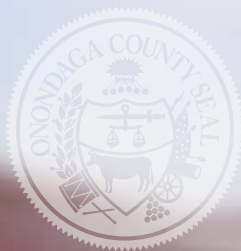


STATE OF THE COUNTY TWO THOUSAND NINE

JOANNE M. MAHONEY
COUNTY EXECUTIVE



Thank you and Good evening

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you from the recently renovated auditorium at Wellwood Middle School.

Thank you to the choir. Thank you to Superintendent Kaiser and Principal Almonte for allowing me this opportunity.

And thank you Mayor Olson for your invitation to present my SOC in this beautiful auditorium. After speaking at Shea (Bellevue Middle School) last year Mayor Olson asked me to consider coming to Fayetteville Manlius for this year's address. I appreciate the work he did to put it together.

Before we begin, let us take a moment to acknowledge our service men and women stationed around the world. We are grateful for their service to our country.

Greetings Chairman Meyer members of the Onondaga County Legislature

I would like to take a moment to introduce Department Heads who have joined my administration since the last SOC.

- Jim Rowley – Chief Financial Officer
- Mary Beth Primo – Director of Economic Development
- Ken Beam – Commissioner Information Technology
- Brian Donnelly – Commissioner, Department of Transportation
- Bob Long – Commissioner of Mental Health
- Patti Pastella – Commissioner Department of Water Environment Protection
- Bob McLean – Director Veterans Service Agency
- Julius Edwards - Director Commission on Human Rights
- Don Jordan – Director Planning agency
- Mark Stasko – Director of Risk Management

Please allow me to recognize and welcome our District Attorney, Bill Fitzpatrick, our Comptroller Bob Antonacci, County Clerk Ann Ciarpelli, and representing Sheriff Walsh is Undersheriff Warren Darby.

Thank you Mayor Driscoll for being here – I know you are in your eighth and final year as Mayor, but I am confident that your service to this community will continue.

To the State, County, Town and Village officials who are here tonight – thank you for the work you are doing. I look forward to our continued partnership in the upcoming year.

To the Onondaga County Department Heads, thank you for your hard work and the service that you provide on behalf of the citizens of Onondaga County.

I stand before you tonight to deliver my second State of the County Address. 2008, the first year of my administration, was an exciting and challenging year.

This time last year, I was reporting to you on the Opportunity Agenda Action Plan which was established in partnership with my transition team. A commitment I made at that time was that I would publish a report card to let you know how we are doing meeting the goals we set.

I am pleased to tell you that the report card is out and you can obtain a copy at www.ongov.net or by contacting my office.

Economy

The topic that most dominates our conversations, and our actions today, is the economy. It has been the single biggest issue in our county in the past year. Its effect was felt in \$4/gallon gas prices and we recognized that folks were hurting.

When we reviewed the data and determined that there was no benefit from the gas tax cap, we lifted it and looked for a better way to relieve the tax burden. The revenue generated by the gasoline tax was used to lower people's property taxes, and I am happy to report that our tax rate in Onondaga County is the lowest it has been since 1965.

The economy's effect is also being felt in record unemployment rates and the announcement that two icons of Central New York manufacturing are closing; Syracuse China and Magna.

The State cut funding for Onondaga County twice last year and the Governor has proposed even deeper cuts. The economy is affecting every one of us in this room, and all of these things have significantly impacted Onondaga County's budget.

In light of all of that, I am extremely proud to tell you that when Onondaga County officially closes its books next month, we believe we will do so in the black.

For the first time, department heads were asked to implement austerity budgets for the entire year in 2008, and it is due in large part to their ability to do more with less that we were able to once again finish the year with a balanced budget.

We are already taking action for 2009. With state funding cuts and shortages in revenues, Jim Rowley projected early on that we had to make changes to avoid a shortfall of \$20M

Once again Onondaga County's department heads rose to the challenge. They are all currently working with austerity budgets and will close half of that shortfall themselves.

