

COUNTY OF SUFFOLK



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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COUNTY EXECUTIVE

State of the County Address – 2009 January 29, 2009 Five Towns College, Dix Hills

Thank you Stanley and David Cohen and the staff here at Five Towns College for hosting us tonight in the Town of Huntington. And thank you Supervisor Frank Petrone for your warm introduction. I look forward to our continued work together. Also I extend my thanks to News12 for televising this speech tonight.

Presiding Officer Lindsay, members of the Legislature, tonight I deliver this State of the County in an economic climate not seen on Long Island in the last eighty years. Our national economy is as weak as it has been since The Great Depression. The State of New York is awash in deficits that dwarf even those experienced after the collapse of the Twin Towers.

The challenges we face here, in Suffolk County, are extraordinary. Weathering the storm ahead will take enormous resolve. These are the days when we are put to the test.

All of the laudable goals that we harbor as officials will hinge on whether or not we can overcome the enormous fiscal challenges ahead. Our desire to increase bus service, to buy state of the art digital mammography equipment, and to improve our environment will be exceedingly difficult if we don't even have enough money to meet the core services of county government.

How large is this problem? Consider this: the federal government is printing almost a trillion dollars to save the financial and auto industries. The Governor of New York presented a budget which cuts aid to schools and hospitals, while contract agencies that assist the poor may be shuttered.

Raises for state employees may be rescinded and thousands possibly laid off. California has asked the federal government for a bailout just to meet its payroll. The Mayor of New York cancelled the hiring of a thousand new police officers and has talked about laying off over three thousand employees.

The slowdown in the national economy impacts Suffolk County as well. We lost millions in state aid last year, and will lose millions again this year. People here are losing their jobs, their 401k's, and their ability to keep their homes. Taxpayers have been unable to pay over thirty million dollars in property taxes due to Suffolk County. That's thirty million dollars we do not have to meet our payroll or help keep our health centers open.

But, as painful as this loss in property tax collection is, we are impacted far greater by the steep drop off in sales tax collection. Sales taxes account for over a billion dollars in our budget. Consequently, a mere hiccup in the economy can have a significant impact.

In the good old days when the economy was booming, it was not unusual to see sales taxes increasing by six, eight, or nine percent annually. But, in 2008, sales tax collections actually dropped from the previous year for the first time in almost twenty years. To understand how deleterious this is on our ability to govern, realize that every one percent in sales tax growth equates to approximately eleven million dollars in revenue to our budget.

The nine percent increases of the 1990's meant roughly a hundred million dollars in extra money for the following year's budget. That kind of sales tax growth helped offset the dramatic yearly rise in healthcare, energy, Medicaid, and preschool handicapped services. In 2009, those costs will continue to increase rapidly, and with the slow economy we can expect to see an increase in people utilizing our social services. Yet our sales tax revenues will probably decline again.

Sales taxes collected in December showed a twenty percent decrease in revenues over the same month in 2007. This is a frightening statistic. This should sound the alarm to anyone still questioning whether or not we are in uncharted budgetary waters.

We have shown in the past that when faced with crisis, we unite in a bi-partisan fashion to do what has to be done to protect our taxpayers and preserve needed services. That coordination, cooperation, and sense of purpose must be stronger than ever.

We can weather this storm only by preparing right now, only if we are united and only if we are willing to make the tough decisions that have to be made. Decisions that might have been considered too controversial a year ago will have to actually be implemented this year if we want to make our payroll, preserve our core services, and prevent a major tax shock to the people we serve.

Albert Einstein once said, "In the middle of every difficulty, lies opportunity."

Often we hit a fork in the road that forces us to choose one of two directions. One direction is that of short-term gratification. It allows one to defer tough decisions, to live for the moment, to buy on credit, and to indulge in anything that feels good. But at some point it catches up to you, just like a Bernard Madoff Ponzi scheme, and it all crashes down. That's why proper budgeting counts.

