

Good evening and welcome.

It is a special honor to be in the courthouse tonight. In 1958, President Eisenhower proclaimed May 1st as “Law Day” with these words:

“The world no longer has a choice between force and law. If civilization is to survive, it must choose the rule of law.”

Those words continue to guide us. We may just be a tiny piece of civilization here in Westchester. But whatever our challenges, whatever our differences, it is the rule of law that sees us through.

Our host, the honorable Alan Scheinkman, administrative judge for the Ninth Judicial District, could not be with us tonight. He has his own Law Day commitment.

But my thanks go out to him and all the attorneys and other professionals here tonight who have dedicated themselves to the law.

Also with us are:

- County Clerk Tim Idoni
- Putnam County Executive Mary Ellen Odell
- And a host of other elected officials from around the county.

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Now I get to recognize, my favorite team – Team Astorino. This is my fifth State of the County address, and the first time my wife Sheila and I have been joined by all three of our children, Sean, Kiley and Ashlin.

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I also want to welcome everyone at home watching us on News 12.

Those of you with us tonight in the courthouse may have noticed our photo exhibit hanging on the wall.

We asked how people hashtag LiveWestchester, and you showed us by submitting photos on Facebook and Twitter.

Social media has become an important tool for us. For everyone Tweeting along tonight, please use hashtag AstorinoSOTC.

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We are here to continue a tradition that's actually older than Law Day. It was 77 years ago when the County Charter declared it the duty of the County Executive to communicate with the County Board.

Specifically, the charter instructs me to present a "summary statement" of the county's finances and departmental activities to the Board of Legislators. It is my honor to do that.

I would like to acknowledge the members of the Board of Legislators who are with us tonight.

Good government requires balance. My thanks to new Board Chairman Michael Kaplowitz for working with me to bring all sides to a place where the partisanship stopped ... and solutions took hold on tough issues like the budget, day care and Playland to name just a few.

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The news to start this year's state of the County address is good. No lives were lost last year among Westchester's men and women serving proudly in our military around the world.

For that we are truly thankful ...and to those who have served proudly and returned safely, Westchester County has not forgotten its debt to you.

A home and job seems like the least we can do for our veterans. Our Departments of Veterans Affairs and Social Services set an ambitious goal to house 75 homeless veterans in 100 days as part of a national "100,000 Homes" initiative. We met and exceeded that goal.

Since August, we have found housing for 150 veterans.

But we didn't stop there. We also found jobs for 63 veterans.

And, the work continues. We won't stop until every veteran in Westchester has a job and place to call home.

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Our success to date is because so many have been willing to help. Bassett Furniture is just one example. When word got out of our efforts to house homeless veterans, Bassett Furniture generously stepped up with a \$16,000 donation to furnish two of the apartments. No one asked; they just came forward.

Tonight I'd like to recognize Robyn St. Denny, general manager of the new Bassett Furniture location in Hartsdale.

Let me also recognize and thank Vito Pinto, the head of our Veterans Service Agency, Kevin McGuire, our commissioner of Social Services and Phil Gille, our deputy Commissioner of Social Services. And to all the other members of this team effort, thank you for letting our veterans know their service to our country is always appreciated and never forgotten.

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This year's State of the County address is a report card not just on the previous year, but on the last four years since my administration came into office in 2010. Using that broader perspective, I would like to frame my remarks around three broad topics:

- What have we learned?
- What have we done?
- And what do we do next?

The short answer to all three questions is ... "a lot."

But let's dig in to each one.

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So what have we learned?

We have learned about the power of collaboration.

At my inauguration in 2010, I outlined the compass we would use to govern. We call them the 3 P's, and they may be familiar to you by now.

- Protect taxpayers
- Preserve essential services, and
- Promote economic growth.

Protecting taxpayers recognizes the simple truth that government must live within its means.

Preserving essential services defines our mission that as a government we must do all we can to meet the critical needs of our people.

Promoting economic growth is the way we take care of the first two. Economic prosperity is how we keep taxes in check and still have the money to provide the services that our residents need and count on.

Time has shown that the 3 P's have us working on the right things.

But that is not enough. You also have to deliver results, which brings us back to collaboration.

No matter how many votes you receive, you never get them all. But the day you take office, you represent all of the people. So your first job is to bring together those who are for you, those who are against you, and those who are still undecided.

The role of the County Executive is to bring as many people to the table as possible; to be the collaborator in chief who gets input from all the familiar voices, but also seeks out and listens to new voices. In other words, no one with a stake in the solution gets overlooked.

We began with formal outreach. Women, the Disabled, Veterans, African Americans, Hispanics, Youth and the LGBT community all have boards and offices that report directly to the County Executive.

Then we went a step further and began reaching out in non-traditional ways. I created our Faith-based Community Partnership to strengthen the bonds between county government and religious organizations in our communities. Heading that effort is Rosa Boone, who is also our Deputy Commissioner of Social Services.