We have also structured a cost reduction plan to address the remaining \$10.7 million shortfall in 2009. At the state level, the Governor has proposed hundreds of new taxes to generate revenue, but here at the county level, we are solving our own budget issues with reductions in spending. And we are examining ALL of our options

I am the only full-time employee in Onondaga County Government that did not get a raise. It may be a small dollar amount but I hope it signifies my own personal commitment to solving our budget crisis.

The Federal Stimulus Money and the FMAP money, which is your children and grandchildren's money, can help in the short term--- if the State does not take away with one hand what the federal government has given us in the other--- but we can no more rely on the federal government to solve our problems than we have been able to rely on the state.

Because the Stimulus Money will be awarded on a competitive basis, I have asked a small group of county employees---to be led by the extremely capable administrator for physical services, Jean Smiley-- to work together as a Stimulus SWAT team and seek out opportunities that will put Onondaga County front and center when funding is awarded.

Still we must ensure that Onondaga County is able to stand on its own; and for that reason, we are looking at everything we do. While ALL the programs the County funds are well intentioned, we have had to take a long hard look at them. Our Human Services Administrator Ann Rooney is to be commended for the work she has done examining programs for which we contract.

We drew critical parameters and agreed that we would continue the programs that provide Food, Shelter, Health and Safety. We have had to make some very difficult choices. There is a lot of benefit to being the County Executive, but there are times when it is not easy. My administration is not able to ignore the difficult issues or abstain from deciding when there is no easy choice.

We temporarily suspended contracts that did not meet the critical needs we outlined. While people want their programs reinstated, they would have a difficult time finding one to trade.

But as Thomas Edison once said, "Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work."

There is no denying our economy is a problem, but I also see opportunity; opportunity to re-examine our way of doing business, opportunity to make County Government more efficient, opportunity for partnership and progress, and opportunity to better meet the changing needs of our community

We asked our very capable Department Heads to examine ways that services could be delivered differently; and one shining example of the success of such forward thinking is our Nurse Family Partnership Program administered through our Health Department

When we learned that the state was cutting COPS funding for this program we gathered a group of very smart county employees around a table and set to the task of finding alternative funding sources. This program provides critical services to at-risk first time expectant mothers and their children through age two.

I was thrilled to see a letter last week from the *National* Nurse Family Partnership praising our County Health Department and our Department of Social Services for successfully finding a way to continue funding this program.

That is just one example of the new ways we are doing business to ensure that Onondaga County will not only survive, but thrive long into the future - after the economy rebounds and stimulus money is spent.

I am also proud to announce, that despite the very difficult economy, we have maintained our investment grade bond ratings. I personally traveled to New York City with Ed Kochian, Jim Rowley and Joan Ferrara from our finance department and met with the rating agencies. We assured them of Onondaga County's firm financial footing and our intent to maintain our healthy fund balance.

They rewarded our willingness to make difficult decisions to solve our budgetary shortfalls without unnecessarily dipping in to our reserves. And those ratings are very valuable. Because of our excellent bond rating we were able to sell our current \$61M issue with a true interest cost of 3.56%. This is our cost of money, what we will pay in interest over the life of the bond issue. We were able to achieve this rate because of our superior AA rating.

Compared to a single A rating whose issues are selling at 5.3%, we will save \$350K *per year* in interest cost over the life of the bond issue. Of the 62 New York State counties, only 2 have a higher rating than Onondaga County. This puts us in a very competitive position when our economy settles and businesses seek to invest and expand; and I fully intend to take advantage of this opportunity. It is important to remember that despite these difficult economic times Onondaga County remains a leader in New York State

Upstate Mandate Relief

During the last year, I was joined by the County Executives of Monroe and Erie counties to form the Upstate Mandate Relief Commission

Please let me take a moment to recognize three individuals who represented Onondaga County and did a tremendous amount of work with the commission. Bill Fisher, Cydney Johnson, and Joel Delmonico worked to present real options to Governor Paterson, and I was happy to see that their work is reflected in his proposed budget.

County Workforce

I also want to take a moment to thank the employees of Onondaga County who work daily at exceptional levels.

When I took office last year they did not miss a beat. They kept on working and did their jobs well. Many of the highlights of this past year are a credit to them; and I am grateful to the entire County workforce for their commitment and service to this community.

