall Street has recognized our effort. All three of the financial rating agencies – Moody's, Standard & Poor's, and Fitch – recently reaffirmed our high credit rating.

Had we decimated our fund balance as many suggested, we would have faced a credit downgrade which would cost Onondaga County taxpayers millions of dollars. Instead, Onondaga County remains a beacon of strength during these dark financial times thanks to our fiscal discipline.

I thank the legislature for continuing that discipline by passing a resolution sponsored by Kevin Holmquist, to restore our general fund balance to 10% of our general fund revenues within 3 years. This will continue to signify to the rating agencies that Onondaga County takes seriously the need for fiscal responsibility.

While 2009 was a difficult budget year, Onondaga County and our employees did have tremendous accomplishments.

Since 1998, Onondaga County has been under an amended consent judgment mandating that we stop polluting Onondaga Lake and take a lead role in cleaning it up.

As many of you know, this past November, Judge Frederick Scullin of the Northern District of New York signed a new amended consent judgment – this time allowing us to use state-of-the-art green infrastructure technology to clean our lake.

Onondaga County is the first government in the country to convince a judge to include the use of green technology in a consent order.

Judge Scullin's ruling has generated a great deal of interest from other regions of our country. Onondaga County is becoming known as an innovator in the use of this technology. By working together with our partners in government, higher education, non-profits, and the private sector, our County has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to establish a reputation as a world-class center for Green technology innovation, which will not only improve our environment but help us attract young people to our region. We must not miss this opportunity.

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To get our own community involved in our new direction for stormwater management, we've launched the "Save the Rain" campaign. You have likely begun to see billboards and other advertisements around the community – and this is only the beginning.

Just as it was when Onondaga County became a leader in recycling, public participation will be crucial to our success. Please learn what you can do to help and encourage others to do the same. It is exciting to watch this project develop and I have complete confidence that with your help, we will be successful.

I am happy to announce tonight that we are initiating the Green Improvement Fund to provide financial assistance for the installation of Green infrastructure projects on privately owned properties in the areas affected by Judge Scullin's consent order. As much as 100% of eligible costs, up to a maximum of \$100,000 per applicant for a single project and \$250,000 for multiple projects, will be available under this new program. This program will cover costs for the installation of Green infrastructure solutions above and beyond traditional construction practices.

For nearly a year, the world has been coping with the spread of the H1N1 flu virus.

The Onondaga County Health Department, led by Dr. Cynthia Morrow, did a tremendous job vaccinating this County's citizens who are at risk. I visited some of the clinics and they worked with precision – better than anyone could have expected.

While people are sometimes quick to complain, we don't often receive compliments for the work we do in County Government. That is why it was so gratifying to receive many, many phone calls and emails from people who brought their children to our clinics and were thrilled with the level of care and the speed with which they were served.

Thank you to the Health Department employees and volunteers. And thank you to Dr. Morrow. Onondaga County is lucky to have a professional of your caliber leading our Health Department.

Another department that generated unsolicited compliments is our Department of Emergency Communications.

As some of you know, Onondaga County is upgrading our emergency communications system to better enable our first responders to communicate.

Communication using the old system would often times require the emergency responder to stand outside or to stand in just the right place, in just the right position and that was if the signal even reached their part of the county. Many of our first responders were not able to communicate with each other at all.

Simply put, people's lives were at risk every day.

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Changes had to be made, and Emergency Communications Commissioner John Balloni and his team of professionals went to work. As of today, 2000 first responders have made a successful switch to the new interoperable system, and the remaining first responders throughout Onondaga County will be converting soon.

Many, many people were a part of the success of this project, including members of fire, police and EMS agencies, the staffs from Motorola and United Radio and others. I'd also like to thank in particular the entire staff at our 911 Center.

We have found efficiencies throughout county government that are enabling us to reduce our bottom line.

In our Department of Transportation we have successfully implemented one person plowing, increasing its use from 25% of our plow routes last year to 50% this year and this has resulted in \$103,000 of overtime savings.

We have also implemented a GPS-based system to track our vehicles. This will maximize the safety of both staff and the traveling public while enabling us to improve management of work activities.