As part of that initiative, I meet regularly with the United Black Clergy under the leadership of Bishop C. Nathan Edwers of Friendship Baptist Church. We have home and away games: My conference room here in the county office building and his church in Mount Vernon.

Bishop Edwers and Rosa Boone thank you for your service to church and state.

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Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic group in our county, showing gains in every community in the last census.

A todos nuestros residentes hispanos, le mando una cálida bienvenida. Estoy orgulloso de representar a todos nuestros residentes y nuestro gran Condado de Westchester. Pueden encontrar el video en español del Estado del Condado en nuestro sitio web - westchestergov.com. Espero que lo vean y nos manden sus comentarios.

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Immigration has always been one of America's special strengths. In Westchester, we are blessed by our rich diversity.

In this very room, I have had the honor and privilege of watching new residents take the oath to become citizens of the United States.

According to the latest census figures, more than 20 percent of Westchester residents were born in other countries.

- The largest numbers come from Europe at 23 percent.
- Asia and South America are tied at 19 percent each.

- They are followed by the Caribbean at 18 percent, Central America at 16 percent and Africa at 3 percent.
- Our neighbors to the north in Canada round things out at 1 percent.

Who knew Westchester's one percenters were all Canadian?

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For all new immigrants, the government of their new country can seem remote, mysterious and uninviting. At the county level, we would like to change that.

Tonight, I am announcing the new role of Immigrant Services Liaison within the Office of the County Executive.

The idea is to ease and speed the transition of our newest residents in two ways. The first is to break down cultural and language barriers. The second is to help them steer through government bureaucracy.

A key focus will also be working with immigrants who are interested in starting new businesses.

Serving in this new role will be Katherine Delgado, who will assume these new duties in addition to her role as my deputy chief of staff.

Katie's parents emigrated from Peru to pursue the American Dream in Peekskill, where she was born and grew up. A graduate of SUNY Cortland and finishing a master's in Public Administration from Pace, she is fluent in Spanish, extremely active in the Hispanic community, and brings to the job a broad set of skills, insights and experiences that will benefit our immigrant community.

Katie, por favor, levantese.

Katie is already working on a forum for entrepreneurs, especially those operating in Hispanic communities, to be held on May 29th at the Gateway Center at Westchester Community College. The event, which is being run in partnership with the publication Latin Business Today, will provide

entrepreneurs with information on how to raise capital, navigate contracts and reach customers.

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Whether in English or Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Italian, Korean, Hebrew or Arabic, collaboration is how we deliver results.

So what have we done?

First and foremost, we structurally reformed our finances by putting a halt to double digit spending.

Between 2005 and 2010, county spending went up 23 percent.

Under our budgets for the last four years, spending went down 4 percent. That's not a slowdown of an increase. That's a real, honest, hand-on-heart decrease and one of the largest decreases of any county budget in the state.

How did we do it? The old fashioned way – we pinched every penny and spent every dollar on the things that mattered most and delivered the most value.

Like homeowners refinancing their mortgages, we reissued our bonds to take advantage of lower interest rates. That saved more than \$1 million last year, and more than \$8 million since 2010.

We also set a course for all government employees to pay a portion of their health care – just like everyone else – providing relief for taxpayers who had been picking up the entire \$90 million bill by themselves.

The professionalism and dedication of our county workers is second to none. I cannot say that enough. But, they are also expensive. As county executive, it is my job to figure out how to pay them and not bankrupt our taxpayers at the same time.

Through frank and fair negotiations with our unions, we have been able to restructure contracts in ways that protect the interests of both workers and

taxpayers. In just one example, our new contract with our Correction Officers brings down our future costs by \$62,000 every time we make a new hire to replace a retiring officer. When people talk about significant, structural savings, this is one of them.

In addition, after four years at the bargaining table, we now have contracts with seven of our eight unions, and they all include employee health care contributions.

So to the leadership and rank and file of:

- Teamsters Local 456
- The Correction Officers Benevolent Association
- The Correction Superior Officers Association
- The Police Benevolent Association
- The Superior Officers Unit of the PBA
- The District Attorney's Investigators PBA
- And, the New York State Nurses Association.

Thank you all for your partnership.

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To the members of CSEA, the one union we are still waiting for, I have to be honest and say I am frustrated and disappointed.

At the request of your union, an independent fact finder conducted a full hearing; heard the arguments of both parties, weighed the evidence, and issued a report and recommendation for the settlement of the contract.

I didn't like everything proposed. But the fact finder did recognize the reality that in today's economy every employee must pay a portion of their health care.

I accepted the fact finder's recommendations because they struck a fair balance between the needs of the union and the needs of taxpayers.

Unfortunately, the leadership of the CSEA said no.

We will continue to negotiate. But the time has come for the leaders of CSEA to give their members a contract and taxpayers some fairness.

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Finding the right balance between services and costs – is how we have been able to keep taxes in check and still meet the needs of our residents. We like to think of it as smart government.