Highlights

As many of you know last February I halted \$250m in construction costs for regional sewage treatment plants to move to a more environmentally friendly approach that uses both gray and green infrastructure. We are working collaboratively now with the Atlantic States Legal Foundation and the State DEC to explore new advances in technology, to incorporate modern storm water flow control techniques, and avoid a series of regional treatment facilities being built.

The lake is now cleaner than scientists and skeptics alike ever imagined it would be. The result of this new approach to cleaning the lake will reduce costs and improve water quality.

In 2008 and for the first time ever, the Department of Water and Environmental Protection recorded Phosphorus levels that are in compliance with New York State Water Quality Guidance Values. The enhanced treatment facilities at the Metro Sewage Treatment Plant have had a significant, positive impact on water quality and progress continues daily to return the lake to its natural state.

Efforts for a greener community are also taking root. We are making every effort to protect our vast natural resources and reduce any unnecessary costs associated with our system of combined storm water and sewer overflows. We are further ahead than most areas in New York State, and as a result, we have positioned ourselves to receive federal stimulus money to move some of our projects forward.

My 2009 budget created two new positions within WEP to reflect the new lake cleanup strategy: a stormwater position and a green infrastructure position were established to guide Green initiatives and increase public awareness of ways every property owner in Onondaga County can reduce storm water runoff.

We in County government cannot solve the storm water problem alone because the vast majority of property is privately owned. We need your help. In the coming months, you will hear about the specific steps you can take that will help us continue to clean our lake.

More Green Initiatives

Beyond the lake, I am committed to a greener more sustainable community. Internally, I have initiated a countywide sustainability committee, which, under the direction of Pat Mosley, looks at ways to improve the way we conduct the county's business

Outside, we are working with the city of Syracuse to change codes to allow porous pavement to become standard when replacing sidewalks in the City.

The county is replacing the roofs on four identical buildings at the Onondaga County Correctional Facility and we are testing four different sustainable roofs. We are partnering with SUNY ESF and their experts will study the effectiveness and efficiency of each roof for future projects

We have issued a joint Request for Proposals with the City and the City School District to solicit new, sustainable energy projects that will increase the energy supply we will get from renewable energy sources. In addition to being more environmentally friendly, we are hoping to stabilize and even lower our energy costs by pursuing this collaboration.

The county applied for and received its first New York State grant to fund an Urban Forestry Project. The funds will be used to plant trees in the Clinton Combined Sewer Area located on the City's Near West Side to reduce storm water run off.

Grant money will also be used to fund rain gardens in the area and provide related outreach – major parts of these projects will be carried out in the spring and summer of this year.

All of this is very good news for Onondaga County. I have never pretended to have all the answers, but I am committed to providing the necessary leadership to find the way to a more sustainable community.

We have an opportunity to be a principle partner in green initiatives; and beyond that we have an obligation to protect, revitalize and restore our community for future generations.

Increased Demand for Services

As would be expected the poor economy has caused an increase in demand for all of our public benefit programs, especially in those that exist to support working families and the recently unemployed.

2008 brought a 12% increase in Temporary Assistance. Much of this occurred during the latter half of 2008, as the economy worsened. Our Food Stamp caseload increased 14%, and our Medicaid caseload increased 4%.

The downturn in the economy combined with the cold winter season caused enormous stress among low-income households struggling to make ends meet. Just as we have learned with our own county budget, there are two ways to relieve financial pressure for

individuals; through an increase in financial resources in the home, as well as by helping households reduce costs. Onondaga County is providing both.

This year the Departments of Community Development, Aging and Youth, and Social Services worked together to provide energy kits to low-income households. Each kit, containing assorted energy savings items which cost less than \$17 will provide a way for households to save over \$200 year after year. Partnering with the Salvation Army and 22 local senior centers, 4,000 kits were distributed to low-income households.

HEAP, The Home Energy Assistance Program, is a joint effort between Aging and Youth and Social Services. Demand for service has been high this year. Already we have issued over 25,000 regular benefits, an increase of about 10% over last year.

The Day Care Assistance caseload increased 5% as we undertook initiatives in 2008 to strengthen the local child care system and to improve access to benefits for low income households.

