

2007 STATE OF THE COUNTY SPEECH

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Usually when you think of a State of the County speech, you think about miles of road that we plow, Social Services cases handled, or seniors, children and impoverished families cared for through County services.

All those things are part of Oneida County's story. They are all part of providing the effective and efficient government that you need.

But I am not here to talk about what County Government is supposed to do every day, because the simple fact of life is that we need to do more.

So instead of a lot of government buzzwords, I want to spend most of our time here today talking about some words that really matter.

Innovation.

Economic Competitiveness.

Transformation.

These are the concepts that matter the most to our region because very simply we need to do a better job of implementing them if we hope to tackle the major problem facing our communities – the loss of qualified and capable young adults. The loss of tomorrow's leaders, tomorrow's entrepreneurs and tomorrow's energetic new possibilities must be reversed

for Oneida County to sustain long-term economic growth that brings good-paying job opportunities so that all people and all communities benefit.

Instead of uncertainty about the economy and fear over what might be lost, we need to approach the future with a sound plan that will use our assets to the fullest and transform our region into a county of innovation and creativity that becomes a magnet for new growth.

I know there's someone out there who's going to say it can't happen here.

Why not? Twenty-five years ago, North Carolina was a state that relied on the tobacco industry. Biotechnology king San Diego was a military town. The conventional wisdom back then was that giants like GM, GE, Kodak and dozens of others were bigger than change.

We know better now. We know that nothing is pre-ordained, and we know that change offers opportunities to those who want to change with the times, and who have the will to turn a vision into reality.

We need to learn to change. We need to learn how to harness the potential for innovation in our region and develop that into an economy and a region that will be transformed by our partnerships. We need to provide our students and workforce with the up-to-date skills they need to

contribute creatively every day and develop new ideas that can vault Oneida County past the competition.

To begin the process of moving us in a direction that is essential if we want to provide opportunity for the young people who now leave this region for other places, I am announcing today the creation of a broad-based initiative to make Oneida County more competitive. Action to rev up our regional economy must include these core principles:

- Economic vitality that builds new hope and new dreams
- Equity in prosperity among communities and people
- Quality education using the outstanding network of colleges as a driver for economic growth
- Efficient, effective government that works to solve problems as a partner
- Strong cultural and recreational activities for every age group.
- Safe communities that protect families and children, provide tough enforcement and foster positive youth development.
- Regional land and housing policies that maximize resources, protect the environment and grow attractive communities and neighborhoods.

Transforming Oneida County into an Innovation Community is not someone else's job. It is everyone's job, because innovation and transformation touch every part of our lives. We cannot maximize the economic potential of our region without addressing issues that we think of as community-specific: housing, care for the homeless and poor, public safety, infrastructure maintenance and excellence in education for all children.

Let me give you a quotation from the Report of the Strengthening America's Communities Advisory Committee:

"Communities must act regionally to be competitive in today's world. To reach their full potential, communities must collaborate with other communities and with private and public partners (e.g., businesses, civic organizations, chambers of commerce, national laboratories, research and education institutions, foundations, non-profits, regional developers, etc.), on economic strategic planning and growth initiatives and their implementation. Ideally, all American communities and regions should adopt innovation-based strategies to remove barriers to economic growth and to increase their competitiveness in an era of globalization."

In short, we all have work to do and we have to do it together.

Here is how we will begin.

I am committed to working with Mohawk Valley EDGE on the development of Marcy NanoCenter. New York State has gained significant traction within the semiconductor industry with the emergence of Albany Nanotech as a global R&D hub and with the decision by AMD to build its 300 mm wafer fabrication facility at Luther Forest in Saratoga County.

The Marcy site is well positioned to be the next site in New York State that can land a semiconductor firm. Since AMD's pronouncement of Marcy as a "world-class site" last June, EDGE has expanded its marketing efforts to include direct contact and one-on-one meetings with industry companies. These meetings have taken place at company locations in several states and European countries, and will continue in Asia next month. The global marketing push we have begun is an aggressive effort to land a project that can transform our region.

The Governor and his economic development team can make good on their pledge to rebuild the Upstate economy by getting behind the effort to make the Marcy NanoCenter a reality.