Smart government is how we have managed to keep our social safety net strong. At over a half billion a year, the budget for our Department of Social Services is our largest in terms of dollars and people.

Like every other place in the budget, our costs in Social Services have gone up. And like every other place, we have managed them by looking objectively at what was working and not working, and then making the necessary fixes.

Needless to say the fixes, at least initially, are not always popular.

Take day care for example. Here are the facts. Each year, the county spends more than \$30 million on day care subsidies. So no one can challenge our commitment.

What we did was restructure the program. We shored up the finances with bipartisan support in the Legislature, and we did it in a way that gave access to more families than ever before. Our changes expanded the budget to provide full-day care to almost 3,500 kids this year, an increase of more than 300 since 2010 when we arrived.

Making day care accessible to more kids and more families is a good thing, a very good thing.

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In addition to running our programs smartly, the Department of Social Services has been vigilant in its efforts to root out fraud. Every dollar stolen or misspent, as a result of fraud, is a dollar that does not go to the needy.

In 2013, Social Services overhauled its anti-fraud activities. The simple explanation is that it moved from a centralized approach to a decentralized one. Instead of operating its Front End Detection System, known as FEDS,

out of a single office, every office became part of the solution and fraud detection began at the start of every application.

The result: Paperwork backlogs of up to 45 days were reduced to two days and savings increased to \$20 million last year, a year-over-year improvement of 40 percent. Those savings are how we keep the safety net strong and protect taxpayers at the same time.

The broader point in all our efforts is that good management is our safety net's best protection.

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Paratransit is an area where we have put a good idea to work that not only has been saving money, but has also greatly improved our ability to serve those among us who are disabled.

Last year, our paratransit vans made more than 220,000 trips around the county taking 5,500 disabled residents to jobs, school, and other appointments that filled out their daily schedules.

Paratransit vans are a lifeline for the disabled, but they are not perfect. They are expensive and, because they pick up multiple passengers, and make multiple stops, getting from place to place can be time consuming. And there is also the stigma of not riding in an ordinary car or bus.

So what if we could make our paratransit service more convenient and mainstream? What if, in addition to vans, we could make taxi service available to the disabled? Evan Latainer, our director of the Office of the Disabled, had just that idea.

We ran the numbers, enlisted partners, and got started. First in White Plains, followed by Peekskill and New Rochelle.

Today, our paratransit taxi service is making 200 trips a month in New Rochelle; 400 a month in White Plains; and 600 a month in Peekskill. Each ride saves money. The average taxi ride costs about \$10, compared to \$46 for a paratransit van. That difference has added up to savings of almost \$500,000. And the program has also given welcome business to local taxi companies.

But the benefits extend beyond money and commerce. The biggest benefit is making the lives of the disabled a little more ordinary. To borrow a line from our great Westchester company Mastercard, being able to get where you want, when you want in a car that looks like everyone else's is priceless.....

And plans are under way to expand. The para taxi program goes to our county's biggest city – Yonkers – in June.

Special thanks to two of our taxi partners, Kevin Toohey and Rich Miller, from Act Now Limousine in Peekskill, who are here tonight with Evan Latainer, our director of the Office for the Disabled.

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Let's talk for a moment about the most important group of people in Westchester – our parents and grandparents on whose shoulders we stand today. Seniors make up roughly 20 percent of the population of Westchester. The number keeps getting bigger as medical science allows more of us to live longer lives.

Seniors are such a vital part of our county because they are the living bridge that connects us to the past and positions us for the future. In Westchester, we are committed to keeping our seniors right here.

One way we do that is to keep taxes down. For many seniors, property taxes are the biggest bill they pay each year. Another thing we do for seniors is to bring new ideas to old problems.

For instance, we're currently developing a program that will monitor a senior's health, blood pressure, weight and other vital signs.

Other programs do that. But our new initiative called TIPS, or the Telehealth Intervention Program for Seniors, goes further.

TIPS not only produces medical information, but its reports, or TIP sheets, also include economic and social assessments to make sure the individuals are receiving the benefits they need – all at no cost to the senior.

This program will formally be announced on May 8th at our Salute to Seniors at the County Center.

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One nice thing about the TIPS program is that it will largely be administered by volunteer college students. Another way we are keeping the generations connected is through our Think Tank.

The idea was spearheaded by Catherine “Kitty” Wynkoop of Pound Ridge.

Kitty began by enlisting nine students from six local colleges and together they addressed transportation and isolation issues facing many of our seniors who live far removed from buses and trains in northern Westchester.

In response to the findings of the Think Tank, the county has worked in partnership with Family Services of Westchester to expand RideConnect, which provides transportation for seniors to medical appointments, shopping, cultural events and errands. Rides are provided solely by volunteers.

In 2012, RideConnect provided 1,000 referrals. Last year, the number jumped to more than 6,000.

But we need more volunteers. If you’re looking for a good way to give back to our seniors, this may be for you.

To sign up and learn more go to westchestergov.com.