We raised rates to contracted day care centers; installed an automated payment system, secured a waiver from NYS to eliminate the child support requirement for day care financial assistance applicants; and, reduced the parent fee for recipients effective January, 2009.

I remain convinced that the investment we make to provide support to families to meet the critical needs of working parents will return dividends for years to come ,will help build stronger families, and produce children who are better prepared for school and learning.

The High Fidelity Wraparound initiative, a unified effort between Departments of Mental Health, Social Services, Probation and Hillbrook, began in 2008, and provides a person centered approach to preventing placement of children in high cost residential care. This cross-department approach is already producing results with the census of children in placement being reduced by 9% during the year.

No Wrong Door

Ensuring accessibility to services and benefit programs is a key goal of the Department of Social Services. The Department is in the implementation stage of our electronic case management system called No Wrong Door.

It will allow us to better track the movement of cases through the various benefit programs. It will also help us identify clients receiving benefits in one program who may also qualify for benefits in another; and the most exciting part of this application is that it will be web-based, allowing greater information linkages with community agencies and clients who are served in common with our county departments.

Program Evaluation Team

Last year I reported to you that I would create a Performance Evaluation System and we have begun to do that with our Performance Evaluation Team. We have an extremely talented and dedicated workforce, with many staff, supervisors and managers often asking, “Wouldn’t it cost less if we did it this way?”, or, “Wouldn’t it be more effective if we tried this?”, yet they are often without the resources, time or staff to complete an evaluation.

With the creation of the Performance Evaluation Team last year, we now have dedicated staff to answer these questions and to ensure that tax dollars are being spent most effectively. In particular, the team is looking at programs that span across departments to maximize our resources, strategically improve and streamline our operations and service delivery, and prevent duplication.

An example of an employee idea that has resulted in taxpayer savings can be found in the idea presented by Tom Callaghan in our IT Department: Did you know that even in your own homes, if you turn off your PC every night you can save up to \$88 per year?

That might not seem like a lot of money, but if you multiply that by the 2,000 county owned PCs left on during non-working hours it results in a potential savings of \$176,000 annually. In terms of energy savings this is equal to the elimination of 150 cars on the road, the planting of 60,000 trees, or the elimination of 1 million pounds of harmful CO2 gases

These are just the types of savings, to our pockets and beyond, that we can find when we roll up our sleeves and do the work.

Operation Impact

Public Safety continues to be a critical service to our community. I would like to thank Sheriff Kevin Walsh for his support, of the Clay police merger, and I would also like to specifically acknowledge the eight deputies and one sergeant who are deployed as part of Operation IMPACT.

Operation IMPACT is a multi-agency response to violent crime in the City of Syracuse, led by the Syracuse Police Department. The primary goal of the operation is to remove guns and violent criminals, from the streets of the City of Syracuse and Onondaga County at large. In 2008 alone, the Sheriff’s IMPACT deployment:

- Made 241 warrant arrests
- Issued more than 5,000 traffic tickets — including 731 Aggravated Unlicensed Operation arrests, and 52 DWI arrests
- Made 165 Penal Law arrests — including several felony arrests involving weapon charges
- And took dangerous weapons off the streets

We are grateful to all those who work in law enforcement for putting their lives on the line daily to protect the citizens of Onondaga County

Fire Departments

Many of you have heard the discussions in the news lately about our local fire service. The vast majority of our fire departments do a tremendous job providing fire protection to our community. They are made up of hard working men and women who make sacrifices everyday to protect us. They truly are our heroes.

Under New York State law, the role of counties in fire service is one of coordination only. Onondaga County is not permitted to operate a fire department; in fact these fire departments are individual municipal forms of government. The County can no more force a fire department to comply, than we could the City of Syracuse.

The New York State Commission on Local Government Efficiency and Competitiveness recommends that counties explore the idea of managing fire protection. In the next few weeks, I have meetings with key state government officials scheduled in Albany, and I intend to ask for their help in providing counties with the tools we need to exercise direct management over fire protection services. In the mean time I will do all I can to encourage better cooperation among fire departments.