In our Department of Facilities Management, Commissioner Brian Lynch believed we could save taxpayer money if we stopped outsourcing the processing of our outgoing mail. By spending \$350,000 on a new mail machine, we are able to save \$100k/annually. In just three and a half years, this machine will have paid for itself and the savings can be returned to the taxpayers.

Last year, in anticipation of the growing emphasis on energy consumption, we created a new Director of Energy and Sustainability. The County has, with Lee Klosowski's expertise, locked in savings on natural gas and electricity prices saving almost \$2.3 million dollars.

And, by proactively hiring an expert in energy, the County has received a \$2.5 million Energy Block Grant. Onondaga County's application was one of the first 10 County applications in the country to be approved by the US Department of Energy.

We found significant savings in prescription drug costs as well. A contract awarded after a new Request For Proposal (RFP) resulted in \$1.9 million dollars worth of savings per year.

The County also moved to a new dental carrier which will save county taxpayers \$500,000 dollars per year and we have an RFP out for our health care administration. We are continually looking for ways to reduce costs where we can and I am happy to report that we are finding much success.

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As I said earlier, higher unemployment has increased the demand for the human services we provide to those in need.

Social service costs and their associated mandates from the State and Federal governments make up the vast majority of our budget. As demand is increasing, budget pressures do not allow us to hire additional staff to keep up.

With fewer employees and more people looking to county government for help than ever before, the Onondaga County Department of Social Services, led by Commissioner David Sutkowy, has turned to technology and innovation to meet this growing demand without increasing costs.

You may have heard me speak on other occasions about “No Wrong Door.” No Wrong Door is not a program. It is a belief that county services should be made available to the public in the most efficient way possible.

Using technology, the county will connect with community groups already helping people in need, allowing easier access to services available through county government.

The groundbreaking work being done in this area will change the face of social services delivery. Technology and the proper exchange of information is the key. By dramatically improving the quality and quantity of information shared between our benefit programs and community agencies, we will dramatically improve service delivery for all.

Many times at conferences or in professional journals, we in county government learn about how things are being done elsewhere and naturally we look to adopt those best practices wherever we can. Well today, people all over the nation are looking at Onondaga County as an example of how best to do things.

In October, I had the opportunity to welcome government officials from across the northeast and Federal representatives from Washington DC who traveled here to learn about an innovation that is producing tremendous results in the Food Stamp and Temporary Assistance area. Unleashing the potential of technology was once again the driving force.

A task-based call center, the first of its kind for a local social service district, was instituted to streamline operations and the results have been extraordinary. The call center approach has proven to be a far more efficient way of doing business, and has allowed DSS to handle a 34% increase in Food Stamp cases without adding any additional staff.

As Commissioner Sutkowy has reported, “This task-based, call center has exceeded all expectations. It has been the single most far-reaching innovation in our Department of Social Services. It has been transformational in providing a solution to the ongoing and very real

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challenge of meeting increased demand for service during times of diminishing resources. Without exaggeration, it is the future for government service delivery.”

But this anecdotal information isn't enough. The proof is in the results, and they are truly impressive:

- 85% of calls to the center are appropriately resolved with the first telephone call eliminating the need for additional staff involvement.
- And most importantly, errors in payments to clients have been reduced from 25% to 0 over the last two years;

DSS is expanding the call center model to the Medicaid program, where there is also great potential for savings. Congratulations to Commissioner Sutkowy and thank you to you and your staff.

I am continually impressed by the hard work and results our county employees achieve. Last year, I announced the creation of the Program Evaluation Team, a team which was staffed by existing management and budget employees.

The goal of the team was to take a specific function of county government and evaluate it by becoming completely immersed in it.

To this end, we assigned the team to investigate service delivery to our vulnerable elderly population and to see if we could do better.

As Baby Boomers age and as older people live longer, the demographics of our community are changing.

The elderly are representing a greater portion of our county's population. Between 2008 and 2030 the elderly population is expected to increase by over 20,000 people. We're already beginning to feel the impact of this change on our programs.

