
**BROOME COUNTY LEGISLATURE
REGULAR SESSION
MONDAY, MARCH 1, 2004**

The Legislature convened at 4:04 p.m. with a call to order by the Chair, Daniel A. Schofield. The Clerk, Louis P. Augustini, read the fire exit announcement and called the Attendance Roll, Present-18, Absent-1 (Mather).

The Chair, Mr. Schofield, led the members of the Legislature in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, followed by a moment of silence.

WRITTEN OR ORAL PRESENTATIONS OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE:

Chairman Schofield introduced County Executive Jeffrey P. Kraham presenting the State of the County Address for 2004.

"Just an hour ago, I had the honor of participating in the deployment ceremony for the New York Army National Guard 204th Engineer Combat Battalion at the West End Armory. I told these brave citizen-soldiers as they head off to "Operation Enduring Freedom" in Afghanistan, that our community was solid in its support of their efforts to insure that the battleground for the war on terrorism does not reach our soil again."

"As these soldiers leave their families and put their careers on hold, I pledged to them that we all would do everything we could to minimize the hardships that their families will face during their tour of duty. Our prayers are with them and their families."

Chairman Schofield, Members of the Legislature, Distinguished Guests. It is a pleasure to stand before you to deliver my 8th, but certainly not last, State of the County.

When I assumed this office seven years ago, I pledged to you and the members of this community that every day I would provide the leadership to make this community stronger, safer, and even more vibrant.

And I believe that working together, through the partnerships we've helped to create, through a great deal of collective effort, we have laid the foundation for a bright future.

Allow me to take a moment to review a few of the accomplishments of this administration and this legislature. We don't do this often enough.

We have in recent years made major investments in the county's infrastructure.

Working with Senator Libous we refurbished the Broome County Veterans' Memorial Arena and were able to attract the American Hockey League back to Binghamton.

We renovated the Greater Binghamton Airport using a combination of Federal and State support minimizing the impact on local taxpayers. The airport is now playing a major role in the revitalization of our region. Passenger boardings grew by 11.7% in 2003, the largest increase in nearly 20 years.

To allow our airport to grow even stronger, I would like to announce today that beginning April 1st, USAirways will begin twice a day jet service to Philadelphia from Binghamton. The 50 seat regional jets will replace 37 passenger turboprop aircraft.

We secured \$7 million dollars in financing and built a state-of-the-art new public library in downtown Binghamton. Since the library opened in the fall of 2000, it has been visited more than 18 million times, an increase of 278% per month since the opening.

We built a new downtown courthouse with updated family court facilities.

We worked closely with all the Veterans' organizations to create a new medical clinic at the former Binghamton Psychiatric Center.

We constructed senior centers in Whitney Point, Endicott and Harpursville.

We consolidated 911 emergency services saving taxpayers more than \$1 million annually.

We consolidated tax collection services saving more than \$200,000 annually.

We transferred home health care services to Lourdes Hospital saving more than \$200,000 annually.

We consolidated the County's Aviation and Transit departments saving more than \$80,000 annually.

We merged the County's Parks and Public Works departments saving more than \$80,000 annually.

We consolidated Central Foods with the Office for Aging saving more than \$60,000 annually.

We merged the departments of Mental Health and Social Services saving more than \$90,000 annually.

I would like to take a moment to give you the members of this Legislature a round of applause for your vision and commitment to getting these things done.

This afternoon, as we look out over our community, we see a community very clearly on the rebound. When you build the base, success will come.

Don't take it from me, take it from those outside and inside our region making significant investments in our community.

Take it from Endicott Interconnect who recently announced a new homeland security partnership with Ensco that will create 700 jobs in Endicott.

Take it from Lockheed Martin in Owego who has recently obtained several major contracts and are working feverishly to persuade the Defense Department to assemble the President's helicopter here in Greater Binghamton.

Take it from the PGA who recently extended its agreement with the B.C. Open.

Take it from Ari Meisel who is working to revitalize a historic part of the north side of Binghamton.

Take it from Starbucks, Target, Kohls and other national companies who count their facilities on the Vestal Parkway among the busiest in the country.

Take it from the United States military which has invested more than \$40 million dollars in Eureka to create tents to give our soldiers stationed around the world a home away from home.

Take it from the New York Mets who have preserved baseball in Binghamton for years to come.