Mr. Madoff promised his investors the moon. They got instant gratification. All the more responsible brokers couldn't compete with guaranteed double-digit returns. They might have lost some business in the short term, but when the market collapsed, those companies that abided by basic, common sense accounting principles were left standing, while those espousing the quick fix left behind a trail of financial devastation.

Likewise, it is easy for elected officials to say yes to everything. Those who say no sometimes get the reputation of being the grinch, the scrooge, or simply cold-hearted. In fact, it's just the opposite. The official who says yes to everything is leading people off the same cliff that Mr.

Madoff did. The prudent investment companies who stayed true to basic fundamentals in the long run were the compassionate ones. The yes-men, such as the Madoffs, were the enablers that lost everything for the investors who placed their trust in them.

Over the last few years, I have been warning about a dangerous pattern that has developed. Some officials have continued to resist the need to cut anything and have become incapable of saying no to any additional spending. We must follow the basic rule of economics – you cannot increase spending if you cannot pay for it.

We can't add more police, restore museums, and add hundreds of contract agencies to the budget without a viable source of revenue to pay for them. Coming up with phantom revenues won't do.

That is what creates deficits. That is what creates structural imbalance. That is what creates a house of cards that will eventually collapse. Not on my watch.

We can't do it all. But, we can continue in our quest to maximize efficiency and eliminate waste.

Indeed, it was these efficiencies and smart government principles that together we implemented last year to help us in Suffolk County avoid the draconian cuts or the massive tax increases that were resorted to by many jurisdictions around the nation.

We accomplished this by tackling the problem head on, early in the year. While some jurisdictions waited until the late summer to address the economic slowdown, we took action in February and created a cost saving package that saved our budget, saved our services, and saved our taxpayers. I thank the bi-partisan group of legislators who worked with me on this.

Think about it. We started the year with a 150 million dollar shortfall, yet because of our proactive approach, we ended the year with services intact and a budget presented to this Legislature that included no tax increases for 2009. This was the fifth consecutive year of no general fund tax increases.

We shrunk the size of government, not through lay offs, but with a sensible early retirement program. We restricted hiring, despite enormous pressure from special interests to fill every possible position and we eliminated numerous car purchases.

In a rare feat in government, I presented a 2009 budget that actually cut spending from 2008. And while so many other governments had their bond ratings lowered, we in Suffolk received yet another increase – to the highest level in our history. This fall, when some jurisdictions were borrowing at interest rates of six- and one-half percent, we were able to attract an outstanding zero point-eight percent interest rate on our short term notes.

To me, it doesn't make sense to keep doing the same old things simply because "that's the way they've always been done." You should do what makes sense, and change what doesn't make sense. In this financial climate, we no longer have the luxury of clinging to the status quo.

We needed then – as we need today -- to take bold action to save our taxpayers and our services.

We said privatize the management of Suffolk’s health insurance agency. Naysayers claimed the action would cripple the delivery of health care services. The result? The privatized plan provided us with an additional three and a half million dollars annually that we can apply toward enhancing health care for the poor.

We said Suffolk police shouldn’t patrol state-owned highways. Naysayers claimed “you can’t change that. Public safety would be threatened.” The result? Over fifty officers were redeployed to enhance our neighborhood protection, and the deputy sheriffs have stepped in to do a magnificent job, as they have done on the East End for many, many years. And this redeployment alleviated the need to spend eight million dollars for new officers.

We said we could lower medical costs by requiring the use of generic prescriptions. Naysayers claimed our employees’ health would suffer. The result? Employees are still getting the medications they need, and we are saving twelve million dollars a year.

Some of these initiatives were indeed controversial, but make no mistake, had we not exhibited the leadership in making these necessary changes, county taxes would have soared or core services would have been severely cut.

These actions gave us the cushion we needed to help offset the losses in this sluggish economy.