I am pleased to report that we have begun implementation of the team's recommendations and believe that the changes will produce very practical and long lasting results: The Adult Protective Unit in the DSS and the Neighborhood Advisor Program in Aging and Youth are now systematically coordinating their efforts, allowing for better responses to identified cases of need among the elderly.

Similarly, we are moving the Home Care program from Van Duyn to DSS to improve coordination of case handling among that program, Adult Protective and Medicaid. Solutions like these will allow us to adapt to demographic changes by instituting improved service delivery for our aging population, without any additional costs.

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In collaboration with the City of Syracuse, a new single point of entry approach to assist people who are homeless or facing the prospect of losing their home was created in 2009. The federal government allocated \$2.5 million to the City and \$900,000 to the County to assist the homeless and housing vulnerable over the next three years. The City and County agreed to collaborate on a new approach. The goal is to avert homelessness in the first place and to more rapidly re-house citizens who are homeless.

The Department of Social Services is working with the City, community agencies, and landlords to create safe housing options, and to prevent the recurrence of homelessness, saving county taxpayers money in the long term. This is a tremendous example of collaboration among local governments and putting Federal stimulus funds to good use in a well-planned, expedient manner.

With my commitment to keeping a focus on literacy, I was pleased to learn that this year's State of the County address also happens to be "Read Across America Day".

There are few activities more important than reading to a child and our literacy efforts are paying off. The Literacy Coalition is well established with 2 Literacy Zones, the Imagination Library is about to take off, and our partnership with Say Yes to Education will serve as the catalyst for increasing graduation rates and making it possible for more youth to attend college. As I have said so many times in so many ways, "If we invest in our children now, it will pay dividends long into the future."

When I took office two years ago, I promised to take a regional approach to economic development and to coordinate the county's efforts with those of other economic development organizations. I welcome the news that the Metropolitan Development Association and the Chamber of Commerce are combining their own efforts. To MDA President Rob Simpson and Syracuse Chamber President Darlene Kerr, I say congratulations.

As you may know from Mayor Miner's State of the City Address, she and I and our respective teams have been having our own discussions about how City and County economic development departments can collaborate more effectively. As the Mayor announced, we are planning to co-locate our economic development teams this year. Tonight, I am pleased to announce some of the specifics. Our plan is to lease office space in a new LEED certified building in the thriving Armory Square business district. Beginning this fall, Washington Station will be the home for the newly minted, long awaited one-stop-shop for Economic Development.

It's an idea our community has discussed for years, and I'm happy to say it's finally becoming a reality.

By working together, we'll be able to do a better job meeting the needs of businesses; allowing them to create the jobs that our community needs in the future.

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This new space puts our community's best foot forward when courting those who can bring new employers, and it gets better...

This new office space will come at no cost to property taxpayers. To explain how we are planning to do this, let me take a step back.

With state changes to Industrial Development Agencies, non-profit organizations had few options available to them to finance new projects. We recognized this problem and we went to work. Then last August, the County was approached, as we often are, by a business looking for help.

In this case, St. Joseph's Hospital was limited by the financing options available to it. One of their few remaining options was the NYS Dormitory Authority.

In addition to being expensive, the revenue generated by the Dormitory Authority was being packaged up and sent to underwrite state government in Albany.

I don't know about you, but I think Albany takes enough of our money.

So we implemented our plan to solve the problem.

We created a new legal entity called the Onondaga Civic Development Corporation, OCDC for short, and with this legislature's support, within 60 days our new local development corporation was given the ability to provide St. Joe's with the financing method it needed. The hospital has already broken ground on its expansion project and we are glad we could help.

In similar fashion, Dr. Neil Murphy at SUNY-ESF is using the OCDC to finance construction of its new student housing.

The fees generated by these projects will no longer be sent to Albany. They will stay right here in our community to support our own economic development efforts.

My office will ask the board of directors of the OCDC to use its resources to pay for expenses on a five-year lease in Washington Station for use as the one-stop shop for Economic Development.

In an ideal world, economic development successes would pay for economic development activities. While our world is not quite yet ideal, this successful collaboration is a tremendous step in the right direction.

