

Good evening.

It is my great pleasure to be with you here tonight to present the 2015 State of Westchester County Address.

This is the sixth year I have been honored as County Executive to report to the residents of Westchester on the progress of our county. Six years is a long time. And yet, it **has passed** in the blink of an eye.

I'm reminded of the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, where the bible tells us God created heaven and earth; the light, the land, the oceans, and all living creatures **in just six days**.

If given **six years**, you wonder what God could do with Westchester County....

Would there still be pot holes? ...

Especially since people **yell** his name every time they hit one.

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The message from my office here on earth tonight is that there will be no day of rest in our efforts to make Westchester County a place that grows **smarter, safer and stronger** each day.

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With that I would like to welcome everyone here with us in the courthouse tonight, and those watching on News 12 and Fios 1.

Also welcome to all of our Spanish speaking residents.

Bienvenidos a mi sexto Discurso del Estado del Condado. Mis esfuerzos por servirles continúa. Diario estoy trabajando arduamente para hacer de nuestro condado un lugar que se convierte **más inteligente, más seguro y más fuerte** todos los días. Usted puede ver mi discurso del Estado del Condado en español en [Westchestergov\(punto\)com](http://Westchestergov(punto)com). Gracias por ser parte de nuestra familia de Westchester.

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In the courthouse tonight, there are some people I would like to recognize.

First our host, the Honorable Alan Scheinkman, administrative judge for the Ninth Judicial District.

Next, our District Attorney Janet Di Fiore and County Clerk Tim Idoni.

We also have a host of local officials here tonight.

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My thanks also go out to all of the members of the Board of Legislators.

I want to particularly thank Chairman Michael Kaplowitz for his partnership.

Mike and I don't agree on every issue.

But where we disagree, we have built a relationship that allows us to come to the middle on our differences.

By doing so, the two co-equal branches of government align, and the business of Westchester gets done in a constructive and bi-partisan way.

So thanks to Chairman Kaplowitz for his leadership and to all the members of the Board of Legislators for your dedication.

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My family is also here.

Certainly for us, the six years has **flown** by. Ashlin is already in kindergarten. If you'll remember, she was an infant when I first took office. Sean and Kiley are now in their "tweens."

You can imagine how excited they are to be here. “Oh great, Dad’s giving another speech.”

To show their enthusiasm, Sean handed Sheila and me a handwritten note last week on behalf of all three kids. The note was to let us know they were “Opting Out” of this year’s State of the County.

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But, I am happy to say, they are all here tonight. Even if it’s because I threatened to withhold their financial aid.

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As has become our custom, we begin the state of the county address with a report on our veterans.

The news is good.

No lives were lost last year among the men and women from Westchester proudly serving in our military around the world.

For that we are truly thankful.

The debt we owe to our veterans can never be repaid in full. But each day we try to chip away at it.

It is unacceptable that any U.S. veteran can find himself or herself in a situation where they are homeless.

Since 2013, through our Patriot Housing initiative, we **have found homes for 265 veterans... and we won’t stop until every veteran in Westchester has a place of their own to call home.**

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This past year, we have also focused on thanking our “***greatest generation.***” In October, my office and the Veterans Service Agency

worked with the Hudson Valley Honor Flight to send 74 of our World War II veterans to visit our nation's capital, and in particular the monuments that honor all who fought and fell to protect freedom throughout the world.

The sendoff from Westchester County Airport was incredible.

Proud soldiers, now in their 80's and 90s, from all branches of the service, were surrounded in a giant hangar by their even prouder families, military bands, color guards and well-wishers of every age.

All who had gathered, in words spoken and unspoken, had the same message for them: "Thank you. We wouldn't be here today without you."

..... There wasn't a dry eye to be found.

Best of all the tradition continues. This year's Honor Flight will leave Westchester County Airport on May 9th.

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Anchoring all these efforts is Vito Pinto, the head of our Veterans Service Agency for the last five years. To the job, Vito brought a career's worth of experience as an educator; 27 years as an elected official, and 8 years as a fighter pilot during the Vietnam War.