The day after we finalized our 2009 budget we began preparing for 2010. Every new year requires that we come up with thirty-five million dollars in extra revenue just to pay for contractual salary increases, ten million in pension costs, eight million in new Medicaid costs, and the list goes on and on. In total, it’s over one hundred and fifty million dollars in new money that we will have to find just to keep the same level of services intact.

That daunting fact, combined with the bleak sales tax picture and the possibility of continued state cuts is why two weeks into the year I ordered my budget office to set aside ten percent of all non-mandated expenditures, in every department. This money will be held in reserve as we continue to monitor the economic picture.

We are looking at every corner of the budget for ways to provide services and save money at the same time.

This is why I brought to the forefront the millions of dollars in losses we experience each year with our county owned nursing home.

New York State is encouraging counties to get out of the nursing home business. For twenty years, County Executives have been urging our county to do the same. And right now, seven counties in New York are considering sale or closure.

Naysayers claim “patients will be kicked out onto the streets.” I say, it is time to debunk the myths and embrace the facts.

Every patient in his or her bed can remain there after privatization. The county can save ten to fifteen million dollars a year – and that money will soon be desperately needed to prevent the closure of our health centers or the elimination of day care programs.

Yes, in the late 1800s, the nursing home was built for those with no other place to go. But back then, there was no such thing as a private nursing home or Medicaid. Today there are over forty, licensed private nursing homes in Suffolk that can provide the same type of services as our public facility but at costs that are much more affordable.

It is easy to preserve the status quo, even if it is not working. It is hard to reform, to call for change. Let's not put off the difficult decisions, because ultimately no one benefits from that.

Our type of smart government not only saved taxpayer dollars but actually enhanced services. Together, we ran a government that was the recipient of over thirty awards from the National Association of Counties.

Our Child Support Collection Bureau continues to collect more money from delinquent spouses than any county in the state outside of New York City.

Our new Point of Delivery service program has reduced patient waiting time by 23 minutes and increased the number of patients served at our health center in Shirley by eight- and a-half percent.

Our new Preventive Medicine program is becoming a model for other departments throughout the state. Our health care providers travel into the community to care for the underserved. Prenatal deaths in minority communities were reduced significantly and asthma related emergency room visits declined by 75 percent. Our "Butts Out" program continues to combat teenage smoking, and our award winning AIDS Prevention program has illustrated that one of the most effective educational tools is to have older students counsel their younger peers under professional supervision.

There are further measures we can take to both enhance health care for our residents while also providing us long term savings. I will soon be submitting legislation to create an electronic medical record system for our health department. Competition within the field has brought the cost of this type of program down seventy percent over the last four years.

This system can help avoid medical error which remarkably is the eighth leading cause of death in the United States. A patient's entire medical history can be available to health care practitioners at the click of a button. Chicken-scratch prescriptions will no longer be misread, and important medical conditions will not be overlooked. Overall liability to the county will be significantly reduced, and ultimately, both lives and taxpayer dollars will be saved with this innovation.

And when it comes to prevention, the best way to start is right in our own homes.

Experts tell us that there are everyday steps we can take to avert cancer risks – some as simple as ridding the cabinet under the kitchen sink of hazardous products. I am therefore charging my

Cancer Awareness Task Force with the duty of developing a comprehensive educational program as to what families can do to lessen cancer risks. Information related to sun exposure, one's diet, and toxins in our environment and in our homes will all be part of the program that will be readily available to all.

We can further enhance the health of our children by ensuring their nutritional needs are met. No child in Suffolk County should go hungry because of a lack of financial resources at home. The federal free school lunch program has been a major success since it was established decades ago, however not every eligible student is enrolled in the program.

A successful model we implemented with the Sachem schools helped improve enrollment in the free lunch program. If 30 children alone in Sachem could be helped, think of how many others could be ensured of proper nourishment countywide. I am therefore directing my commissioner of social services to expand our program into other districts. This is a program that has no cost to the county, yet yields great results for our kids.

The bottom line is this: the healthier we are, the less expensive will be our health care costs. That pertains not just to our own personal health care expenses, but those borne by the taxpayer. That is why it makes financial sense to try to keep our county employees healthy.

