

Chairman Morse, Majority Leader Commisso, Minority Leader Carman, Comptroller Conners, Sheriff Apple, District Attorney Soares, County Clerk Hidley, members of our State Legislative delegation, members of the Albany County Legislature, invited guests and my fellow citizens of Albany County, I thank you for joining me for my State of the County address.

Thank you also to Arielle King from Albany High School for that moving rendition of our National Anthem and for Father Lefebvre's inspirational invocation.

I'd like to take a moment to thank Legislator Christine Benedict. Bipartisan support was needed on many occasions for the good of Albany County and, as Minority Leader, Ms. Benedict understood that. Christine, I thank you for that and look forward to your continued service on the legislature and to working with Minority Leader Lee Carman.

Let me begin this evening by sharing with you my belief that the State of the County message should be, at its core, a report on our progress in fulfilling the important mission we have as County leaders.

Fundamentally, that mission is to serve those in need and to create better opportunities, economic and otherwise, for our struggling middle class and poor, so as to improve the quality of life of our communities and to make a better future for our children.

Big challenges, particularly in tough economic times. But I believe that through effective and strong leadership; through strategic partnerships and through thoughtful and inclusive vision, we can and we will meet these challenges and, in so doing, improve the lives of the people of Albany County.

And so tonight, I'm here in part to report on the progress we've made and on the successes we've achieved toward that end.

And fair warning, I'm also here tonight to call for action, on some very important ideas and initiatives and to ask for your support in moving them forward.

When I stood here a year ago, I outlined several key initiatives that would define 2013 and called it a pivotal year for Albany County. And there is no question that it was.

We set in motion plans to address our financial issues, to streamline operations, to accept responsibility for how to resolve the decades-long issue of what to do with the Albany County Nursing Home and to work collaboratively to find solutions to the challenges we face.

The result was the enactment of a budget for 2014 that came under the property tax cap; that did not adversely affect any programs or services; that did not lay-off any county employees and that set the framework for turning over operation of the Nursing Home to a Local Development Corporation.

Although we have cut costs, we still face financial challenges largely created by unfunded state and federal mandates.

So finding new ways to do things more efficiently and effectively remains a priority of my administration. That's why I asked our State Comptroller early on to evaluate the performance of our County operations and I look forward to his recommendations. But in the interim, we have worked hard to achieve efficiencies across all departments.

In the years prior to my administration, the County had to take out short-term loans of more than 15 million dollars annually to deal with cash flow challenges. This is not a good business practice. During my first two years in office, we have been able to significantly reduce this borrowing by over 4 million dollars.

We did this by realistically projecting revenues - my proposed budgets have never, and will never, include imaginary revenues to make the books look balanced when they really aren't. We've also been prudent regarding expenses and in finding cost savings throughout all of our departments.

While we are in significantly better financial shape now than when I took office, I have asked our legislature to approve my request to participate in the State Financial Review Board's Review process. If we're selected, the Board would look at our books and make recommendations on how to further improve our finances, our management and our delivery of

services. In return, we could be offered a grant or loan of up to 5 million dollars to implement these recommendations. That's a great opportunity and I look forward to your support of this request.

There is no question that the cuts we have made have required us to call on our employees to do more with less, and they have responded. The strength of any government lies in its workforce and we are very fortunate to have a dedicated, hardworking group of men and women. In fact, largely because of their efforts, Albany County is known throughout the state for providing more and better services than almost anywhere else.

In recognition of their importance, last year I resolved the labor issues that arose from the 2009 decision to furlough county employees. That resolution avoided a potential one-point-four million dollar liability to the County and was the springboard to settling many long outstanding contracts.

As a matter of fact, we were recently able to settle 6 collective bargaining agreements through the year 2016 and we are working hard to settle ALL outstanding agreements.

I thank our employees who have partnered with us to help make Albany County a better place to work.