Vito announced his retirement at the end of March. His successor is Ron Tocci, who like Vito has a long history of public service. A veteran himself, Ron chaired the Veterans Affairs Committee in Albany for many years when he served in the State Assembly, and he also served as the Commissioner of the New York State Department of Veterans Affairs under Governor Pataki. So our veterans remain in very capable hands.

I couldn't let Vito retire without thanking him publicly for all of his service to Westchester County.

Unfortunately, Vito's brother passed away this week and he is at the funeral today in Philadelphia.

What I planned to say to him tonight was that he is an officer, gentleman and true patriot, and that it is my great honor to present him with Westchester's Distinguished Service Award, our county's highest honor.

Vito when you get home, this will be waiting for you, along with the thanks of an entire county for all your years of service.

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Just as we are working hard on behalf of our veterans, we have made significant progress in fulfilling our obligations under the housing settlement, which was reached by my predecessor and the federal government and calls for the construction of 750 units of affordable housing in 31 of our communities by the end of next year.

Five years into the settlement, 223 of the units are occupied and 454 units have financing in place. We are very proud of those numbers. They exceed the settlement's benchmarks and **stand as proof of** Westchester County's commitment to affordable housing.

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The numbers also give lie to the notion that Westchester's zoning laws are exclusionary... Simply put, if our zoning was exclusionary and our communities unwelcoming, our progress would not be what it is today.

We have made this point repeatedly to the Department of Housing and Urban Development. But it has fallen on deaf ears; ***until now.***

From the day I took office, I made it very clear that my administration would fulfill the county's obligations under the settlement. Like it or not, the law is the law. The rule of law is what binds us together as Americans.

But I also made it clear I would not allow unelected bureaucrats at HUD to create new obligations for the county that were never agreed upon in the settlement.

One year **into** the settlement, HUD began to test us. The agency started withholding federal grants – also known as **our tax dollars** – from the county. This money was designated to help our neediest communities, who it needs to be pointed out, were **not in any way involved** in the settlement.

None of this mattered to HUD. HUD viewed the grant money as ransom to be paid **only** if the county would capitulate on local zoning.

I said no.

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I said no because the county had **done nothing wrong**, Westchester is **in compliance** with the settlement, and HUD had **no right** to withhold the money simply because it said it could.

At the very least, Westchester was entitled to due process.

So we went to court.

Support for my decision to go to court was, **shall we say**, less than universal. Critics said we should **just** keep quiet and do whatever HUD says we need to do to get the money.

Again I said no. The decision was easy. Local zoning and home rule **are not for sale**.

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In February, we got a decision. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, whose power and influence are second only to the U.S. Supreme Court, delivered **a major victory** to Westchester County.

The court said that HUD **did not** have “unfettered” discretion... that HUD’s decisions **were** subject to judicial review and that HUD’s opinions **did not** carry the weight of law.

In other words, HUD was subject to our nation’s laws – and its own rules and regulations – just like you and me.

The ruling is critically important because HUD must now provide evidence in court that its actions to withhold money from the county were legally justified. It must back up its claims with proof.

Even more important than the ruling's significance for Westchester is its national impact. The Second Circuit's decision establishes standards that HUD must follow in its dealings with every municipality in the United States.

This new accountability for HUD **is a major victory against an aggressive and overreaching federal government.**

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This victory was the result of a lot of teamwork, and two departments deserve to be singled out. First, the Law Department, which successfully argued our case.

And second, the Planning Department, which was responsible for the exhaustive research – conducted across every inch of Westchester – that shows our zoning is open to all.

As just one indication of the expertise and professionalism of our county planners, the department was honored this month with an Award of Merit for Best Practices by two of the nation's leading planning associations.

Congratulations to Commissioner Ed Buroughs and the Planning Department. Ed please stand up.

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One of the biggest challenges for any administration in its second term is figuring out how to maintain its focus and energy on making things better.

In our case, the response began with asking a lot of questions. Chief among them: What are our biggest strengths, biggest weaknesses, and how do we bridge the gap?