That means we need the Governor's commitment and support to ensure that there is:

- A suitable structure in place for site control

- Providing state funding to support various site and infrastructure improvements to enhance the attractiveness of the site
- Supporting the marketing efforts that are underway by EDGE and the NY Loves NanoTech team to position New York for more growth in this industry sector

There are few industry clusters that can have as dramatic an economic impact on a region than the semiconductor industry. This is an industry sector that will not only be a source of direct and indirect employment for our region but gets at the heart of Upstate New York's most pressing need, which is the need to retain and attract people. The AMD project is putting New York on the map; our job is to market the site – which EDGE is doing – and also transform our community so that we can attract and retain the type of talent needed to make our region the top site for future development.

Griffiss Park is part of an outstanding transformation of our aviation potential. The move of the County Airport to the Griffiss Airfield took place ahead of schedule but there is much more work to be done. The decision to move showed outstanding vision on the part of the Board of Legislators, and now we have the responsibility to develop the airfield to its maximum potential. In the coming weeks I will send legislation to the Board of

Legislators to re-establish the Department of Aviation and with it recreate the position of Commissioner of Aviation. This position will be filled by a qualified Aviation expert after a thorough nationwide search. Some will argue this is an expansion of government at a time when we should be scaling back. I say that we cannot grow economically without critical positions that are essential to our growth. The Airport represents a major opportunity for the optimum development for the Park, for the entire community, and for our future.

The use of the former County Airport has been a subject of controversy over the last several months with the anticipation of the State's Homeland Security Training Center and the amount of acreage they wish to utilize. While this issue has only consumed my time for two months, it has been over a year without a clear resolution. I have been working with the state to maximize our potential impact from this project and move it forward on the fast track, because the entire airport area is very essential real estate. The Oneida County Business Park in Whitestown is home to over 3,000 jobs. During the long transition period of the former airport, a number of issues have emerged that require attention to the park's infrastructure, operation and maintenance. Further, we want to redefine the park with a new name and new look to make the Whitestown site a place that can grow

new jobs. Final state action to determine its land needs is a critical first step to allow us to begin making our plans for upgrading the park so that we can continue to provide employers with a number of very attractive locations across Oneida County.

Agriculture is a vital part of our economy and our communities. The need for alternative fuels to power cars and the development of alternative fuel facilities in New York will create an outstanding opportunity for our farmers to grow willow, switchgrass and other plants that can be used as ethanol. Oneida County farmers can be on the forefront of growth as these new markets develop, and I will work with the Farm Bureau, Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Board of Legislators' Alternate Fuels Committee and the state Department of Agriculture and Markets to ensure that our farmers have the opportunity to continue their family farms into a new generation.

If we really want to be a community that grows economically, we need to be a community that has the energy and excitement that attracts and retains young professionals. I will work with the Genesis Group, Leadership Mohawk Valley and Young Professionals to develop an action plan that identifies specific steps we can take to evaluate what we can do and what we can afford. This effort needs to be centered around downtown

Utica's jewels of the Stanley Theatre and Munson-Williams, the revitalization of downtown Rome and – yes – the Turning Stone resort.

Also, I will direct the Planning Department to work in conjunction with EDGE to identify the gaps in our housing. We need to survey employers here, and employees, as well as young people to determine what kinds of housing we need and where we need it to have the right mix of urban, suburban and rural development that will provide what people want.

I am also directing the Department of Planning to develop a Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan to improve transportation services for the elderly and people with disabilities. The Planning Department will also be working to better identify transportation solutions that can connect low-income people with work, to move them off of welfare. Planning will also partner with CENTRO to improve transit by collecting information on employer locations and transportation needs so that we can realign routes to help employers – and the people who work for them.

Our Workforce System has done an outstanding job at helping secure funding to train people for new openings, but we need a more fundamental shift to handle the challenges that are on our horizon. We cannot simply wait until industry has arrived to prepare a workforce. I believe we need to

improve the connections between employers and schools, so that students and schools know what employers want. Consider MVCC's A&P Mechanic Program. We now have a unique program training local people for high-growth, good-paying careers that can also help grow new jobs at a major regional employer. Partnerships that create growth – that's the blueprint we need to follow. The Office of Workforce Development, our WIB and EDGE are being tasked to assess what we need to move our region forward for the skills development of our youth and adults. I also plan to meet with the presidents of our regional colleges to develop the potential of our college community to the fullest and strengthen college-community connections across the region. Further, I will convene regular meetings with local school districts to address the long-range development of the workforce of the future.