As I've said, it takes both vision and partnership to truly make success happen. When it comes to economic development, we've forged that winning combination. Last May, I joined Lieutenant Governor Duffy on the announcement of the redevelopment of Wellington Row, a project that will include new housing and retail, as well as offices for Aeon Nexus.

The good news continued in August as I joined the Empire State Development Authority on the announcement by Columbia Development and B-B-L Hospitality of a new 48 million dollar hotel to be built inside the old Dewitt Clinton hotel.

In December Governor Cuomo approved a plan for a convention center project linking downtown Albany, the DeWitt Clinton Hotel, the Times Union Center and the Empire State Plaza. This project will create 157 permanent jobs and 114 construction jobs over the next two years and will generate over 160 million dollars in investments. Thank you, Governor

Cuomo and all of our partners involved in this project. We look forward to putting shovels into the ground this summer and again hosting the NCAA and other national tournaments at our Times Union Center.

From the start, my administration has been committed to working with area businesses to help them grow and prosper in Albany County. To further these efforts, last year we put out an R-F-P for economic development services and recently awarded a contract to the Arsenal Business & Technology Partnership. They will map out a strategic economic development plan to assist us in fully understanding how we can better retain, expand and attract businesses in our County and build upon our successes to date.

Successes like the Al Tech Loan Fund, which is run in partnership with the Albany-Colonie Regional Chamber. The Loan Fund is a valuable tool that we have used to support development within the County. In 2013 alone, Al Tech funded manufacturing, retail and construction companies, including minority and women-owned businesses.

The funding was important for job creation in the county.

With that goal in mind, last week, I announced a new job initiative, a smart phone app called Albany County Tweet My Jobs. Those looking for work will be notified about job openings. Businesses that need employees will have an opportunity to find qualified people.

Over the next several months, I plan to work closely with the County's IDA on exploring ways we at the County can do more to expand our efforts to make Albany County synonymous with job growth, economic development and educational opportunities.

On the issue of educational opportunities, after years of talking about a higher education site for downtown Albany, in January we began hosting Schenectady County Community College classes right here in this building.

Through this partnership, we will provide an excellent alternative for Albany County students. Albany County is projected to pay 10.3 million dollars for all community college tuition this year. With this partnership and

with community college chargeback reform, we anticipate a significant savings for our taxpayers over the next several years.

Our initiative with Schenectady County Community College maximizes the use of our county office space, creates additional economic development opportunities, provides alternative higher education options for Albany County students and reduces the high cost of our community college payments. Thank you SCCC for the partnership we've forged. This is just the beginning.

In addition to what we achieved with SCCC, another one of the great successes of 2013 involved our efforts at Lawson Lake. As you all know, Lawson Lake had been closed for years, and was reopened last July to the public and as a summer camp for kids.

It's already become a favorite spot for fishing, hiking and enjoying the beauty of nature. And this year, we will be expanding the camp by opening additional buildings and creating even greater opportunities for our children.

I'd like to recognize everyone who made this possible including our County Legislature, Sheriff Apple and DA Soares, St. Catherine's Center for Children, the Pride Center of the Capital Region, the Boys and Girls Club and C-D-T-A as well as our own Children, Youth and Families staff. Thank you for answering my call to action and for making Lawson Lake once again one of the jewels of the Capital Region!

As I said at the beginning, caring for the children of our County is critical to our mission and we must do everything we can to nurture and to protect them. Toward that goal, Albany County is leading the way once again in several key areas. The Albany County Health Department has launched a program to help first time moms get the training they need so they can take care of their new babies. This is an important program that will make a difference in the health and wellbeing of the youngest children in our County.

Something else that I believe will make a difference for new parents is a strong Family and Medical Leave policy. That's why I am proposing that the first four weeks of an employee's absence, after the birth or adoption of a child, be a paid parenting leave without having to charge accruals.