For answers I went to our commissioners, department heads and employees. I also sought the insights of 50 leaders in various fields from around the county.

Here's what we found:

Westchester's top three strengths are:

- **Talent** – Westchester has one of the most talented workforces anywhere. A remarkable 45% of county residents over the age of 25 hold a bachelor's degree or higher. That's best in the 50 states.
- **Accessibility** – Three Metro North rail lines serve Westchester. Our county airport serves commercial, private, and corporate flights. And the backbone of our transportation network – the Bee Line Bus System, which served more than 31 million passengers last year, continues to grow and improve.

Quality of Life – Schools, shopping, movies, museums, concerts, restaurants, parks, open space *and* four full seasons are all part of the reason we love Westchester. Outsiders love us as well. Tourism is a 1.7 billion dollar industry for Westchester, and television shows filmed here, like “Orange is the New Black,” “The Americans,” “The Following,” and “The Leftovers” earned 29 Emmy nominations last year.

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On the other side of the coin, Westchester's top three challenges are:

- **Affordability** – Every Westchester resident knows full well that high taxes and housing prices make our county an expensive place to live and do business.

- **Complexity** –We love our cities, towns and villages, but with 45 of them, not to mention 43 school districts and believe it or not 212 separate taxing districts, navigating Westchester’s multiple layers of government can be frustrating, expensive and time consuming.
- **Identity** – The dynamism of Westchester is often overshadowed by a reputation for being “your father’s Oldsmobile.” Westchester has changed greatly since the days when it was the home of Dick Van Dyke and the Petrie family. Our challenge today is to get the message out that ***our economy is vibrant*** and ***our doors are open to everyone.***

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Armed with a portrait of strengths and weaknesses, we dug deeper. What’s our fundamental mission? Should we even exist? Connecticut doesn’t have county government. They did away with it in 1959.

Philosophy quickly gave way to practicality. Albany is never going to abolish county government. So we focused our energies on making county government better.

The private sector showed us we could be more efficient. But running government like a business only gets you so far. Public safety, public health, parks and providing for our sick, needy and elderly don’t fit into neat, little business models.

County government operates in the space between compassion and profit. Yes, we want our government to be faster, better, cheaper, but not if it hurts our quality of life. The dilemma was and is: How do you continue to deliver vital services at a cost that’s affordable to our already overburdened taxpayers.

Our answer is that we have to be smarter.

Smarter doesn't solve all our problems. ***We are not that smart.*** But it does put us on a path toward constant improvement.

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What does smart government look like? One example is the Westchester Smart Mobile Application Development Bowl.

The challenges here were twofold. How to improve care for patients with dementia and Alzheimer's Disease, and how to show our young people that Westchester is a place where their technology talents can be nurtured and rewarded?

The smart answer, brought to life by a partnership between our Department of Social Services and Pace University's Seidenberg School of Computer Science and Information Systems, was to hold a contest that asked high school and college students to design mobile applications that could help patients, doctors, nurses and families.

When the idea was first hatched, we thought we would be lucky to get six teams. We got 50; more than 200 students not just from Westchester but from New York City, Rockland, Long Island and Connecticut.

We kicked off the contest at the County Center, complete with banners, marching bands, dancers. Think of it as ***March Madness for Brainiacs.***

And last week, the winners were named.

There were no losers, but there was a grand prize winner: A brother-sister team from Yorktown called ASSIST, which stands for Application Specialists in Science and Technology.

ASSIST is made up of Mark Aldrich, a freshman at Soundview Preparatory School, and his sister, Lindsay, a junior at Yorktown High School. Their coach is their mom, Cindy.

Just getting high school siblings to talk to each other is an incredible accomplishment. What team ASSIST did was develop an application that makes it easier for care givers to help patients and their families.

Specifically, the app organizes and shares tasks among all of a patient's helpers. To do that, the app assembled what coders call an "inverse profile" of responsibilities.

I don't have a clue how that works.

But, I do know that team Assist's efforts speak volumes to how young minds and new technology can reshape our world in smart and positive ways.