Therefore I will be creating a pilot program for county employees – called SHIP SHAPE -- that would improve their health and help control our medical, hospitalization and prescription costs. The way to change behavior is through incentives. We will bring up to five hundred employees into this pilot program and actually pay the employees up to five-hundred dollars if they are able to significantly lower their cholesterol, their blood pressure or bring and keep their weight to a medically acceptable level. It is very possible that at the end of the yearlong pilot, a small investment may reap us many times more in savings.

We have allowed all of our residents to buy prescriptions through our large volume purchases at the county, saving some individuals over twelve hundred dollars a year. To date, over 72,000 prescriptions have been filled through our SCRIPTS program, which, by the way, costs nothing to join and has no age limits. Creating a larger pool of purchasers not only helped the private individual, but also gave us in the county more leverage in negotiating with our vendor. This program has helped save taxpayers a million dollars a year.

We embarked upon a Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness and brought over fifty service agencies to one setting to serve over five hundred homeless individuals with everything from haircuts, to job counseling, to health screenings. For many it was their first checkup in decades and for three, who were diagnosed with severe conditions, it might have been life saving.

Another way we can care for those in need will be through a not-for-profit program called Rock and Wrap It, where we will coordinate with hotels and universities to ensure that food, toiletries and other surplus items do not go into the waste stream, but rather to agencies that help the less fortunate.

We now affirmatively reach out to our veterans returning from service overseas. We no longer wait for the veterans to contact us – we contact them. We help them find jobs, earn a degree,

obtain loans for housing, and receive needed healthcare, especially in dealing with Post Traumatic Stress. We are elated that several returning veterans have found jobs from the Employment Fair we hosted last September.

Our veterans are being helped even further by the East End veterans' satellite clinic we are building in Riverhead. And this Tuesday, the Legislature can pass a bill I presented that will give preference in affordable housing programs to our veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Our World War II veterans were greeted with a G.I. Bill – our Vietnam vets were basically ignored. Never again. Not in Suffolk County.

We owe our freedom to our brave servicemen and women. We are fortunate to have here tonight Lt. Louis DelliPizzi, Bravo Company Commander from the Fighting 69th, his wife Beth, who is President of the Fighting 69th's Family Readiness Group, as well as Purple Heart recipient Specialist Sheamus Burns. I ask you to join me in welcoming home all the brave men and women of that unit. I also ask that we remember the sacrifices of military families in Suffolk County, most especially those who have lost a son or a daughter, a brother or sister, a parent, a spouse, or a loved one protecting our nation.

Our many successes are not limited to these enhanced efficiencies in the delivery of services. We can also be very proud of how we have protected our public's precious environment. This county has taken the lead nationwide in environmental protection and preservation.

When Connecticut sought to dump its metallic dredge spoils in the Sound, we said no and stopped it. When Broadwater sought to industrialize our Sound, we rose up together in a bipartisan fashion and stopped it.

We continue to invest in extensive stormwater remediation. And we are also committed to cleaning our waterways through old fashioned, natural means. Revitalizing our once vibrant shellfish population provides us with the most basic way to filter out pollutants in our bays. Shellfish are more than just tasty treats. Clams and scallops act as natural filtering devices in our bays.

There was a time, only three decades ago, when our county produced one quarter of the nation's scallops and one half of all of its clams. That industry was decimated by pollutants. While others accepted this demise as inevitable, we said we would embark on the most ambitious program in the nation's history to restore a vibrant shell fishing industry to our county. With over two million dollars invested through the Water Quality Protection Program we seeded three and a half million scallops and three million clams in our waterways. The result? Recent reports show a 3,000 percent increase in the scallop population and a 4,000 percent increase in young clams.

You may wonder, if we are so strapped financially, how can we continue to move forward with these programs? Well, the programs are not funded by property taxes, but rather, from the quarter cent sales tax program that is segregated strictly for environmental improvements. That is the same program that reserves millions for our open space purchases.