I’d like to recognize Kitty Wynkoop for her work on the Think Tank for helping to improve the quality of life for our seniors.

Sitting next to Kitty is Mae Carpenter, Commissioner of Senior Programs and Services, who is the visionary for all our award-winning senior programming. Great job.

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In Westchester we like to say we are New York's Intellectual Capital. In addition to being a catchy phrase, it has the benefit of being true.

Forty five percent of our county residents over the age of 25 have at least a bachelor's degree. It's a higher percentage than any of the 50 states.

This commitment to education of course starts at a young age, and we all know that Westchester has some of the best schools in the country. One of the things that set our schools apart is their concentration on what has become known as STEM. When I was in school, stems grew out of the ground and connected roots and leaves. Say STEM today and conversation revolves around Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.

Whether you are old school or new, stems are all about growth.

Our Youth Bureau has been working hand in hand with two of the county's leading corporations – Regeneron and Acorda Therapeutics – to encourage top-notch science education.

Most recently, Regeneron announced the expansion of a new teacher training program, called the STEM Teaching Fellowship.

The program began when Lawrence Perretto, a teacher in Mamaroneck, teamed up with our Youth Bureau and Regeneron to start an afterschool program in Mount Vernon designed to engage kids with science.

Regeneron liked the program so much that it is now paying to train 10 additional teachers on how to integrate STEM into classroom instruction. NASA is even on board as a partner.

Through our Youth Bureau, we will continue to focus on bringing quality science education to after-school programs around Westchester, with a particular emphasis on communities where school funding is under the most stress.

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We also are getting the word out about the great work our kids are doing thanks to a partnership between the county, Acorda and WFAS radio.

Each week on WFAS AM 1230, host Lisa Wexler talks to students who are winners of the Acorda Scientific Excellence Awards. Tune in every Sunday at 9 a.m. and you will find out just how smart our kids are.

With us tonight is Peter Dworkin from Regeneron, David Lawrence from Acorda, Lisa Wexler from WFAS and our Youth Bureau director, Dr. Iris Pagan. Also joining us is Alan Cha, an Acorda Award winner and a senior at Walter Panas High School.

And a special tribute goes to Lawrence Perretto.

Way to go.

These students show us how bright our future can be. Great teachers show our students how great they can be. Thank you all.

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Nothing we do in county government is more important than keeping our children and families safe.

It was over a year ago – December 14, 2012 – when 20 children (8 boys and 12 girls ages 6 and 7) and six adults were murdered at their school in neighboring Newtown, Connecticut.

Like 9-11, that day shook us to our core; changing forever our fundamental assumptions of what it means to be safe in America.

As a county of almost one million people, we knew our response had to be comprehensive and lasting.

From this mindset, Safer Communities emerged.

Here's what we have done so far:

- We brought educators, public safety officials and first responders together for a School Safety Symposium. William Bratton, the police commissioner of New York City, schooled us on the critical importance of communication, coordination and collaboration in times of crisis.
- We gathered leaders from our communities to listen to Dr. Howard Spivak of the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta tell us how to look beyond the symptoms of violence and address the causes.
- We created an Action Network of volunteers that looked at the connections between school absenteeism and youth crime and violence.
- We published a Safer Communities Blue Print that among other things consolidates in one place dozens of available community resources.
- And, we partnered with Westchester Jewish Community Services to be the first in New York to adopt Youth Mental Health First Aid on a countywide basis.

The program is so important, because the statistics are so staggering. Approximately 20 percent of kids ages 13 to 18 have had a seriously debilitating mental illness. That's one out of every five kids in our middle and high schools.

Response to our Youth Mental Health First Aid initiative has been overwhelming. The first training session for 30 participants was at capacity within 24-hours. We now plan to add four or five additional sessions over the summer.

There is no way to guarantee that bad things won't happen to those we love. But if they do happen, we can say we didn't sit back.

One year and five months after Newtown, we set out to build a comprehensive and long-term approach to making our communities safer, and we are doing just that.

Keeping communities safe is a team sport. Members of the Safer Communities team with us tonight are Alan Trager, CEO of Westchester

Jewish Community Services, Melissa Staats, our acting Commissioner of Community Mental Health, and her deputy Michael Orth.

Thank you for all your efforts.

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In addition to keeping our communities safe, we need to keep them growing, and we have. Our population continues to increase, up a healthy 2 percent in the last three years, and that is because our economy continues to expand.

Westchester's unemployment rate is one of the lowest in the state.

That didn't happen by accident. I have said repeatedly that government does not create private sector jobs. But it does play a critical role in creating an environment that is either helpful or harmful to job creation.

In Westchester, we have worked extremely hard to be on the side of the job creators. This year began with an outreach to all segments of our business community – young and old, big and small, profit and not-for-profit.

To my conference room, I invited small groups – which included executives from our largest corporations; entrepreneurs with companies at different stages of development; hospital officials; college presidents; municipal leaders; social service agency leaders; and young people just starting their careers and families.