Interoperable Radios

In line with our emphasis on Public Safety, we continue to work with State officials to secure telephone surcharge legislation to fund the interoperable radio equipment linking emergency personnel throughout the county on one network.

I would like to thank our local state representatives who recently reintroduced this legislation. I am optimistic that it will be approved and we will be able to move forward with streamlined emergency communications between all our partners.

Economic Development

When I was elected County Executive I committed to being involved personally with our Economic Development efforts, and I am doing so on several fronts.

I have met with the CEO's of many of the areas largest companies to offer support and help them address issues they are facing. I have been courting potential businesses who will help affirm our area as a leader in green manufacturing.

It is very disappointing to see much of the progress we made hampered by the uncertainty of the New York State Empire Zone program. Governor Patterson's proposal to abolish the program is already having a disastrous effect on economic development efforts in Onondaga County.

We are working with our State representatives to find solutions. The system has been abused and millions of state dollars have been wasted, but I am convinced that with effort and creativity, the state will be able to fix the loopholes without having to do away entirely with this very valuable Economic Development tool.

Israel

In November, I was invited by then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to attend the Prime Minister's International Conference. This event was attended by over 500 people, representing more than 40 countries

I came back with the clear understanding that the people of Israel are eager to do business with companies in the United States. A number of Israeli companies own patents for new technology but lack manufacturing capability, and do not have the desired access to the US market.

We are presenting them with creative options that have not been used here in County government before. Instead of the enormous capital investment necessary to start a manufacturing operation from the ground up, we are encouraging them to look at ways to use the high quality manufacturing capacity we already have in place, a capacity that is not currently being maximized. By crafting product licensing agreements, our workforce will benefit from the jobs created.

We can provide a tremendous competitive position for companies interested in taking advantage of U.S. Green Building Council's LEED tax credit program, which provides tax savings to businesses who buy products manufactured locally, and we are getting that information to the decision makers. It is clear that there would be mutual benefit for companies to manufacture here in Onondaga County.

More Economic Development

I am also engaged in Economic Development related to making Syracuse and Onondaga County a destination location. The building of a Convention Center Hotel is my number one priority for stimulus money. We are ready to go on this project and the developer has made effort to add green elements to the design so it can qualify.

I was pleased to recently learn that increased funding for marketing through the Convention and Visitors Bureau is already yielding results.

In collaboration with the CVB our parks department will host the ESPN-owned bass tour for the fourth consecutive year this August. This will be the crowning event on the Elite Series tour. Keeping national attention on the superb fishing assets in our area with the final event of the BASS Master Tour at Oneida Shores is great news for fishermen and the community alike.

We are also working collaboratively to bring other nationally recognized events to our community to further highlight our tremendous water and natural assets: The Iron Girl

Triathlon will be held at Oneida Shores in July. They have a three year commitment to Syracuse and anticipate up to 1,000 participants including professional athletes.

Hydrofest returns to Onondaga Lake Park in June courtesy of the Updowntowners for three days of vintage hydroplane racing; and, Watercross (jetski) racing returns to Onondaga Lake Park in May with participants from throughout the country competing. It is yet another free event showcasing the renaissance of Onondaga Lake while generating tourism interest and income.

Events like this, as well as Jazz Fest, our Zoo and Lights on the Lake are bringing national attention to Onondaga County while stimulating our local economy and improving our reputation as a destination community

Chiefs

2008 saw dramatic improvement in the county's working relationship with the Syracuse Chiefs Baseball Club. The acrimony that dominated the relationship has been replaced with cooperation and an understanding that working together we can both be more successful. I thank the Chiefs for the effort they have made to improve our working partnership, and I thank Jean Smiley and Gordon Cuffy for your time and effort in making it better.

A review of reports generated by the Comptroller's office provides clear data that times have changed. Since May of last year, only 10 months ago, the Chiefs have written checks to the county totaling over \$250K to pay for utilities. When compared to zero dollars in 2007, zero in 2006 and less than \$100K in total since 2004 it becomes immediately clear that there is real value in our new way of doing business.

And the icing on the cake... Many of you have heard the Dave Mathews Band is coming to Alliance Bank Stadium on August 4th. We hope this will be just the beginning of bringing national acts (and the associated tourism dollars) to this venue.