Over the past five years we have preserved land totaling over six and a half times the size of Central Park and get this, over sixty farms. I'll bet there are viewers who didn't know we had sixty farms in total in Suffolk County. The farmland program is thirty-three years old. But more than one-quarter of all the farms preserved over that time have been in just the last five years.

These investments have long term economic and ecological benefits as does our unprecedented investment in alternative energies. As early as 2005, this county was recognized as being a leader in going green. We were the first in New York State to adopt the Sierra Club's standards for clean counties. We were the first to adopt the highest standards for green building construction. And this spring we will host the first county-level Electronic Waste recycling drop off day.

We were the first county to offer a sales tax break on the purchase and installation of solar equipment. We are making our rooftops and surplus properties available to private companies seeking to harness the sun's power. And with legislation I will soon submit, we will seek to be the first county in New York and one of the first in the United States to require that every new county building over 10,000 square feet be fitted with solar panels.

We were among the leaders in converting to hybrid and alternative energy vehicles, and in reducing particulates from our bus fleet by over eighty-five percent.

We took the lead in retrofitting our county buildings with energy conservation projects. This program not only put people to work, but reduced our energy consumption and carbon emissions. Our program to reduce the public use of fertilizers in our ecosystem is now in effect, and we remain on track to reduce seventy-five percent of pesticides used by the county over the next decade.

Our environment can be improved even further by expanding mass transit, something long overdue. But if we want to expand further, the federal and state governments must stop treating Suffolk as a second class county when it comes to transportation aid. We are geographically three times the size of Nassau and twice as big as nearby Westchester County. Yet, while Nassau receives fifty-eight million dollars in subsidies and Westchester receives forty-eight million, Suffolk County languishes far behind, receiving only twenty-two and a half million dollars to run a public transportation program.

Some say we don't receive as much funding because our system is not as elaborate. It's just the opposite. We are not as elaborate because we don't receive the same type of funding. So I ask you to join me as we ask our friends in state government to give us a deservedly bigger slice of the pie for expanding our bus system. Let us work together to implement Sunday bus service and provide longer hours with more routes to accommodate our growing population.

Both our environment and economy are also helped if we continue our work toward alleviating traffic congestion. The ambitious road expansion projects of the last year have illustrated the importance of a locality priming the pump.

It is important that we continue to hold the line on taxes and control spending in our operating budget. In the capital budget, however, we float bonds for long term projects, such as road and

sewer expansion. In these times of economic stagnation, it is not contradictory to say that we should hold the line on the operating budget, which directly impacts property taxes, and yet expedite as many road and sewer expansion projects as we can, to put people to work and prime the pump. These investments reap significant returns.

Look at what we have done so far. This past spring, I cut the ribbon to open the new eastbound lane on County Road 39, the gateway to the Hamptons. We expanded and improved Nicolls Road at the Community College, alleviating major gridlock. We did the same at intersections at North Ocean Avenue and the Long Island Expressway, and County Road 111, which had been overrun by Friday and Sunday night East End traffic.

In the coming year, we will see even more expansion, including Montauk Highway in Mastic, Portion Road in Farmingville, Bay Shore Road in Islip, Pinelawn Road in Babylon, and a new lane on County Road 58 in Riverhead – our gateway to the North Fork.

This past year, we began expansion of the Southwest Sewer District to accommodate economic growth in western Suffolk. We are expanding the Hauppauge District to add nearly 250 properties to one of our most thriving economic centers. We expanded the sewer system in Port Jefferson. And in the upcoming year we will seek federal funding to expand or create sewers in Kings Park, in Yaphank, at Stony Brook University and in Rocky Point, to name just a few.

We will continue to prime the pump in our economy by creating centers of business growth. Our innovative biotech growth industry plan helped sixty-seven biotech companies here in Suffolk apply for research and development grants. And, as Supervisor Petrone said in his introduction, we look forward to cutting the ribbon on the Canon world headquarters right here in the Town of Huntington, which will provide two-thousand high-paying jobs for Long Islanders.