Infrastructure investments lay the foundation for growth. We all know the great difference made in our region by the expressways we have thanks to the leadership of Congressman Boehlert. I want to expand our vision for infrastructure by asking EDGE to work with our communities and telecommunications experts to assess our ability to compete in a wired world. Broadband communication is going to be as important in the 21st Century as the Erie Canal was in the 19th. Before we plan growth, we need

to know what we have, what we need, what it costs and how we can expand our knowledge infrastructure to meet demands that are only going to grow.

Because of the age of our housing stock, Oneida County is one of the top 10 counties in New York State for the incidence of lead exposure. Lead poisoning ruins lives because it affects their ability to grow and learn. The Oneida County Health Department is making reduction of lead exposure its top public health effort this year, through both trying to alert parents to potential dangers in their homes or apartments and through working with our state and federal officials to provide resources that can help fund a lead abatement initiative.

Because of its unique role in delivering human services, social services, public safety services, workforce development, and services to at-risk youth, County Government touches many of the issues related to the safety and well-being of all people in our communities. Safety is the most important element in the quality of life in any community. District Attorney Scott McNamara, who shares my commitment to a safer community, has agreed to work as the major partner with my office. To improve the safety of our communities, our highways, our youth and our neighborhoods, I am

proposing an Oneida County Comprehensive Community Safety Campaign.

None of us want gangs in our communities, but we know from following the news media that youth gangs are here. To address this issue I am proposing a Gang Reduction and Intervention Project that – working in cooperation with the District Attorney’s office -- will:

- Bring citizens together with community agencies for a summit to discuss how the community believes we need to fight this problem. I want to hear from the community and those who work in and with the youth impacted by gangs what kinds of programs we need to target that can provide an alternative to gangs.
- Convene law enforcement and youth development experts to forge new alliances that can enhance existing programs and provide proactive efforts to suppress existing gang activity.
- Develop a regional strategy with our DA’s Office as well as law enforcement agencies to share youth gang information, and to coordinate with the Child Advocacy Center to intervene when we find young children in gang activity.

- Re-align the resources of our Youth Bureau to work with partners who can provide results-oriented programming that targets high-needs areas to stop gangs before they spread.

STOPPED program: Young drivers are the biggest risks on the road.

To save lives and protect all motorists, Oneida County will expand the STOPPED Program by new outreach efforts to encourage parents to register their vehicles with the program. Registration with STOPPED means that if the vehicle is pulled over, parents will find out – whether a ticket was issued or not. That means increased safety because dangerous drivers won't be able to hide.

Driver simulators: Young drivers don't always understand their limitations. They drink and drive, thinking they can do it. Every drunk driver is a tragedy waiting to happen. To someone. In the coming year, the STOP-DWI Program will increase its array of anti-DWI programs by buying a mobile driving simulator it can take from school to school to show young people what it really feels like to drive drunk. If we save one life, prevent one tragedy, the expense will be worth it.

Operation Night Watch: Oneida County's Probation Department is taking a lead role in stopping drunk drivers from becoming repeat offenders. Through Operation Night Watch, Probation will work with Law

Enforcement to provide surveillance of offenders, perform home visits, provide backup for DWI stops and – in short – ratchet up the pressure on those who have already been found guilty of drinking and driving. We are going to be on the roads; we are going to be in the community and we are going to do everything we can to prevent tragedy from striking.

Domicile Restriction Program: We have an outstanding program that we will seek to expand to both protect the public and help turn around the lives of juvenile offenders. Our Probation Department's efforts to track offenders without costly placements in detention or jail has saved Oneida County more than \$1 million in 2006. By providing an alternative to jail, we give offenders the chance to fix their lives – but we also monitor them every step of the way to ensure the public is protected.

All of these efforts together will make us a region better able to attract new people, new investment and new opportunity.

TRANSFORMING PARTNERSHIPS

But the transformation we need is not a job for one person, one government or one program. Transforming our region begins with transforming how we work together. All of the initiatives I just outlined require aggressive partnerships to reach their full success.