I am supportive of the Chief's efforts to use the stadium for concerts that will have significant impact on the local economy. We have a better working partnership than the county has had in years, one that is resulting in real benefit for the Chiefs, the county and our entire community.

Literacy

I take every opportunity to read in our local schools, and provide books to children wherever possible. A 100% Literacy Rate in Onondaga County is possible, and I truly believe the answer too many of the chronic problems our community faces.

It is the answer to improved graduation rates and decreased dependence on social services, increased workforce readiness and decreased crime rates,

We know these things. We have the ability to get there now, rather than later, but we have to work to make it happen. This is something everyone can be involved in – read to a child, donate a book, tutor an adult who struggles with reading skills.

Literacy has long been known as an economic measure for a region’s “human capital” Through the efforts of Deputy County Executive Ed Kochian, we are striving everyday to make a bigger impact on the local community with our literacy efforts - The Literacy Parade, the World’s Largest Bedtime story, the summer reading program.

Through the establishment of a Literacy Fund in my name, we are aiming to connect the many other groups who are working toward improved literacy locally, and make sure every child has access to books and reading opportunities. There remains no doubt in my mind that a literate population can be transformative.

One of our partners in Literacy, Lemoyne College, four months ago received the largest gift ever made to an educational institution in Onondaga County. This \$50 million gift from the McDevitt estate will be used by Le Moyne to continue working alongside Onondaga County and its many corporate, civic and educational partners to build and expand the industry sectors that hold the most potential for growth for this community.

OCPL

I would like to publicly welcome Onondaga County Public Library’s new director

Elizabeth Dailey shares a passion for literacy and I look forward to working with her in the months and years ahead.

OCC

Under the leadership of its President Debbie Sydow, Onondaga Community College is thriving. With the changing nature of our economy, OCC will play an even more pivotal role in retraining our local workforce.

With 11,400 students, OCC's enrollment is up nearly 10% since the spring of 2008. They are seeing students with perhaps the most diverse backgrounds ever.

In addition to the steady stream of traditional students, there are many who have chosen to return to school for job retraining. We are fortunate to have the college to fill that role.

I am also pleased to report tremendous progress in OCC's construction and renovation projects. The athletic fields are done. The renovations to Mahwinney Hall are nearly complete. And design work for the arena facility will soon be underway.

I would like to commend the College for undertaking their first capital campaign in 10 years. In their efforts to become more self sufficient they have raised over \$4 million dollars towards their \$6 M goal. They are well on their way and I thank them for all they are doing.

Community Development Lead Money

Our Department of Community Development, based on outstanding performance on prior grants, was awarded two grants totaling \$6.6million through HUD's Lead Paint Hazard Control Program.

These funds will provide for the elimination of lead paint hazards helping us to reach our goal of making all of our housing lead free for Onondaga County's children.

Van Duyn

We are in the process of making a number of capital improvements to Van Duyn to ensure the safety and well being of our residents. Decisions are being made strategically so that we can put Van Duyn in the strongest position possible. It is crucial that the beds remain in our community.

As promised, we are looking at our options for Van Duyn Home and Hospital in the long term. Fully funded for 2009, we are taking this year to plan the future of this facility.

I would also like to recognize the volunteers at Van Duyn and throughout the County. They provide immeasurable service in so many areas, and we are grateful for their ongoing contributions.

Say Yes to Education

I am very encouraged about the potential for the Say Yes to Education Program currently in its first year of implementation in the Syracuse City School District. There is some confusion about the program, and I encourage you to learn what you can and help me support what is a tremendous opportunity for children in our community.

I have said it often. We can either give children the tools they need to succeed on their own or we can pay the extraordinarily high social services costs of our failure to do so.

The Syracuse City School District is the only entire school district in the United States being supported by the Say Yes to Education Foundation. This program provides the vision of college from an early age, supporting students in achieving this goal, and ultimately assisting with the financial burden of college costs. We must embrace this promise for the future for our community's children.