To all of them, the question posed was: What's working, what's not working and how do we work together to get to the next level.

All of the insights are being compiled in a report, which will provide a compass to guide future economic growth. The preliminary findings suggest a couple of target areas.

- The first target is improving mass transit. The new Tappan Zee Bridge presents us with a once in a generation opportunity to give our residents new transit options, especially along the I-287 corridor.

This is why I pushed so hard to make sure Bus Rapid Transit was incorporated into the plans for the New Tappan Zee Bridge; from the start, and not left as an afterthought to be forgotten.

Our plans call for improving our bus network, not only east-west from the Tappan Zee Bridge in Tarrytown to the Connecticut border in Port Chester, but also north-south with White Plains acting as the central hub.

- The second target is to tighten the link between our colleges and businesses. Our kids need jobs when they graduate and our businesses need graduates with the right skills. The challenge is to make sure our students have the right skills coming out of school.

One emerging idea is to expand internship programs between Westchester businesses and colleges with the County Center becoming the site of a giant match-making forum this fall. Think of it as a combination speed dating and internship mixer.

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It is no secret that some of our most iconic corporations have considered leaving Westchester. But we met with them, listened to their concerns and partnered with them on strategies that could make them more successful and remain in Westchester at the same time. As a result:

- Pepsico is not only staying in Westchester, but completely modernizing its world headquarters in Purchase.
- MasterCard is also doing a similar upgrade to its headquarters in Purchase.
- Regeneron is expanding its campus in Mount Pleasant to one million square feet and adding 500 jobs.
- Acorda Therapeutics is expanding its corporate headquarters in Ardsley.

We have also worked closely with smaller companies.

AxisPoint is a prime example. When the Town of Ossining entered into an agreement three years ago to have the county provide police services, the town no longer needed its police station.

AxisPoint, a technology services provider, was looking to expand. Our Industrial Development Agency was able to broker a deal for AxisPoint to buy the old police station from the town for \$1.4 million.

AxisPoint is currently making renovations and expects to have 31 employees at work in the building next month. Taxpayers in the town, county and Ossining school district all benefit by having the property returned to the tax rolls. This is another example of smart government.

Frank Scanga, president and CEO of AxisPoint, is here with us tonight. Frank, thank you for investing in Westchester. Sitting with him is Eileen Mildenberger, the head of our Office of Economic Development and Jim Coleman, the head of our Industrial Development Agency. To anyone with a business in Westchester or thinking of starting one here, Jim and Eileen are here to help you.

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Our successes also extend to keeping our not-for-profit sector vibrant. In 2008, the New York State Legislature in its “wisdom” decided to let a law lapse that allowed non-profits access to low-cost, tax-exempt financing.

This made absolutely no sense.

And so when Albany refused to fix its mistake, we took matters into our own hands in Westchester.

With the help of our Board of Legislators, Westchester County created its own Local Development Corporation last year, which at no risk to taxpayers, can give hospitals, schools, nursing homes, social service agencies and other not-for-profits access to lower-cost tax exempt financing. There is no risk to taxpayers because the financing comes from private investors. This money can be used to refinance existing debt or help fund new construction and renovation projects.

To date, the LDC has leveraged almost a half a billion dollars. Beneficiaries include:

- Pace University
- SUNY Purchase
- White Plains Hospital
- Phelps Memorial Hospital
- Northern Westchester Hospital
- And, Kendal on Hudson, the nursing and assisted living facility in Sleepy Hollow.

The point is that everyone benefits if not-for profits can lower their costs.

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As important as our partners are, there are things that the county can do – like put our own budget to work for the economy. Nowhere is that connection more clear than with the money allocated each year for capital projects.

This year, our capital budget totals \$271 million. The money goes to fix roads and bridges, enhance our technology and telecommunications, and upgrade our parks. The money also supports roughly 2,000 jobs a year.

Better infrastructure and more jobs is certainly good news; but there is still room for improvement. One area is the time it takes to complete our capital projects.

Any time taxpayer dollars are involved, care must be taken to make sure the money is spent the right way, on the right things.

But as the potholes from hell this winter showed, speed is also important. When the potholes are big enough to consume a Prius, immediate relief is needed.

With that in mind, tonight I am proposing what will be called the County Road and Bridge Urgent Restoration Program.

This program will put \$25 million aside over the next five years so that money is always available when our roads and bridges require urgent attention. The money won't just be for temporary fixes to potholes; it will allow us to make long-term improvements as well. The bonding will give us the flexibility to jumpstart new projects as road conditions dictate, and not to be constrained by slow-moving budget schedules.

Legislation will be delivered to the board in the coming days.

On behalf of all the tires and axels screaming for mercy, I ask that we act on this legislation as soon as possible.

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It is important to note that we are working to make our economy greener as well as stronger.

One way is through the Westchester Green Business Challenge, our public-private partnership with The Business Council of Westchester that is designed to help our businesses go green and at the same time save money and improve performance. More than 250 companies of all sizes have stepped up to the challenge.