Last week, we proposed a multi-million dollar investment plan to further revitalize the heart of downtown Patchogue with a hotel, apartments and a center square replacing the abandoned Swezey's Department Store. And next month, we will select the developer of our planned destination center in Yaphank. These investments will reap both economic and social returns.

Late last year, we chose Rechler Equities to redevelop the Hampton Business and Technology Park in Westhampton. This industrial park will concentrate in the areas of alternative energy development, high tech industries, and film and digital media production. This park will provide six- to seven-hundred high-paying careers for our residents.

So many of our biggest stars live and vacation in Suffolk's East End. Why not encourage them to work out here as well. That can generate a lot of money for our local economy. The film and television industry is also aided here by the thirty percent tax credit we obtained from the state – the same tax credit enjoyed by New York City – making us more competitive. Additionally, I will be unveiling a program to work with local colleges – such as Five Towns right here – to provide our local students with the specialized training needed for film and television production jobs.

The economy has hit our region hard. When the county takes a home for failure to pay property taxes, the land is ultimately auctioned. Often those purchasing these homes have no plans to

plant roots in the community. As a result, crime, transiency and lack of upkeep can begin to plague a neighborhood.

Therefore I will partner with community leaders in administering our new Community Pride program. This program will help us maximize federal funds available to recycle foreclosures into homes for young families that will take root in the community. We will also expand to other areas the success we've had in North Bellport taking selected properties off the auction rolls and instead dedicating them toward a community vision. This program will keep properties away from speculators, and will instead use them for home ownership, parks, daycare and youth activities that help enhance the sense of neighborhood.

Our neighborhoods are very desirable, in part because Suffolk is one of the safest suburban counties in the nation.

Our police officers are the quintessential professionals who are extremely dedicated and whose good work has helped make this such a safe place to raise our children. A great department was made even better over the last several years by our innovations and reforms. We reversed the old philosophy that said the only way to bring crime down was to bring taxes up.

Proponents of the status quo said we must constantly increase the size of the department, regardless of the cost. We said, the problem was not a lack of personnel, it was that too many officers were relegated to desks or white and blue collar jobs, such as working on computers, personnel or auto repair. Civilians can do these jobs cheaper and so we hired them to do so. That freed up officers to be redeployed to our street patrol where we need them the most. The result? While we may not have as many police officers on the payroll today as we did five years ago, the important point is that we have 140 more officers on our street patrol today than we did at that time.

What does this mean? It means that we have been able to save money and simultaneously bring crime down by a healthy six percent over this time. Violent crime has been reduced by ten percent over that period.

Still, there is a knee-jerk temptation to latch on to that discredited philosophy that spending more and more money is the only way to maintain levels of safety. This is the worst time to adopt such thinking. Our economy is in turmoil. We cannot be taxing people out of their homes. We must resist the pressure from special interest groups and do what is best for the people of this county.

We don't save taxpayers money through platitudes. We save them money by making tough decisions. Let's not go backwards.

While we're making our community safer, we are also making our department more responsive to our community's needs. In an effort to be as sensitive as possible to our minority communities, we implemented a new civilian complaint policy, which closely tracks complaints against officers to identify patterns early on. This process has helped reduce civilian complaints by over fifty percent over the last two years.

We are also on our way toward greater diversity in the department, not by creating quotas or watering down standards, but by being more aggressive in recruiting more minorities to take our exam. In our most recent exam, we doubled the number of minorities who qualified in the top three tiers. More diversity in the pool will mean a police department that looks more like the people we serve.

Our emergency response system provides a level of professional service second to none. The most recent example of that, a story that gained national recognition, is the one of Christine Springer, one of our Emergency Medical Services dispatchers who talked an expectant mother in early labor through a successful breech delivery over the phone. Christine's quick, calm, and professional response saved a life and made all in Suffolk County government proud. I ask you all to recognize Christine Springer, who incidentally is due to give birth herself in a few short weeks.