If we truly wish to lower taxes and to decrease the size of our government, then we must make a reasonable investment in our children. Whether you live in the City of Syracuse, the Village of Tully or the Town of Manlius, this program affects you. The vast majority of the tax dollars our county takes from you support the Department of Social Services, the sheriff and our correctional facility.

We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to embrace a private foundation's willingness to help us reverse that trend. It not only helps kids get what they need to lead productive lives, but it will make it possible for you to keep more of your hard earned tax dollars when we succeed. Fostering and enhancing these partnerships is what it will take to break the cycle of poverty and despair, and they have my full support.

Modernization of Government

Now we come to a topic that has been talked about for decades but has resulted in very little action over the years. It has been touted as the solution to fragmented and inefficient government systems, and I am proud to say it is in finally happening in Onondaga County I'm talking about Government Modernization.

In July of 2008 the Clay Police Department effectively merged with the Onondaga County Sheriffs Department returning over \$1million per year to the tax payer's pockets, and reducing the overall property tax rate for Town of Clay property owners.

This is the first, **GIANT**, step toward more efficient local government ...ensuring fiscal responsibility to taxpayers in Onondaga County for years to come. The merger has gone very well, and has resulted in a 20% cut in town taxes for Clay property owners, with no increase to County property tax payers.

While we are proud of this merger this is just the beginning – much more can be done to consolidate services and provide savings to the taxpayer, I participate regularly in conversations between local municipalities on a variety of topics.

As you may be aware, the Towns of Cicero and Salina are planning to combine their assessor's offices. My office has been a part of these conversations since the beginning, having met with the New York State Director of the Office of Real Property Service to discuss the coordinated assessment program.

We set up a meeting between the Salina and Cicero Town Supervisors, and discussed the options. Thank you to Supervisors Mark Nicotera and Chet Dudzinski for your forward thinking. With that we have another merger on the horizon and I am working diligently to complete it.

Consolidation and Modernization are also being worked on inside our county government.

While working with Department Heads and senior staff to find places in our budget to trim spending, I also asked them to take a hard look at how they run their own departments. I asked them to look for ways to streamline and be more efficient

I am pleased to report to you today, that we found very real ways to reform, restructure and reorganize some county departments. In the coming months, I will submit plans to the legislature to reorganize some of the county's largest departments, and will show taxpayers that we can continue to do more with less of their money.

This is the Future

This is our future – A more modern and efficient county government and I am exploring all of our options.

Times have changed dramatically since the development of our current local government, and this economy demands change. Technological advances have shortened the distance between towns and communities, between government and the people.

We are no longer going to town in horse and buggy. Many of us have no need to go to town at all. Instead we cyber commute – computers, high speed internet - information and communication have taken on a whole new reality. Services that were once defined by district can now be streamlined for efficiency

The safety of our community is better addressed when communication and cooperation come together. We can accomplish this while also preserving people's identity and pride in their local community's

Now is the time. We finally have proof that it can be successful. We have proof that it can save money. We have proof it can be effective and efficient

My pledge to you remains. I will continue to work to reduce taxes, streamline services, and modernize government in Onondaga County.

In Conclusion

We are meeting the challenges of this economy. We cut our spending. We reduced your taxes. We maintained our excellent bond rating and we found new ways to better deliver your services. We have much to be proud of, much to look forward to, and much work to do.

Once nearly extinct - the American Bald Eagle has returned, and is thriving on Onondaga Lake. According to the American Bald Eagle Society – “Eagles do not live in isolation! Because they are near the top of the food chain, they become an irreplaceable indicator for measuring the health of the entire ecological system in which they live.”

This speaks volumes for the work and progress that is taking place in Onondaga County. Whether it is the lake improvements, our commitment to modernization of government, service delivery or Literacy initiatives, all indicators are pointing Onondaga County toward a very promising future – a future in which we flourish for generations to come. Just as the Bald Eagle remains a symbol of our country's greatness; it has now become a symbol of Onondaga County's ability to reinvent itself.

Moving forward, I will take full advantage of all our resources, our firm financial footing, our unlimited natural resources, our outstanding work force and our underutilized manufacturing capacity to steer us in a direction that will place our community, our centrally located piece of New York State, into the world economy!