This benefit can help to build a strong family foundation, which will ultimately help us build a stronger County workforce. I will ask the legislature to approve such a policy and I thank you for your support.

Last year, in partnership with New York State, we launched an aggressive grant-funded media campaign to educate families that babies are safest when they sleep alone, on their back, in their cribs. We ran public service announcements, put the message on buses and we put posters in hospitals, medical offices and businesses throughout Albany County. I also formed a task force to provide recommendations to further spread the word. I want to recognize Albany Medical Center for being an important partner throughout this campaign. From 2009 to 2012, Albany County had twelve unsafe sleeping deaths. In 2013, that number declined to two.

Clearly, our public information campaign is working, so we will continue the effort and do everything in our power to educate families on this issue to keep our kids safe!

I am also proud to tell you that our Traffic Safety Education Program has received national recognition for its focus on properly installing child safety seats. At a recent traffic safety awards luncheon, Dan and Faith Yates told the story of how on a recent trip to the mall, a reckless driver crashed into their minivan. Their two children, a toddler and an infant, escaped serious injury because their child safety seats had been properly installed at an Albany County Traffic Safety Education Program. This story is a great example of the terrific programs we offer that truly affect the lives of the residents of our county.

In fact, the programs that we offer to keep children safe extend to our schools, to playgrounds and even to the internet. As an example, Albany County is a leader when it comes to bullying prevention. Last year, we established the Albany County Bullying Prevention Task Force which works with schools and community groups to educate kids on how to recognize bullying, and to speak out and stop it.

We know that bullying isn't confined to the school yard. It's expanded to social media. We've made it known that we will not tolerate bullying of any kind and will defend our right to protect those who are being victimized in cyberspace.

Sometimes, no matter what you do, children get into trouble. If they commit a crime and are ordered to pay restitution, it's often their parents who pay and the kids don't learn the consequence of their actions.

Once again, Albany County is leading the way with "Project Growth."

The program is the first of its kind in New York State and is a partnership with, among others, UAlbany, Siena College, The College of Saint Rose, the Central Avenue BID and the Capital City Rescue Mission. Kids participating in the program will get help finding a job, and once they get a paycheck they'll have to pay a portion of that money back.

Kids learn accountability and job skills and victims get restitution. It's a win-win and should serve as a model for other communities.

Speaking of model programs, the Department for Children, Youth and Families has launched an innovative program that will determine the best way for the county to reduce the number of youth placed in secure detention facilities. We've been selected as only one of six Alternative Juvenile Detention sites in New York. This program has proven to be successful in other areas of the Nation in keeping kids out of the system. I congratulate D-C-Y-F for bringing the program to Albany County!

As I've noted several times this evening, the successes we've achieved are due largely because of the strength of our partnerships.

Over the past two years, we have recreated the Veterans Service Bureau to better serve the 20,000 veterans who call Albany County home. The Bureau, with our partners at the Homeless and Travelers Aid Society and the Albany Housing Coalition, helped over 1,700 veterans last year. I'm proud of this accomplishment but we need to do more.

As a veteran, I know full well the challenges returning vets face, and I believe it is shameful that far too many who fought for our country don't have a permanent place to call home. That's why I announced in 2012 a partnership with Soldier On... a nationally recognized program for homeless veterans.

Already, Soldier On has established an Albany County Resource and Referral Center...the first of its kind in New York State...and is looking to

develop housing for Capital Region veterans on the site of the Ann Lee Home.

But the cost to Soldier On for this project will run somewhere around 30 million dollars. It's an ambitious goal, but one that is without question worth the effort and we will do all we can to help Soldier On bring this project to fruition.

In that effort, we'll get help from Charlie Daniels, Bret Michaels and Marshall Tucker who are hosting a concert on May 31st at the Times Union Center and are dedicating a portion of the ticket sales to Soldier On's project. Let's make this concert and this project a success.

At this time I would ask you to join me in recognizing all of the Albany County employees who have served and are currently serving our nation.