Instead of reacting to short-term problems, it's time to develop a sustained, sustainable, collaborative vision of what our community should be, so that the decisions made at all levels of government fit with a plan that comes from the people, not just a project here or an idea there.

It is very easy for us to be divided by our common fears. The fear that our community, our life, our neighborhood will be left behind while someone down the road gets the growth instead is a very real fear – but also a very real barrier to progress. I do not ask anyone to put blind faith in government, I ask all of you to work with me to establish the trust we need to tackle issues only trust can solve – issues such as consolidation, the Oneida Indian Land Claim, and sorting through the complex web of services to keep what is needed, fund it properly, and weed out the rest.

I am now in the process of meeting with all of our towns to talk about issues so that we can develop consolidation plans that are rooted in the real problems communities have providing essential services.

Consolidation cannot be imposed; it must come from the people who live with it. Consolidation is the result of a common hope that overcomes deep-seated fears and old-time rivalries. There is only one County. When I was a kid in Utica, Rome was the competition. As an adult in Rome, I hear people talk of Utica as the competition. That's destructive. Any growth for anyone,

anywhere, that adds jobs, that adds activity, that adds vitality and energy is a step forward because we are too small, too interdependent to survive with any other outlook.

I'd like to build upon the discussion the district attorney started last year in talking about consolidation of law enforcement agencies and how we can bring that closer to what the system can handle and not overburden our taxpayers. We have to put together a public safety consolidation plan. I think that's probably a great starting point, because once governments see you can do that with public safety, just as we have seen results from our public works sharing, other areas can be consolidated much easier. I want to hear what needs fixing.

COUNTY GOVERNMENT ACTIONS

All that I have outlined here today will mean nothing unless we get and keep our financial house in order. From the start I have identified the additional one-percent sales tax and the implications it holds for our future. As noted recently, it puts me between a rock and a hard place – or easier said, two very large rocks. The tax brings in the equivalent of a 45% property tax increase. But it also brings along a stigma that this county can no longer afford if we are to be competitive. The facts are that the financial straits that we are in are not just a result of the Medicaid burden we face

year in and year out, but because we exhausted our once-substantial fund balance and relied on one-shot revenues such as tobacco settlement money. Freezing county property taxes for 6 of the past 9 years drew down all that had been saved.

The county could not hide from normal inflationary growth, let alone the spikes in the growth of Medicaid and other state mandated programs, all the while keeping property taxes low, without the resources coming from somewhere. We have been successful in keeping county property taxes low. In fact, they are some of the lowest in all of New York State. County Government has been placed in an anemic condition where it can only afford to write checks for Social Services programs and triage problems, but it lacks the fiscal ability to take the lead role in developing local capacity for growth.

Let me be very clear: If we do not take control of our own destiny by investing in the future, and if we rely on state or federal handouts, we may pay nothing, but we will also do nothing and grow nothing.

In the next several weeks I will work with the Board of Legislators and County Comptroller Joe Timpano to craft a financial plan that addresses the one-percent tax and what we will need to do to stay away from another drastic approach for fiscal stability.

Here are my parameters:

1. The one-percent tax must be reduced to the lowest possible level.
2. Property taxes must be stable and affordable to sustain long-term growth.

Achieving this will take great discipline from those of us in county government and great understanding from those who seek our assistance as we create a sound fiscal environment that can build a foundation for greatness that will endure.

To that end I believe we need to get back to basics. There must clearly be a review of all programs -- mandated and non-mandated. Whenever the discussion arises about changes to mandated programs, those changes are cast aside simply because of the term. The program may be mandated but how we deliver it and what it costs must be within our control.

This fall, I will present a budget that outlines how we put principles into practice. The principles that will guide this budget are these:

Is there a cheaper way to deliver the same service?

Is there a better way?

How soon can we get it done?

Even those programs that are mandated will be scrutinized. I know from the time I spent in County Government that even if a program is mandated, the way that program is run is not.

Whatever we in County Government do, we need to provide effective and efficient services because so much of what we do affects people who are in extreme crisis – frail seniors, families recovering from economic or other problems, ex-offenders trying to assemble new lives, and people who come to the County Office Building because they have nowhere else to turn and need help. County Government has a moral obligation to be the safety net for the people of this county who need us. That's a very unique mission, it is often a very costly mission, but it is one that has the power to transform lives.