And there is other great news in our local economy. In early September, Bob Roberts, the CEO of SRC, announced that his company now employs 1,000 people. Congratulations on this important milestone and please keep creating those jobs here in Onondaga County!

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We learned last year that Crucible, one of our county's oldest employers was facing bankruptcy and closure. Not willing to simply stand by as the community faced the prospect of losing these valuable jobs, we got involved.

After months of work with our Economic Development team, Crucible and Empire State Development Corporation we reached a conclusion.

J.P. Industries purchased the Crucible plant in late September and announced that they would hire back 200 steelworkers within the first 60 days of operation. I'm happy to confirm that Crucible Industries is again making steel at its plant on State Fair Boulevard and as of today has hired 237 employees.

To these business leaders and to every other manager of an Onondaga County business –large or small – that created jobs in the past year, I offer my heartfelt thanks on behalf of all of us.

As I said, by almost any measure, 2009 was a difficult year. But at the end of 2009, the unemployment rate in Onondaga County stood at 7.6%. With the National unemployment rate at 9.7% and New York State's at 8.8%, the unemployment picture in our county is a little brighter than elsewhere. It's successes like these that keep us ahead.

To encourage additional successes like these, we must continue to address high property taxes. One of the many, less obvious factors affecting our high taxes is sprawl.

Sprawl itself is an environmental concern. But sprawl with no population growth is an economic problem which affects every single taxpayer in Onondaga County.

When the same number of people are paying for more and more miles of roads, sewer pipes and water infrastructure, it takes only simple math to calculate the increased costs per person.

As you may know, settlement in Onondaga County has been guided by the 2010 plan – a plan currently being updated.

The goal of the settlement plan is to encourage smart growth and prevent sprawl. As you can probably tell by looking around the county, we haven't been entirely successful curbing sprawl...

But it's my goal to put together a new settlement plan that will do just that. Please watch as more information becomes available from our planning department.

2010 brings a new opportunity to consider the way in which Onondaga County shares its sales tax revenue. For the past 10 years, Onondaga County has shared over half of its sales tax revenue with the towns, villages, school districts and the City of Syracuse.

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In addition to being 3rd among counties in New York State in terms of what it shares, Onondaga County also protects its municipalities from any sales tax shortfalls – no matter how badly the economy performs.

In 2009, when sales tax collections in the county were down significantly, this agreement required Onondaga County to pay more than \$7 million to keep the other municipalities whole.

Reductions in revenue have the effect of encouraging governments to reduce spending. By shielding municipalities from economic downturns, taxpayers are prevented from realizing potential savings.

I respectfully request that the legislature correct this policy. I also ask that you move in a direction that adds transparency to every level of government. This generous sharing formula has the effect of subsidizing municipalities and by artificially propping up other governments, we are not being transparent.

We in government would all be wise to consider ourselves with joint balance sheets.

The federal and state governments collect taxes, the county, towns, villages and city collect taxes. We collect fire taxes, library taxes, school taxes, sales tax and the list goes on. What we must not lose sight of is that we are all asking the same people for their hard earned money to operate our governments. We have an absolute responsibility to reduce taxes, no matter who is collecting them.

We are working very hard to modernize government. Too many of us perform the same service in the same place, we have too many layers of government and we collect and spend too much tax money.

By changing the sales tax formula and continually discussing how we can share services we can lessen the property tax burden on our entire community.

Consolidation is one of those areas into which many elected officials have been reluctant to tread. Most people are happy with their local government, and reluctant to change. But are they still willing in 2010 to pay the ever increasing costs?

In the Town of Clay, when voters were given the choice between saving \$1 million dollars annually and having their own police department, they chose the million dollars. I believe other voters will feel the same way.

I'd also like to point out that consolidation isn't a Republican issue or a Democratic issue, and I pledge to all of you that I will work with anyone who wants to bring more efficient government to our community.

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Keeping in mind our joint balance sheets, another place we can save taxpayer dollars is by working with the volunteer fire service.

I have tremendous respect for our emergency services volunteers. You are doing things that most of your neighbors will not do, and you deserve our respect and our gratitude.