On the small end, we have The Blue Pig, an ice cream shop in Croton-on-Hudson, owned by Lisa Moir.

Though Lisa's ice cream comes in many flavors, green runs throughout. She starts by sourcing all her ingredients locally – she grows berries on her rooftop garden – and has employed green construction techniques throughout the store. One more point. I took the family to The Blue Pig last Saturday, and make no mistake, the ice cream is delicious.

Note to my kids: If you make it through the rest of the speech, I will take you back for more ice cream.

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On a bigger scale, there is New York Presbyterian Hospital. When you include its White Plains campus to its other holdings, New York

Presbyterian is one of the largest hospital systems in the country – employing 800 people in Westchester alone.

Few companies do more to put environmental sustainability to work than New York Presbyterian.

The hospital assigns "Green Champions" at each of its campuses to lead its environmental efforts, which have included establishing "green" procurement policies, purchasing hybrid vehicles, investing in energy and water efficient equipment, and recycling just about everything that is not nailed down.

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At the county level, our environmental initiatives run the gamut as well, and even go as far as *literally turning garbage into money and art*.

The Material Recovery Facility in Yonkers, better known as the "MURF," is where glass bottles, aluminum cans, plastic wraps, cardboard and newspapers from across Westchester – in the amount of 70,000 tons a year - are brought to be sorted and recycled.

The payoff for the county is that the "MURF" generates \$6 million in revenue for county taxpayers and saves another \$6 million from not having to dispose of these items as garbage.

The MURF is also a classroom where 6,000 visitors, most of them students, learn about the benefits of recycling.

In 2013, the Education Center at the MURF was renovated. Last week "Trash to Treasure," our recycled art gallery was added. The art is all made from recycled and reused materials.

Government can't get much smarter than when it is turning garbage into money, trash into art and helping the environment at the same time.

With us tonight are members of our Smart and Green Team.

- Lisa Moir of The Blue Pig
- Alissa Kosowsky and Steve Ferrando of New York Presbyterian

- Tom Lauro, Westchester’s commissioner of Environmental Facilities.
- And Scott Fernqvist, manager of the Green Business Challenge on behalf of Westchester County.

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There are a lot of fun things to do in Westchester and county government is a catalyst for many of them – like bicycle Sundays on the Bronx River Parkway, now in its 40th year, our many cultural heritage festivals and the Fourth of July fireworks at the Kensico Dam.

Speaking of the dam, if you are wondering why Kensico Plaza has been closed, it’s because of a major project to plant new trees and install new lights. When the park reopens later this spring, the lights will allow us to keep it open later at night. So to our many fans of the Kensico Dam Plaza, we will have you back in there in a couple of weeks. *Maybe winter will be over by then.*

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One arrival that we are very excited about is that of the New York Knicks, whose developmental team will start playing its home games at the County Center in the fall.

Talk about a great partnership. The NBA, Madison Square Garden, the New York Knicks, and county government have teamed up to bring professional basketball to fans in Westchester and beyond at very affordable prices.

Ticket prices will start at \$10 for the 24 regular season games to be played between November and April.

In other words, second mortgages won’t be necessary to take the family to a game.

The county wins by having a contract that covers its expenses, plus sees revenues from ticket sales, parking, concessions and advertising grow with the success of the team.

With us are Dave Howard, the president of MSG Sports; John Starks, the former Knicks star who is now a fan development advisor, and Bill Boyce, who heads the Westchester operations for the new team. Sitting with them is Kathy O'Connor, our Commissioner of Parks.

Dave, John, Bill and many others from MSG, the NBA and the Knicks will be with us at the County Center on May 14 when the new team name and logo will be officially launched.

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Speaking of fun. Let's talk about Playland.

The story of Playland is the story of what it is like to be a parent. You look at your kids, and you see enormous potential. Unfortunately, they just don't grow up by themselves. They need lots of love and attention, not to mention money.

So where are we with Playland?

We are at the hard part:

- Hammering out details.
- Crunching numbers.
- Splitting differences.
- Questioning assumptions.
- Trusting partners.
- Deflecting lawsuits.
- Convincing doubters.

All in an effort to put our vision into contracts.

Yesterday, we turned another corner as Sustainable Playland Incorporated recommitted to the project.

Four years ago when we started the reinvention of Playland, we knew that our road to success would be long, windy and full of many stops and starts.

The last four weeks have actually been very constructive, because they focused everyone's attention on the details that need to be worked out.

And today, we do have greater clarity. One thing SPI was concerned about was that its members, all volunteers, would be covered by the county in the event of lawsuits. We gave them that assurance.

SPI also asked, and we agreed, to have the county play an even more active role in working out the details of the contracts with the professional operators being brought in to run the park.

The good news is that SPI has assembled a top-flight set of companies to run the activities within the park.