I know that first-hand.

When I first came to County Government, it was in 1981 as a Social Welfare Examiner. I earned \$8,515. Every day, I worked with people in need, in crisis, in tears. Every day, I watched my co-workers go the extra mile time and time again. Through all my years of service, down through today, I always impress upon those employees that I have supervised that we can only provide quality service if we can put ourselves on the other

side of the desk with those we serve, and I hold myself to that same standard.

Let me give you a tangible sign of the dedication of the people who work at our Department of Social Services. In 2006, the Department's anti-fraud squad recovered more than \$1 million that was owed to us. That's \$1 million taxpayers saved because these people were on the job. A cost-avoidance effort to scrutinize new claims resulted in 296 cases being denied. The bottom line is this: We will meet the needs of our people; we will root out and stop those who try to bilk the system.

Despite these efforts, Medicaid remains a costly program. This year, New York State is supposed to implement a swap in which we could get out of the Medicaid business by giving up sales tax revenue. Finance Commissioner Anthony Carvelli and Budget Director Tom Keeler will be working to review the details of this change, and also to monitor the impact of state budget proposals on the county. The final decision will come down to which option will save money in the long run. The decision on this will not be made overnight, or without the fullest discussion with the people who pay the taxes and who need to know what we are doing on their behalf.

Sound financial planning is essential. So, too, is the boldness to seize opportunity and act.

The Oneida Indian Nation's land claim and tax issues have divided our community for too many years. We have had lawsuit after lawsuit, a proposed settlement that fizzled and now federal land-in-trust hearings. We keep waiting for the federal or state government to solve this, but it goes on and in the meantime, we remain without a solution.

Our future rests in our hands. I have had personal, one-on-one, informal conversations with Nation Representative Ray Halbritter. I believe before we can begin negotiations to resolve all the complex issues at stake, we need to develop a dialogue. Whether we agree or disagree with our neighbors, we need to talk to each other. We have to talk to each other.

I believe that some straight talk, some common sense and some willingness to work together – more than any other thing – are what we need to resolve the land claims and taxation issues concerning the Oneida Indian Nation. Turning Stone is a part of our communities and our culture. There is no denying that. The Nation is a huge employer. I want to work with Ray Halbritter and the Nation, as well as our state and federal governments, to get these issues out of the courts, out of the hands of the lawyers and resolve them for once and for all.

What touches one community touches us all. The fight against the New York Regional Interconnect project is an example of regional unity. It's a bad idea. We will fight it and fight it and fight it some more. Whether we fight it in Albany or fight it in Washington or both places at once, Oneida County will work with area residents, the other impacted counties and the state to use the resources approved by the state last year to defend our communities and block this project.

The past is where we have been. We can't change it. We can shape the future starting today. I know that the decisions made in County Government now will change the course of our region for years to come, and alter the lives of the people who live here. I believe we have work yet to do – but that the greatest challenge of all is developing a regional spirit of unity that will transform our vision from the narrow limits of self-interest to the wider possibilities of tomorrow.

I want to lead Oneida County into a new time of growth. I want to work with all of you – Republicans, Democrats, Uticans, Romans, all the other labels to solve problems, transform attitudes and focus all of our energy on finding solutions.

Our task collectively is to transform ourselves, our community, and our attitudes to bring change, growth and opportunity to all parts of this

county. My task as County Executive is to bring partners together, keep the cost of government down, and the growth of our businesses up. If we succeed in making innovation a way of life and transforming our partnerships into focused efforts to achieve success, we can spark a renaissance in Oneida County.

Public service is a calling for those who believe that rewards are in the lives of people, that building for tomorrow is the greatest never-ending challenge of life; and that problems can be solved if we work hard enough, long enough and with enough people. I ask your help today to work with me, to make this a time of action, a time of change for the better, and a time when the growth our people need takes shape. There are challenges. There will be risks along the way. But if we want to grow, if we want the Oneida County of tomorrow better than the Oneida County of today, we need to commit today to taking action, working as partners and to keep working together, without ever looking back.

I thank you for this opportunity to speak to you, and the opportunity to serve the people of this County.

May God bless each of you.