Take it from the Ottawa Senators who brought a franchise here over competition from Springfield, Massachusetts and other places.

Take it from the developer from Northern New Jersey who recently bought an entire neighborhood in Chenango Bridge to construct the largest housing development in recent memory.

Take it from the Newmans who are making new investments on Front Street including Lowe's and Applebee's joining one of the highest volume Cracker Barrel Restaurants in the country.

Take it from the Marchuska family who has developed numerous formally polluted sites into tax paying properties, and appear to be buying every piece of property they can get their hands on.

Take it from the Broome County Board of Realtors who had a record year in 2003.

These are people from inside and outside who believe in this community. Take their word for it.

And one night last month, our beloved Senators played at the Arena at the same time our Bearcats played in the new Binghamton University Events Center. Nobody put it better than Press & Sun Bulletin sportswriter Kevin Stevens:

"Nay-say what you will about life in this piece of the world...Separated by half-a-dozen or so miles and, by my wristwatch, 15 minutes...from door to door, was NCAA Division I basketball and the American Hockey League...In how many other earthly markets this size can that be said?"

That evening more than 7,000 fans showed up at both venues symbolizing a growing convergence between town and gown. We have known now for some time our future and the University's are one in the same. To have so many students and residents of the community cheering on two teams the same night is a powerful symbol for where we're headed.

And we have much to look forward to.

Governor George Pataki, with strong support from Senator Libous, and Assemblymen Warner and Crouch, made a huge commitment to this region by pledging an unprecedented \$46 million dollars to Greater Binghamton in his 2004 state budget.

Twenty-five million dollars for a new state-of-the art academic center in downtown Binghamton that will be the home of programs from B.U., Broome Community College, and Empire State College. This project would be the centerpiece of a downtown revitalization movement involving artists, developers, and entrepreneurs that is clearly picking up steam.

The Governor has earmarked \$21 million dollars for B.U. to bring to life a High Technology Commercialization Center, which would become the next generation of Centers of Excellence, bringing technology from all over the state to be commercialized here in Greater Binghamton.

We have almost overnight become Greater Binghamton, a strong community well poised to build on its strong history of innovation. And while there are positive signs, we can't sit still. We must continue to work hard building our future.

This afternoon, I want to take a few minutes to update you on some initiatives that are contributing to our rebirth. I also want to lay out a roadmap for the months and years to come.

For many years, the Greater Binghamton economy was dominated by a handful of industrial giants. In recent years, these firms have given way to a growing presence of small and medium-sized firms. Today, fully 84% of our economy is comprised of businesses that have 20 employees or fewer.

We are blessed to have one of the most talented and resilient workforces in the world. As the national and local economies have become even more volatile, we have been there to provide assistance when needed.

We have provided re-training to more than 1,100 people in computer technologies, health care, and other growth sectors. We've invested more than \$2 million dollars in our workforce both before and after hiring.

At the same time, we've enhanced the services we provide to businesses. We've visited more than 1,200 companies in the past three years, and invested \$500,000 in skills training for their new employees.

Two years ago, when it appeared that IBM's Endicott-based microelectronics division might disappear, a group of local investors, led by the Maines and Matthews families, came forward with their vision of what a company out from underneath IBM could become.

With a great deal of support from Governor Pataki, Senator Libous, and the Broome County Industrial Development Agency, Endicott Interconnect was born.

We were instrumental in helping EI obtain a \$1 million grant from New York State to help create jobs. I will soon be asking you to accept that grant.

And I was at EI just a few weeks ago to hear more about their plans to partner with ENSCO to develop a new homeland security technology that will make our airports safer and at the same time create hundreds of new jobs in Endicott.

In April, I participated in a brownfields conference with Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton. One of the top priority brownfield sites discussed as an opportunity was the Millenium Chemical site in Johnson City. This high profile site was not only contaminated environmentally, but was a visual blight to thousands of people daily.

You may have read recently that Newman Development has purchased the site and if their track record is any indication, they will be announcing their plans for development before the ink is dry on the newspaper reporting this speech.

As you know, almost two years ago, working together with our partners at Binghamton University, the Greater Binghamton Chamber, and the IDA, we released the B.C. Plan, an aggressive effort to build on the tradition of technology and innovation for which we have become known.