- Central Amusements International - an amusement park planner, developer and operator, which operates Luna Park at Coney Island.
- American Skating Entertainment Centers – the largest independent owner/operator of ice rink facilities in the United States, which includes the Westchester Skating Academy in Elmsford.
- Playland Sports, a new company started by Rye residents who have teamed up with Pinnacle Indoor Sports, a national indoor sports complex developer who designed House of Sports in Ardsley.

The hard part is that we have to finalize contracts. But that's where our full attention is now focused.

The next immediate step is to resume the hearings before the Board of Legislators. I want to thank Chairman Kaplowitz for his patience. He has my commitment that my administration will work with him to provide the information needed for the Board of Legislators to complete its due diligence on the Playland Improvement Plan before it.

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Let me summarize the path forward with this Playland story. A couple of years ago in the fall, Sheila and I took the kids for a stroll on the boardwalk.

To be honest, the kids were not too thrilled. The amusement area was closed and they wanted to go on the rides.

I explained it was closed and Kiley said to me: “But Dad, you can open it up, you have the keys.”

This year, the park opens May 10.

As long as I have the keys, I will work as hard as I can to make the park financially viable so we can keep it open for generations to come.

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The affordable housing settlement with the federal government has been another challenge.

Since I inherited the settlement on my first day in office, I have approached it from the rule of law. The county would meet its obligations in full, but would not be bullied by the federal government, in its words, to “go beyond the four corners of the settlement.”

And although it falls on deaf ears at HUD every time we mention it, these two facts are irrefutable:

Westchester is ahead of schedule in meeting its obligations to have 750 units of affordable housing built in the settlement’s 31 communities and that progress would not be possible if the local zoning in those communities did not allow it.

The latest tally shows:

- All 31 communities have identified potential projects.
- 403 units have financing in place
- 385 have building permits; already surpassing this year’s obligation.

Frankly, this progress is phenomenal. Any suburban housing development, let alone a government project, that's ahead of schedule is something that rarely happens in real life.

But it has happened in Westchester, and it happened because of the professionalism of our Planning Department and the cooperation we have received from our municipalities.

My continuing thanks to all who have worked so hard. I applaud you.

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HUD has been another story. While we never expected a parade, we have been surprised and disappointed at HUD's decision to punish the very people it claims to help in its attempt to dismantle our local zoning.

This year, HUD is threatening to renege – and we strongly believe without any legal justification – on a previous promise of \$5 million in Community Development Block Grants. The money is for revitalizing neighborhoods, preventing homelessness, and – how is this for irony – helping to build affordable housing.

The immediate problem is that our communities are without the money, while the case goes through the courts – and it needs to be emphasized that most of the communities stiffed by HUD have nothing to do with the settlement.

That's just not right or fair. So what do we do about it?

Some say we should do whatever it takes to get the funds restored.

Yes, a lot of money is at stake.

But everyone needs to understand exactly what HUD is demanding in return for the money. From HUD's point of view, the settlement was never about building affordable housing. The agency's behavior over the last four years proves that.

For HUD the goal is control over our local communities. Dismantle zoning regulations, and there are no longer any checks or balances on the agency's social engineering ambitions in Westchester, now on Long Island, or anywhere around the country.

The Community Development Block Grants have been HUD's prime weapon. The strategy was simple. Withhold the money and wait for the county to capitulate on zoning. But that didn't happen and won't happen while I am county executive. Westchester is not for sale; not for \$5, \$5 million or \$5 billion.

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We have fought a principled fight, because we believe the future of our communities belongs first and foremost to our residents and not to unelected bureaucrats in Washington.

This is not an act of defiance.

It is an affirmation of the principles on which our nation was built.

The founding fathers wisely understood that the government closest to the people is usually the best government. Not because local officials have a monopoly on wisdom. They don't. But neither does the federal government. What local officials do have is an intimate, every-day-of-the-year understanding of how life is actually lived on the streets and in the neighborhoods of their communities. It is why "home rule" is protected by the New York State Constitution.

So how do we move forward?

Tonight, I am proposing that Westchester County start its own block grant program for the communities being held hostage by HUD.

The program will replace the HUD funding with county money financed through a bond issue. All the same rules will apply and the county will handle the administrative processes, which it already does.

But instead of being held up by the whims of Washington, Westchester can move forward independently and do the right thing for our communities.

This act of independence – to opt out of the HUD program - solves a number of problems:

- It will get money to our communities.
- It will get the money there quickly by taking the process away from Washington bureaucrats.
- It will be affordable to our taxpayers. Financing a \$5 million program will cost each household in Westchester about \$1 dollar a year.
- And most important, this initiative will remove the stranglehold that HUD has been using in its attempt to dismantle our local zoning.

Never has one dollar been able to buy so much.

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We have talked about what we have done, what we are doing and what we plan to do. Let's talk about how we have pay for things.

The payoff for taxpayers is that we have remained true to our word. We promised tax relief and we delivered it.

Following a 17 percent rise in the tax levy between 2005 and 2010, we cut the tax levy by 2 percent in 2011.