You also deserve our support. I have directed our Department of Emergency Management to take a more active role, to ensure that there is proper personnel and proper equipment responding to emergencies.

In addition to my responsibility to the volunteers, I also have the tremendous responsibility for public safety in our community.

While County Government has no statutory authority to govern fire departments, I will do everything possible to influence policy and to ensure public safety.

Taxpayers must know that appropriate equipment and personnel will respond when they call for help.

To that end, I have also directed the Department of Emergency Management to find a way to make response time data available to the public. The public has a right to know what the ability is of their volunteer fire service to respond in an emergency.

And, Onondaga County residents pay significant fire protection tax bills. In 2009, Fire Districts collected over 28 million dollars in fire taxes. As a point of reference, the entire budget for the City of Syracuse Fire Department is about 31 million dollars – and they pay their firefighters.

One of the reasons that our fire district expenses are high, is the duplication of fire equipment. I'd like to share some numbers with you. In Onondaga County alone, we have the following fire equipment.

- 151 Fire Engines
- 48 Ladder Trucks
- 26 Tankers
- 32 Heavy Rescues
- 41 Light Rescues
- And we support 57 fire departments with 96 fire stations

I do not intend to minimize the important work that our volunteers do, however we cannot continue to spend this much money on a tremendous duplication of equipment.

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The status of volunteers in our community should be second only to our veterans, and to honor our veterans a unique program was initiated in 2009 called the "Return the Favor Discount Program". This program recognizes and thanks military Veterans for their service to our country. The creation of this program was a combined effort of County Clerk Ann Ciarpelli, Veterans Services Agency Director Bob McLean, and County Legislator Bob DeMore. Participating county merchants have agreed to honor the card and provide Veterans with a discount on purchases. We owe Veterans our appreciation and this is one small way that we can express our gratitude for their service.

And to all of the veterans in the room, thank you for your service...

Before I end, I would like to talk about people's impression of winter in Central New York. For those who think that we batten down the hatches and hibernate, I'd like to correct the record.

The truth of the matter, is that we plowed 18 inches of snow out of the way on Friday morning so that on Saturday, 34,616 of our friends could set the NCAA on campus attendance record watching Syracuse University shut Villanova down. Congratulations to the now #1 ranked Syracuse Orange.

More than 60,000 people visited the Everson Museum of Art for the world-class "Turner to Cezanne", art exhibit. Just as impressive as the exhibit itself was the way in which the Everson, the Symphony, Syracuse Stage, the Opera, the Onondaga Historical Association, and other organizations worked together to draw visitors inspired by "Turner to Cezanne".

Then, this community built an outdoor hockey rink so that 21,508 of us could set a new AHL attendance record when the Syracuse Crunch became the first team in the league to stage an outdoor hockey game.

And, if that wasn't enough, in the middle of it all we had the privilege of hosting the 2010 Winter Games of the New York State Special Olympics. The games were a tremendous success due to the more than 700 volunteers from Central New York who turned out to help coordinate the events. And when the games return to Onondaga County next year, they will be greeted by the completion of our downtown lighting project.

Shortly before taking office I learned that world renowned lighting expert Howard Branston had crafted a plan for Onondaga County which had not been implemented.

We took action, and I am happy to report that this exciting project will be finished this year. Not only will extraordinary architecture be highlighted around Columbus Circle but it will go a long way toward increasing the sense of security and vitality of downtown at night.

As we work in 2010 we must remain vigilant. There are very real challenges on our immediate horizon that we must deal with.

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These are uncertain times, and we must be ready to deal with further reductions of sales tax revenue and state budget cuts.

While this is a stressful time to be in government, it also presents an opportunity for elected leaders to do just that...

To Lead...

It's not always easy, in fact the right decisions are often the most difficult, but to the elected officials in this room, I challenge you to stand up and lead.

With courage and leadership, I am confident we will come through stronger than ever before – and as we clear these hurdles we may start looking toward our future, no longer trying to simply stay afloat but instead moving to create a more vibrant community for generations to come.

Thank you for coming, please have a safe drive home and a pleasant evening.