I'm proud to be a member of the Coalition, and I'm proud of what the Coalition has achieved in a short time.

As simple as it sounds, one of the earliest successes of the Coalition was to change the name of the region to Greater Binghamton. With support from the media, the business community, and coalition agencies, this has been a significant accomplishment for a region plagued by a history of parochialism.

We have improved the community's relationships with our federal representatives. The Coalition has met with Senators Clinton, Schumer, and Congressmen Boehlert and Hinchey. Our efforts have resulted in a \$250,000 grant to support entrepreneurship in Broome County.

We have taken steps to market the community by sending letters to more than 500 site selectors, by participating in trade shows in the U.S. and Canada, and by placing advertisements in national publications.

We co-sponsored an event with the University designed to attract more federal funding for emerging research-based technology businesses. We have initiated efforts to better coordinate resources available to entrepreneurs in the region.

We have helped spark renewed interest in the revitalization of downtown Binghamton by creating a new level of commitment among private developers for a variety of arts, housing, commercial and mixed-use projects. I am pleased that the leader of this effort is here with us today. Jim DiMascio has been the catalyst. His energy and enthusiasm has ignited new optimism for not only downtown, but the entire community. Last week I had an opportunity to join Jim and business leaders in Greater Whitney Point to explore the creation of a business association for this northern gateway to Broome County. I'd like you to join me in recognizing Jim for his tireless service.

Not only is the health of our economy important, so is the health of our residents.

With U.S. health care expenditures totaling well over one trillion dollars a year, it is no surprise that the cost of health care and prescription drugs is causing many consumers more aches and pains. Late last year, Governor Pataki asked me to serve on a six member health care reform task force whose mission is to reduce costs and improve quality of care in all aspects of healthcare, including Medicaid.

Our first report to the Governor that focused on long term care was well received. I was pleased that the point of entry into a new reformed long-term care system, the so-called "gatekeeper", was an almost exact duplicate of our Broome County CASA program, which was the first one in New York State and still is the best. Reforming the State plan services and creating waivers will provide new flexibility in programs, create more personal responsibility and provide incentives to reduce institutionalization resulting in lower costs.

One of the biggest challenges facing our nation is finding ways to provide safe and affordable prescription drugs to our elderly and residents who are uninsured or underinsured. Since it appears that any relief on the Federal and State horizons is a long way off, I began examining ways in which Broome County could help our uninsured and underinsured and elderly residents afford the prescription drugs that they so desperately need.

At our senior centers, I have listened to heartbreaking stories of individuals on fixed incomes, who skip some of their doses of medicine, cut them in half, or don't even get the prescriptions filled because they can't afford it. Even the new Medicare prescription plan bypasses some seniors and their prescription needs.

I have also spoken to hardworking Broome County residents who have no health insurance at all or who are underinsured with low drug benefits or high deductibles and are not able to afford needed prescription drugs. When you combine these groups and our elderly, it is no wonder that one-third of Americans recently polled said their families had trouble paying their medicine bills.

To address skyrocketing costs which have a dramatic impact on a large number of our residents, I am negotiating with several drug discount programs for a bold new initiative that will allow Broome County residents to save on their prescriptions. The amount of savings will depend on the type of drug and whether they save at their neighborhood pharmacy, save more through mail order or for the biggest savings, potentially purchasing prescriptions through a licensed, inspected and approved Canadian pharmacy.

The BroomeRX plan will offer a safe and convenient alternative through negotiated discounts that are passed on to our residents.

While the program will be designed to provide prescription drug discounts to our elderly, uninsured and underinsured, any Broome County resident would be eligible to participate in the program.

Westchester County last month initiated a similar program that offered its residents the opportunity to save 10-50% on prescriptions. Our goal is to have a program equal to or better than Westchester's.

It is anticipated we will be announcing the exciting details of BroomeRX in the next 30 days.

One of my greatest satisfactions as County Executive is having an opportunity to work with people like Dan Bush.

Seven years ago this month Lance Corporal Bush was severely wounded while protecting U.S. citizens at the American Embassy in Albania.

Last year, to continue service to his country and community, Dan appeared at our Veteran's Services Office offering to volunteer. He has become a valuable resource for the thousands of veterans in Broome County. His service turned into a full-time job, and I am proud to say that Dan is now Assistant Director of Veteran's Services for Broome County.