To each of you and to the over 20,000 veterans in our county, I pledge that we CAN and that we WILL do more to show our appreciation for the service you have given our nation!

Helping our seniors is an equally important part of our County's mission. Last year, we faced a serious challenge when the federal sequester meant Albany County lost funding for senior programs. How could we tell Mrs. Smith that we wouldn't be able to bring her a meal because of federal cutbacks? We couldn't and didn't. Instead, we found the money to make sure that our seniors were taken care of.

As you know, the care of our seniors at the Albany County Nursing Home was a major issue during the budget process.

After months of discussion and negotiation, I agreed to hire a new administrator for the nursing home to continue running the facility while the legislature creates a Local Development Corporation.

Our 2014 budget reflects county funding for the nursing home through September 30, 2014, by which time it is my hope that a Local Development Corporation will take over operations. Such action will put Albany County on more stable financial ground, while ensuring that our nursing home residents receive the care they need.

And we will take the savings we achieve to offer even more programs for seniors residing in the community. Let's continue to work together to positively resolve these issues. Our seniors deserve no less! In our mission to protect the health, safety and welfare of all our residents, our concern for our environment and for environmental justice must always be a priority.

In January, I partnered with other local leaders to share with the state DEC our concern about a plan by Global Companies to significantly expand the amount of crude oil shipped through the city of Albany and down the Hudson River. Within hours, Governor Cuomo announced an extension of the comment period. He's also directed 5 state agencies to beef up state oversight of the shipment of petroleum products. We joined together; our voices were heard and we will continue to call for action to insure the safety of the people of Albany County.

A key initiative of my administration is to make Albany County the greenest county in New York State. One year ago, I announced the county would implement a Green Team to examine county functions.

And, in December, I signed Local Law A which banned the use of Styrofoam containers for food by food service establishments with more than 15 locations. Within three years, I want all businesses in Albany County to follow these same guidelines.

Tonight, I propose an even bolder green initiative. I call for the establishment of a new Albany County Public Service Agency. The agency will hold the authority to explore any and all options to reduce the energy carbon footprint of Albany County by developing and managing renewable energy projects at existing county facilities. AND, the agency will explore how to provide county residents with the opportunity to purchase excess power not being consumed by county facilities.

I will work closely with the County Legislature to create this agency, with the goal of placing the County in the best position to take advantage of emerging technology to make Albany County a truly green community.

Already, Albany County is a recognized leader in energy conservation. Just a few weeks ago, we were notified that our Sewer District won the 2013 New York Water Environment Association Award in recognition for

its initiative to use waste heat to produce electricity and offset building heat. To date, the project has produced over one million kilowatt hours of electricity and continues to improve our environment.

Last month, I met with municipal leaders from throughout the County and suggested we review the comprehensive Regional Solid Waste Study completed in 2011 and developed viable ways to deal collectively with the pressing issues surrounding recycling and waste disposal. I look forward to Albany County leading the way on this crucial issue.

A greener Albany County means we must preserve and conserve our land. My administration has already dedicated 372 acres for conservation and we are committed to doing more.

Just look at what we've accomplished with our Rail Trail where we have already restored four-and-a-half miles of trail in multiple municipalities. The leadership, vision and partnership that went into this project have already paid off and thanks to a state grant of over a million dollars, we will continue to work with our local partners on the trail between Bethlehem and Albany.

This project is also a great example of what can be achieved when local governments work collaboratively. Governor Cuomo has encouraged such regional cooperation at all government levels. Toward that goal, I have held numerous meetings with local leaders to talk about how we can continue to work together to achieve savings and increase efficiencies. I am pleased to tell you, it's working.

Albany County was awarded a Local Government Efficiency grant to identify opportunities for consolidation of local highway and road services and we expect to see a final report this spring.

But already Albany County DPW crews have assisted localities with paving projects and there are cooperative agreements for public works projects in place with a number of local partners.