Our 9-1-1 emergency system now answers 95 percent of all calls in under ten seconds, far better than the national standard. Still, the best way to keep these lines from being clogged up is to distinguish those calls that are simply not emergencies. Thanks to our new 852-COPS line, that is now being done.

When there is a true emergency, call 9-1-1. But when it is a non-emergency, such as a complaint about a barking dog, that's when you call 852-C-O-P-S.

In these dire financial times, we will be asking for sacrifice from all sectors. Folks in the private sector are hurting. Many are losing benefits, contributing more toward their health care, working longer, and far too many are losing their jobs. The public sector can not be out of touch with our friends and families in the private sector.

People in the private sector do not comprehend the concept of storing up sick days to cash in upon retirement. In the private sector, sick days are for those who are truly sick. The system has become so out of whack in government that some retirees leave with a check in the hundreds of thousands of dollars for unused time. While I know this can not be changed without the give and take of negotiation, we have been successful in reforming the process in three of our recent contracts. Incoming employees in those bargaining units will no longer be able to cash out these exorbitant sick day bonuses. On the other hand, they will not be constrained by limited sick days if they are truly sick.

And while I cannot unilaterally undo previous contracts, we can change the system for new appointed employees, those not in the civil service system.

I am proposing four reforms for these appointed employees: one, salary step increases will be frozen in 2009 for all exempt employees. Two, new employees can no longer bank unused sick days for a payout upon retirement. Three, those with other municipal service must accumulate ten years with the county – not the present ninety days – before becoming eligible for health benefits upon retirement. And four, we will for the first time require incoming appointed, exempt employees to contribute a percentage toward health care benefits, as do most in the private sector.

While the short term savings for these programs are modest, the message, tone, and example that we set with these actions are enormous in the eyes of the people we serve.

I began this speech saying that this is the most daunting fiscal crisis we've faced in some time. But let me conclude by sharing with you why I am confident that we shall persevere and come back as strong as ever.

Winston Churchill once noted "The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity; the optimist sees an opportunity in every difficulty."

When we faced difficulties before we bonded together, not as Democrats and Republicans, not as an executive and legislators, but as residents of this great county, who share those same ideals as every family from Maine to California. The wonder of America is that we can achieve any goal we set our mind to. Whether it's digging a canal connecting two oceans, putting a man on a moon, or creating an information superhighway, Americans have led the way because of our optimism, our innovative spirit, and our hope for a better tomorrow.

The best evidence that we will rebound is ingrained in our very own history. The dogged determination of our forefathers simply would not allow obstacles to stand in the way of progress. Early settlers weathered discomfort and disease in traveling the high seas -- and persevered. They saw their crops wiped out in devastating winters -- and persevered. They fought a revolution -- and persevered. Americans survived a civil war that pitted brother against brother. And in the twentieth century, we fought two world wars and the threat of communism -- and again, we persevered. We found ourselves in a deep depression in the 1930s, but wound up as the world's superpower at the end of World War II. In the early eighties, we saw seventeen percent interest rates and major unemployment, yet by the mid-eighties we experienced an economic resurgence. In the early nineties, we again were in a serious downturn in our economy, yet by the end of the decade, we were in the midst of the largest economic boon in our nation's history. And in 2001, we witnessed the crumbling of our Twin Towers, but not the crumbling of our resolve to rebuild and come back stronger than ever. Does anyone really believe that this crisis will do us in? No way, no how.

We are the proud residents of a great county and a great nation, steeled by the work ethic and determination of earlier Americans. We have the solutions, we have the leadership, and we have the will to get the job done. So let us together -- Democrats and Republicans; labor and management; developer and environmentalist; all races and all creeds -- do what we as Americans do best. Let's roll up our sleeves and get to work.

Thank you. God bless Suffolk County and God bless the United States of America.