Mark, Lindsay and Cindy well done.....

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I also want to recognize two of our partners from Pace who are with us.

- Dr. Amar Gupta, the dean of the Seidenberg School of Computer Science & Information Systems.
- And, Deth Sao, the school's director of Development.

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What all this new technology is telling us ... is that there are always new frontiers to cross.

Westchestergov.com, the county's website, is a great example.

The website provides what we like to call **news you can use** about every facet of county government – from golf tee times to senior nutrition programs.

More than 300,000 unique visitors use the site each month, totaling more than one million page views.

That's up 165 percent since our administration took office in 2010, and we are very proud of that.

But we weren't satisfied.

Rapid changes in Internet usage have opened new opportunities, particularly with regard to cell phones. More than 70 percent of Internet traffic was generated by cell phones in 2014, and the number is expected to exceed 90 percent in two years.

With only 10 percent of westchestergov.com's visitors accessing the site through cell phones, we knew we had a huge growth opportunity.

So our IT and Communications Departments jumped on it.

Design changes were made.

And today, operating from a **single server in Chappaqua**sorry that's not us, that's the State Department. (Just checking to see if you are paying attention.)

We actually have more than 900 servers, and today among the things they are doing is powering an updated Westchestergov.com that's as easy to access, navigate and read on mobile phones as it is on traditional computer screens.

We are putting information in the hands of people **wherever they are, whenever they want it**, and we think that's smart.

Another smart feature of the web site is the new events calendar. In Westchester, there are always plenty of things to do and places to go, but people often complain they don't know about them. The new county calendar creates a central repository for events. Any school, civic, municipal or not-for-profit organization can get its event posted simply by signing up right on the website for the service, **which is free**.

You never know if you are living in Ardsley, there might be a good reason to go to Armonk next weekend.

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More smart ideas are underway.

In May, our "A Job's Waiting for You Training" gets started and Westchester is leading this seven county effort. The idea is smart and

powerful. Take the hard to employ and hard to fill jobs; build a training program that matches the two; and then guarantee a job upon successful completion of the training.

A real job. Not a certificate. A real, good-wage paying job.

We are partnering first with the health care industry, which has more jobs – like MRI technicians – than it can currently fill. The goal is to place 500 individuals in four years. And, we think we can do better. We are already looking to expand the program beyond the health care field.

Stay tuned for details.

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Smart goes hand in hand with job creation.

Two job creation tools that we are using effectively are the Industrial Development Agency and the Local Development Corporation.

The IDA focuses on private sector companies and the LDC focuses on the not-for-profit sector, but their mission is the same – attract, retain and help businesses grow in Westchester. They do this by offering companies tax-exempt financing and other incentives – at no risk to county taxpayers.

For both agencies, 2014 was a banner year.

The IDA was involved in 16 projects that generated more than \$400 million in private investment and created **3,400 permanent and construction jobs**.

The LDC's projects, supporting groups ranging from Pace University to the YWCA in White Plains, totaled \$129 million and accounted for **1,600 permanent and construction jobs**.

Bill Mooney our head of Economic Development and Jim Coleman, the executive director of the IDA and LDC, have been instrumental in our success and getting the message out that Westchester is open for business and wants your business.

Bill and Jim can you please stand.

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The county team is going to be even busier in the coming months.

Tonight, I am announcing the opening of a new set of doors **in Manhattan**.

We are opening a new Westchester Economic Development office at 125 Park Avenue, right across from Grand Central Station.

This office will be fully functional and open for business starting in May.

The purpose for the office is to aggressively promote Westchester's many assets, offerings and competitive advantages to companies and entrepreneurs looking to re-locate, expand, or start businesses.

Our message is simple: To those companies in New York City looking to Fairfield County or Jersey City, or perhaps the Carolinas, Florida or Texas – before you decide to leave New York State, you need to take a look at Westchester.

And we think Westchester's best asset may be the newest member of our team: Bill de Blasio

People are excited about the new Star Wars movie. We think our Manhattan economic development office is going to be a giant blockbuster as well.