And in 2012, 2013, and 2014, we held the tax levy flat, flat, and flat again. That's a minus 2 followed by three zeroes. Not bad.

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Now the critics will say that county taxes make up only about 20 percent of the local property tax bill, and that's a fact. The biggest portion of the bill, typically about 60 percent, pays for schools, and the remaining 20 percent goes to your local town or village and special districts.

So it is certainly true that a 2 percent decrease on 20 percent of your property tax bill is not going to be life changing. But, it does show that at least county government has put a stop to tax and spend madness.

At the county level, our goal has been to strike the right balance between what's nice to have and what's really needed. Curb indulgence, stop waste and reward value.

Our idea has been to run a government that can live within its means, and here's why.

If our seniors must live within their means, as they struggle to pay the property taxes on their homes, whose mortgages were paid off long ago...

If our young families must live within their means, as they scrimp to put every spare dollar into the college fund...

If our recent graduates must live within their means, as they start careers with big college loans to pay off....

Then their county government can and must do it too.

So tonight I repeat and renew the pledge I have made to the people of Westchester for the last four years. I will submit a budget for 2015 with no increase in the county property tax levy.

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Our fight to bring government spending and taxes under control doesn't stop in Westchester. The next battle is in Albany, because that's where our money is consumed.

This year 85 percent of the Westchester County tax levy will go directly to Albany to pay for just nine state unfunded mandates.

Now Albany politicians will say: What about all the state aid we send to Westchester?

Fact: These nine unfunded mandates cost Westchester \$450 million.

Fact: Westchester receives about \$250 million in state aid.

In other words, Albany sends us \$1 dollar, charges us \$2, and by the time the year is over we owe them more than \$200 million.

If this wasn't the government, it would be illegal.

Instead, it is just Albany math. We've become Albany's ATM. And, the tax cap only makes things worse. The 2 percent tax cap forces counties, local municipalities and school districts to be fiscally responsible – and that's a good thing. But instead of capping its own spending, Albany just keeps sending us bigger and bigger bills.

Less money for local needs – parks, libraries, schools, roads, hospitals – more money for the Albany spending machine. Without relief from unfunded mandates, local communities will continue to suffer.

Our top legislative priority must be to unite our cities, towns, villages, and school districts to hold Albany accountable.

Real mandate relief is needed. The crisis is here. The time to act is now.

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So what to do about Albany? Did somebody say elephant in the room?

On November 5th of last year, the voters of Westchester returned me to this job, which I love.

Election night was one of those moments when it seems a million things are happening all at once.

The first was anxiety. Elections at the county level are always uphill climbs for Republicans in Westchester. I honestly had no idea of whether I would be re-elected. Sending resumes out on Wednesday was a real possibility.

Then the returns came in, and the results were really good. People in Westchester validated their support for the decisions we had made. And I thank you for that.

But the media was already on to the next horse race...and declared me a possible gubernatorial candidate.

President Clinton said he never inhaled. I never got a chance to exhale.

It was flattering to be considered for the job of governor.

It was also daunting.

After some soul searching and discussions with my wife and leaders from around the state, it boiled down to this:

Could my running for governor make a positive difference for both Westchester and New York?

Ultimately, my answer was “yes.”

The issues of Westchester and New York State are one and the same.

Jobs, taxes, education, the environment, preserving the social safety net and bringing some sanity to the burden of unfunded mandates all desperately need attention right now.

Albany is like a giant vacuum sucking money, jobs and energy from local communities. It's time to pull the plug.

We pulled the plug on runaway taxes and spending in Westchester, and what happened? Government got more accountable, services got delivered, and jobs got created.

There is no reason the same can't be done in Albany.

...

New York is losing. We are dead last 50th in this state in all the wrong categories: highest taxes in the nation, worst business climate, worst economic outlook, most corruption, highest per pupil spending and bottom half in results, highest electricity rates, and more people fleeing our state than any other state in the country.

When traveling this beautiful state of ours, my mind sometimes drifts back home, where I could be watching Sean play lacrosse, or Kiley's cheerleading, or read a bedtime story to Ashlin. But it's for them and all of the people of this state that I threw my hat into the ring.

I am hoping to bring to Albany what has worked successfully in Westchester and nothing will help Westchester more than a state government that is accountable and lives within its means.

Will I be successful? I don't know.

But I do know this:

The time to try is now ... and both Westchester and the state will benefit from an honest debate about how to really fix what's broken.

And that's why I am running. To continue to be part of the solution.

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I begin my second term thankful to be here. Westchester is a place we all love. Every day, the job is to make Westchester an even better place. To the challenge, I bring *my head* – to find new answers, *my heart* – to never forget the needs of all of our residents, and *my spine* – to do what is right, even if it is not popular.

Westchester begins with WE. We have the people, resources and will to overcome every obstacle in front of us. Together is how we will continue to move forward and move forward we will.

Thank you and good night.