Our Purchasing Department has also entered into multiple cooperative agreements with local governments.

In fact, we were the first county in the state to draft a bid that New York State utilized.

In the months ahead, we will continue to look for even more opportunities to share services and save tax dollars.

Taking necessary cost-saving measures while delivering top notch services to our residents is critical to Albany County's mission.

That is why we must do our part to enhance and improve the quality of life for all of our neighbors and families.

Today, gas costs over \$3.75 a gallon. The median cost of a home in this region is nearly 250,000 dollars. Yet the average "per capita income," or yearly income per person in Albany County, is just over 20,000 dollars. More than 13% of our residents are living below the poverty line...a good percentage are children and seniors who struggle day in and day out.

With over 20% of Albany County residents relying on government assistance to feed their children and clothe them for school, it is time for leaders to act.

New Yorkers who work full-time should not be poor!

There have been calls to increase the minimum wage at the state level, and I support those calls. Studies have shown that raising the minimum wage is good policy. An increase will help to break the cycle of poverty that is all too real for too many, while also lessening the fiscal burden to municipalities that public assistance brings.

The idea that it will result in job loss is an outdated myth. Studies also show that states with minimum wages higher than the federal level have job growth that is actually stronger overall than in states with the federally-required minimum.

It's a fact: raising the minimum wage is good for the economy, including the local economy. And I agree with Governor Cuomo that we must do it at the state level so that all municipalities are on board together. It is a matter of economic fairness, and we cannot afford to stall on this important issue! So in Albany County, let's work together to make it

known that raising the minimum wage is the right thing to do morally and economically!

While providing services for those in need is central to the mission of county government, we also have an obligation to insure the integrity of the process.

Toward that end, our Department of Social Services investigators and the Sheriff's Office have been successful in identifying those people who claim they deserve programs and services to which they aren't entitled.

Last year, their work resulted in 21 arrests totaling over 415,000 dollars in fraud claims. Additionally, the County saved more than 6.4 million dollars as a result of claims that were denied based on fraudulent applications. Albany County will not tolerate people making fake claims at the expense of those who truly need it!

As part of our ongoing efforts to improve the way we do business, in June, the county launched an online auction process for foreclosed properties to streamline auction sales and simplify the process for non-profit organizations looking to use the foreclosed properties to revitalize blighted areas of the county. This process allows us to fully evaluate bids and evaluate them for their benefit to the community.

In August, we launched a new and improved Albanycounty.com. The website is constantly being updated with information to insure both accessibility and accountability to our residents. The website also offers greater transparency with See Through Albany County where you can find the budget, how many County cars each department has, where County cell phones are allocated and to even check County salaries.

When I took office, I pledged to open up as much information to you as possible and tonight I renew that pledge.

I also pledge that moving forward:

We will continue to find new ways to save taxpayer money.

We will continue to make Albany County synonymous with economic development.

We will continue our efforts to be the greenest county in New York State.

And most importantly,

We will continue our commitment to excellence in the service of all of our residents.

As I said at the very beginning of my remarks this evening, insuring the financial wellbeing of our county government; creating greater economic opportunities for all of our residents; and protecting and serving children, the elderly, veterans, and the disadvantaged are central to the mission of County government.

Every decision we make should be made through the prism of how do we best fulfill this mission. And fulfilling this mission is what I am committed to accomplishing in leading this great County.

Working together over the past two years, we have positively touched the lives of thousands of County residents.

It has taken hard work, vision and partnership, but because of the successes we have achieved, I am pleased and proud to tell you that the State of Our County is strong and that our future is full of promise!

And so, my final pledge this evening, my final call to action, is to work with all of you to further our mission to make Albany County the most innovative and most progressive county in New York State and to always put the interests of the people we serve before any other.

Thank you for your support; thank you for joining me this evening.

May God bless Albany County and all its residents.