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The county is also making direct investments in our economic prosperity.

In the last five years, my administration has invested close to one billion dollars in capital projects. That's billion with a B.

They include:

- Upgrades to sewer, water and refuse systems.
- Repairs for roads, bridges and buildings

- Improvements to our parks, transportation system and Westchester Community College.

These projects aren't glamorous. But they are critically important to making Westchester a place where people want to work and live. And they put food on the table for thousands of families. Our capital projects produce **2,000 construction jobs a year.**

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Today is Earth Day and smart certainly applies to the environment.

I want to mention an exciting new venture. It's a partnership among Westchester County, Arc of Westchester, which works with the developmentally disabled, the Food Bank for Westchester, Westchester Community College, and Westchester Medical Center.

Here's how it works: the county will launch its new composting system in Valhalla in June. Excess food from the medical center and college is collected and composted with the help of teams from Arc. The enriched soil then goes to Food Bank for its community gardens and our Department of Public Works for use on county grounds.

We are so proud of this project because it works on so many levels. It turns food waste into a useable product; it provides training and job skills and it creates an ongoing example of how simple ideas can help preserve our environment.

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More and more our economic growth is both smart and green, such as our successful Green Business Challenge. This program, run in partnership by the county and The Business Council of Westchester, has attracted 300 organizations from throughout the county. These companies are distinguishing themselves by integrating sustainable practices into *all* areas of their operations.

One of them deserves special mention.

Diamond Properties is a visionary company. Less than 10 years ago, its Mount Kisco headquarters was an abandoned building. Diamond saw the 600,000 square-foot property as an unpolished gem.

Today it gleams.

The fully occupied building has a mix of tenants who require big blocks of space. They include an indoor trampoline park, a self-storage facility, a health club and Grand Prix New York, a racing entertainment complex.

What makes Diamond so special is that it integrates savvy business sense and sustainability into every aspect of its operations – from recycled paper products, to solar panels, to green cleaning products, to electric cars.

With us tonight is Bill Diamond, a founder and co-owner of Diamond Properties. I want to thank Bill, his brother Jim, who is also a founder and co-owner, and the entire Diamond team, for their leadership and the example they have set for all of us.

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Smart can also be fun. So here is a riddle: What do teams of lawyers, accountants, marketing consultants and the Dragon Coaster have in common? The answer is saving Playland.

Last week, the county took a giant step forward in securing Playland's future.

Whether you're for big government or small government, does anyone think government has a role to play in running a log flume?

In Westchester, the answer is yes... and has been since 1928. As a result, Playland has become part of the DNA of growing up in Westchester.

Like a lot of things that are fun, Playland costs money, a lot of money. The bill to taxpayers runs about \$4 million a year, and after 87 years, a major capital infusion is needed to restore the park's pizzazz.

That **infusion** is at hand. Last week, we announced a \$25 million agreement with New York-based Standard Amusements to run Playland.

Under the terms of the deal, Standard Amusements will:

- Make a \$2.25 million up-front payment to the county.
- Invest \$23 million to restore and reinvigorate the park.
- Pay the county an annual fee of \$300,000, which escalates each year.
- And Standard Amusements will share seven and half percent of the profits with the county once it recoups its initial investment.

As early as the 2016 season, visitors could be seeing upgrades to the park's overall appearance, a broader selection of food and dining choices, and new rides, including – coasters, slides and a mini water park.

In addition to financial resources, Standard Amusements also brings one of the leading management teams in the industry.

With us tonight are Nicholas Singer, who heads up Standard Amusements, and Jack Falfas, who has more than 40 years of operating experience across the country. In particular, Jack has an extensive background in amusement park turnarounds, and he will be moving to Rye to oversee the agreement.

Nicholas and Jack, please stand up.

We couldn't be happier to have you as partners.

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This deal with Standard Amusements meets all of the county's goals.

- It secures the long-term financial future of Playland and greatly reduces the drain on taxpayers.
- It puts the park in the hands of top-flight managers.
- And it puts a shine on Playland's reputation as a must-visit destination for fun and life-long memories.