His selfless devotion to his country and to fellow veterans is humbling considering the many obstacles he has overcome in his life. Would you please join me in honoring Dan Bush.

One of the major issues to face us in 2004 and beyond is the potential threat of polluted groundwater and soil gas vapors. Be it in Endicott or Hillcrest or any of the more than a dozen other sites in Broome County that the Health Department is investigating, we need to provide the resources necessary to help protect our citizens. That's why I enlisted the aid of Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and Federal resources like the ATSDR, NIOSH, and the Centers for Disease Control that she could help provide.

Working with Federal and State agencies and local citizens groups, the Broome County Health Department's Environmental Services Division, at my direction, has added another health expert to its staff to help monitor sites and respond to our residents' concerns.

Our Broome County Security Division, under Carl Fenescey has earned state-wide recognition in several areas. Our County Security Fraud Detection Unit, under Jim Dadamio, is the most proactive in the State. We generated more than \$5 million in savings last year, \$1 million dollars of that for the County.

We hosted a state-wide conference of Fraud Investigators to give them a better idea of how we do it here.

Broome County Security's "Geek" Squad, under Jim Thompson has become the lead agency in our region for solving computer related crimes including fraud, theft and child pornography. With help from Senator Schumer we received two federal grants totaling more than \$300,000 to train regional police departments in the detection and prosecution of computer forensics. The New York State Police and the FBI depend on our "Geeks" expertise to solve their most difficult computer crimes.

It's quite possible that within the next 10 to 30 years a drug will be available that actually slows down the process of aging. Imagine that. Life expectancy in the United States continues to increase, and we need to be prepared for what this might mean.

Our Office for Aging, under Kathy Bunnell, has received a \$750,000 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to create a community-wide action plan for seniors. This grant was one of only eight awarded in the entire country. Seniors have already identified three key issues: managing chronic illness, supporting caregivers, and remaining socially connected.

We opened two new senior centers in the past year; Northern Broome in Whitney Point and Broome West in Endwell. The number of seniors using these centers has more than doubled since they have opened.

Last year, the Broome County Office for Aging worked with nearly 15,000 seniors and caregivers, 36% of the senior population. OFA served more than 125,000 meals to seniors, a 5% increase over 2002.

Last month, John Demske updated you on the state of the Willow Point Nursing Home. It is becoming obvious that in order to meet the future needs of some of our most vulnerable older citizens, we will need to build a new facility. So, contingent upon funding from the State, I will make a replacement for Willow Point Nursing Home a priority in the 2005 Broome County Budget.

This month you will have on your desk two local laws that help protect our seniors. The first local law will increase the amount of income seniors can have and still be eligible for a partial exemption on their County property taxes. I encourage all the other municipalities to offer the same exemption on the taxes they levy.

The second local law, which was brought to my attention by your Majority Leader Wayne Howard, exempts improvements to a property that are made to accommodate a parent or grandparent. If they move in with you, and you do some improvements, you won't have to pay taxes on any increase in your assessment as long as they are living with you.

This summer is indeed going to be the summer to remember. In addition to all of our exciting events that no other area our size has, we will be hosting two very special events. For the

second time in four years we will be hosting the 6,000 athletes and their fans at the Empire State Games.

Broome County will also be hosting a very special Greater Binghamton Air Show 2004 on July 10th and 11th. The United States Air Force Thunderbirds will be headlining the show with their first appearance over Broome County skies in more than twenty years and the only performance in New York State this year. Several other military demonstration teams will also perform. We anticipate this exciting show will draw more than 50,000 enthusiastic aviation fans from all over. This is a real coup for Broome County, and I can't think of a better way for us to salute our armed forces. I want to thank Carl Beardsley for his willingness to take on this monumental task.

So I stand before you grateful to have an opportunity to represent a community very much on the rise.

Where our investments are paying off.

Where the future is bright because we have prepared for success.

Where we have created opportunities that will pay dividends for us far into the future.

Today, I renew my pledge to keep providing the leadership in the years ahead, to make our community stronger, safer, and even more vibrant.

Thank you.

Mr. Wike made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Howard. **Motion to adjourn carried**, Ayes-18, Nays-0, Absent-1 (Mather).. The meeting was adjourned at 4:34 p.m.

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