It's a triple-shot winner for Westchester.

And one more thing, I am going to sign an executive order, lowering the height requirements on all the cool rides.

You got to look out for the little guy.

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The deal is now before the Board of Legislators for its approval in the next 60 days. With a Double Aqua Loop Slide, UniCoaster and a lot of other fun riding on BOL approval, the stakes could not be higher.

My administration will cooperate in any way it can to assist the BOL.

This season, Playland will open on May 9th under current county management, and our hope is that with the quick arrival of our new partner, Standard Amusements, **the very best days of the park are still to come.**

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Safety is another critical goal of county government and that's the focus of our Safer Communities initiative.

Safer Communities grew out of the fatal school shootings in Newtown Connecticut in December of 2012. This was a punch to the heart that rocked our notion of what it meant to be safe in our schools and homes.

Instead of just reacting to Newtown as an isolated tragedy that happened somewhere else, Westchester understood that it could have been us. So we got to work; exploring our own vulnerabilities and creating programs that solve problems thoughtfully, aggressively and for the long haul.

Here's some of what we have accomplished:

- In 2013, we launched a comprehensive countywide Suicide Prevention and Awareness program. To date, we have trained 400 service providers and advocates to serve as “community champions.”
- Last year, we launched our Youth Mental Health First Aid program. The idea is to teach adults who spend a lot of time with children, like teachers, coaches and clergy, how to spot signs of mental illness, and even more important, what steps to take when they do.

To date, we have trained more than 350 volunteers and our efforts have been praised as a national model.

- We have also expanded our efforts to ensure that our **law enforcement** officers have the best possible training to handle life threatening situations involving people in a state of emotional crisis. In October, we opened our Department of Public Safety’s Crisis Intervention Training program **to all** police, fire and emergency services departments across the county **at no charge** to the local municipality.

This program trains first responders on the causes that are often behind emotional disturbances and provides techniques on how to de-escalate crisis situations.

So far, 38 people have gone through the full CIT program, and an additional 185 have gone through our 8-hour program on mental health issues.

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We are also using technology to make us safer.

A new Safer Communities initiative is the Westchester Safety App. The app, downloadable to your phone for free, will offer information on how to prepare for hurricanes, blizzards and other natural disasters, as well as provide real-time reports on emergencies, such as road-closings and power outages.

It is being developed by Interlecta, a Westchester-based IT company, in conjunction with our Department of Public Safety, and we think it will provide residents with critical information ... when they need it most.

Look for the app this summer.

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Partnerships are another way we're protecting the safety of our citizens.

A case and point is Mount Kisco. A few years ago, Mayor Michael Cindrich approached me and asked if I was willing to explore the possibility of the Westchester County Police providing services to his village on a contract basis.

Mayor Cindrich's goals were to improve police services, while lowering costs. I said it sounded like a good idea. My only caveat was that it had to be cost neutral to county taxpayers.

I directed Public Safety Commissioner George Longworth to see if a deal was possible.

Here's what we found: Mount Kisco could save \$2.4 million over five years; police coverage to the village could be enhanced with more officers on the street; and the deal could be done at no additional cost to the county.

On Monday night, the Village Board unanimously approved the contract.

Earlier today I sent the agreement to our Board of Legislators for review, and, hopefully expedited approval.

Mayor Cindrich is with us tonight and I would ask him to stand and be recognized for his vision and leadership on this issue.

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Our biggest Safer Communities success has been Narcan training. If you don't know, Narcan is a lifesaving anti-dote used to revive heroin overdose victims.

Sadly, heroin overdoses have become a lethal epidemic in recent years.

As part of Safer Communities, we have empowered local police officers to do something they've never done before – give drug overdose victims a life-saving remedy.

Every second counts when a person stops breathing. The more officers we train to administer Narcan, the better our chances for keeping people alive.

At the center of the effort has been our Health Commissioner, Dr. Sherlita Amler, who has personally trained hundreds of officers around the county.

If you want a measure of success for our Narcan program, here it is: twelve lives saved.

With us tonight are some of the heroes behind those life-saving efforts.

- Croton-on-Hudson Officers Douglas Garrido and Thomas Leonard.
- Lewisboro Officer David Alfano.
- Mamaroneck Village Officer Douglas Barron.
- Mount Pleasant Police Officer Daniel Franco.
- New Castle Police Officer Arthur Mendoza.
- Peekskill Officers Doug LaPerche and John Kolesar.
- Yonkers Police Officer Theron A. Park
- And Westchester County Police Officer David Johnson.

Officers – twelve families and an entire county thank you.

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I would also like to recognize Commissioners Longworth and Amler for their leadership in this area.

Senator Terrence Murphy also deserves special mention for his efforts to address the heroin scourge around the state.

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Before moving on, I would like to recognize a loss we all felt this year when the unimaginable happened. An ordinary commute home turned tragic. Six lives

were lost when a car and train collided on the Metro North tracks in Valhalla. To lose loved ones this way is unspeakably sad. Our hearts and prayers continue to go out to the families.

I know the crossing well. I live nearby. When I commuted to New York City, I went over it twice a day by train. Now I pass it by car each day on my way to work.

This kind of tragedy isn't supposed to happen. But it did. Our job now is to prevent it from repeating. I have reached out to the MTA, the state Department of Transportation and our local officials in Mount Pleasant and other communities to see what improvements can be made at our rail crossings **throughout** the county.

We don't yet have all the answers as to what happened that night. But we will. And with this information, we know we can make these crossings safer.

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When you get right down to it, the fundamental key to making our communities safer is making our families stronger. Families are the foundation of our society. Families feed, clothe, shelter, teach, protect, and renew, all with the goal of making the next generation better.

Government is there when families falter. But society operates best when families are strongest.

Two weeks ago, I stood before 400 people in the County Center and told them that the initiative we were about to launch may be the most important and have the most lasting impact of anything **done** by my administration.

The focus of the initiative is **fatherhood** and it is so critical, because in the words of one of our speakers, ***"We can't bungle raising our children."***

Unfortunately, over the course of the past 50 years, the critically important role of the father in the family has been diminished. There are lots of reasons. But what can't be debated are the consequences.

Today, half of all children in the United States are born to single mothers, and that number is even higher in minority communities.

That's deeply troubling because studies show that children in father-absent homes are more likely to:

- live in poverty,
- under perform in school,
- suffer child abuse,
- get involved in drugs and alcohol,
- get in trouble with the law, and get pregnant.

The list goes on and on.

Here's the bottom line:

“What matters for success is less whether your father was rich or poor than whether you knew your father at all.”

These are the words of Lawrence Mead, a political science professor at NYU, who wrote them **25 years ago**.

So what can we do to reverse the tide?

Our fatherhood initiative is aimed at every dad, for the benefit of **every mom, son and daughter**. Our goal is to reach all dads, from those who are present in the home to those who have abandoned their children.

Our approach is that every dad could use a hand. The job of dad is not easy. Even if you had a great dad growing up – like my sister and I did,

plus a great mom – there is still no training manual for when it is your turn to make the tough decisions that are part of parenthood.

On one end of the spectrum, the plan is to work with community agencies to sponsor activities around sports, the arts and community service, where dads can be with their kids and other dads.

We want it to be fun, and it doesn't have to be super organized. Anything a child does with his or her dad can be special. And, we also want to create opportunities for dads to talk to dads.

Talking things over is not a big male trait. Women do it well. Men not so well. But that's not to say men can't improve, even if we are from Mars, if given the right opportunities.

On the other side of the spectrum, our Department of Social Services has developed a pilot program designed to work with unemployed and under-employed men to improve their job skills and prospects and to help ensure that they are meeting their financial responsibilities to their families to the best of their ability.

Again, the goal in all of this is to make families stronger. A good and present dad is good for moms and good for kids. And if the county can be a catalyst for strengthening families, then this may be the most important role the county ever plays.

....

Programs like this don't just happen. They come from people and partnerships. The inspiration and perspiration behind this program are here tonight: Commissioner Kevin McGuire and Deputy Commissioner Joe

Kenner from our Department of Social Services. I also want to acknowledge and thank Judge Kathie Davidson, who oversees our Family Court System. She has provided tremendous support to our fatherhood initiative and to our team at Social Services. Could you all please stand.

.....

Also with us is Allan Houston. Most people know Allan for his legendary career with the New York Knicks. More recently he has become a familiar face in White Plains as the general manager of the Westchester Knicks.

A year ago, we announced our partnership with Madison Square Garden, the NBA, and the Knicks to bring a team to the County Center to play in the Development League. The result has been professional caliber basketball and marquee family entertainment for Westchester residents.

The nice thing about good partnerships is that they can expand in positive ways.

You may not know this, but Allan runs a foundation under his name, and earlier this month he was with us at the launch of our Fatherhood initiative at the County Center. Since then we have continued to talk.

Tonight, I could not be more pleased and thrilled to announce that the county and Allan's foundation will be working together to advance our Fatherhood Initiative and show that fathers matter and real dads stand up.

Allan thank you. I don't know if this will be easier than turning around the Knicks, but we have the makings of a great team.

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Let's pivot to finances. The county's finances are like those of most families in Westchester. We are not broke, but there's not a penny to spare.

In fact we have started each of the last six years with a deficit or what the budget department calls a "structural imbalance." To me and you that means, our bills are projected to be more than our revenues.

The fundamental problem is that many of our largest expenses automatically escalate each year – the biggest one being labor costs.

When families face shortfalls, typically they take a hard look at what is absolutely essential – mortgage and car payments, food, gas and electric – and look for ways to cut back on nice to haves – vacations and dinners out.

The county takes a similar approach. We make sure we are preserving essential services, such as helping those in need, and trim where there is excess. We also look to stretch the budget with greater efficiency.

The problem is that our spending never stops growing thanks to our friends in Albany and the unfunded mandates heaped on us by the state.

Over 80 cents of every county property tax dollar goes to pay for just nine unfunded state mandates. Medicaid – the largest – costs county taxpayers over \$200 million per year. After salaries, it is the single largest expense in the county budget.

Sales tax is another problem area.

While the reduction in energy prices has been great for families on a budget – lowering gas and home heating bills – it has also lowered county sales tax collections, which are running well behind our budget projections.

...

If this all sounds like I am setting you up for an excuse to raise taxes – think again. I am not.

Our taxes are still too damn high. A tax increase is the **last thing Westchester** County needs.

...

So you have my pledge that I will submit a budget to the Board of Legislators in the fall **that will NOT raise the county tax levy**

....

It's a pledge I have kept for five years and I am making it again tonight, because county government **has to be on the side** of every young person, couple, senior and business in Westchester that is struggling to make ends meet so they can stay here.

Fasten your seat belt.

The pressure to raise taxes will be enormous. The cry will go out: what's the problem as long as you keep the tax hike under the state's 2 percent cap.

I will tell you what the problem is: If we had just raised taxes 2 percent for the last five years, our tax levy would be 10 percent higher today.

How many families have seen their incomes go up by 10 percent in that time? Probably not many.

How many families have seen their bills go up by 10 percent or more since then; especially for college tuitions and health care premiums? Probably just about everyone.

We are all getting squeezed; but I would rather see the county squeeze expenses **than squeeze taxpayers.**

It won't be easy. But, we will be smart. We will be thoughtful. And, my **budget won't raise county taxes.**

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So my 2015 State of the County address ends tonight with us still on the path we charted from Day One of my administration. For six years, we have committed to protecting taxpayers, preserving essential services and promoting economic growth.

Westchester is a place we love; where we raise our families, run our businesses and call home. Our past is a source of pride, our future is bright and together we will continue to make Westchester **smarter, safer and stronger.**

Tonight we can go forward, confident that our best efforts will produce progress across all of our challenges **because there will be no day of rest until we reach our goals.**

Thank you.

Good night and God bless you all.