

2009 State of the County Address
March 18, 2009

Good Evening Chairwoman Cornell, Ladies and Gentlemen of the County Legislature, welcome, members of the public, other distinguished officials and guests.

It is my honor and distinct pleasure to present to you tonight my 16th Message to the Legislature. Congratulations, Chairwoman Cornell, on your unprecedented fifth term as chairperson to this Legislature. It certainly is a testament to both your service and capability as an effective leader.

Tonight, I would like to welcome our newest Legislator, Bob Jackson. I would also like to take a moment to honor the memory of our former Legislator and our friend, V.J. Pradhan, who passed away last year. His dedication, determination and strength are missed.

We are living now, as a country and as a County, in times of extreme uncertainty and growing economic hardship. What makes matters most difficult is that there appears to be little consensus on exactly what is broken and how to go about fixing it. Without question, our new president has the population behind him in his attempt to wrestle with the effects of the sour economy and right the ship of state with respect to both Wall Street and Main Street. Indeed, I believe people look to their leaders now more than ever before for some sort of hope, if not firm direction, as to the policies and programs that need to be implemented or revised to help stabilize both our economy and, in large measure, our very society.

We in Rockland are no different from the rest of our state or our country. The state of our County is best described as “guarded.” We know our state government has placed itself in a deep financial hole, and we also know that many of our sister counties are also facing extremely difficult financial decisions. Mandates from the State that force County taxpayers to pay for programs like Medicaid make our challenge even greater. We know

we are not alone in this, but the strategies and determination to think innovatively and create solutions which both have a short-term benefit and a long-term return is what is needed.

No one could have predicted the size and the scope of the losses of Wall Street, the crash of the real estate industry, or the losses here in Rockland's sales tax and the subsequent loss of revenue to our County. Yet we in Rockland had already hunkered down because of the substantial loss of surplus money caused by the bankruptcy and tax certiorari litigation of one of our largest corporations, Mirant, several years ago. We are still digging out of that financial hole, as are many of the other municipalities in North Rockland.

As my colleagues in this Legislature know, we have done everything possible to frame the 2009 Budget on a zero-based philosophy and to build in those areas a budget that was responsive to the mandates of New York State and, at the same time, meet the critical and growing needs of our citizens. Just as so many Rockland families have had to cut back, County government has had to become leaner and more efficient.

We have taken both bold and simple steps to cut costs. We employed an early retirement incentive to reduce our work force. We took out light bulbs and cancelled conferences and trainings. We took back cars from County employees and removed telephone lines, cell phones, and pagers. We went to a four-day workweek in the highway department and we delayed or cancelled the filling of vacancies in every department. Mid year in 2008, we swept entire accounts from departments to save money. Every employee of Rockland County is to be congratulated for working in these tough conditions and actually producing more in services than ever before in the history of our County. Indeed, we are being responsive and accountable to taxpayers in doing much more with significantly less. We must continue in this effort.

The uncertainty of our economic climate compels us to not only guess as to how bad it might get, but to attempt to be prepared to meet the challenge. But like so many bad

assets owned by banks today, the exact bottom of this economic slide is unknown, and we need to adapt and look for ways to change policy assumptions and programs used in more robust times. We must do everything within our power to help any business, large or small, to save and create jobs here in Rockland County.

In January of this year, unemployment rates across our nation rose to 8.5-percent, and our jobless rates across New York State rose to 7.6-percent. Here in Rockland, unemployment rose from 4.5-percent to 6.4-percent in January - the highest jobless rate since 1992. Many who have never been out of work before are now, for the first time in their careers.

Although Rockland County has lost some businesses jobs due to the economic downturn, we continue to work assertively to bring in new businesses and new jobs. And there is some success to report - since December 2006, our local Empire Zone Program and the Industrial Development Agency have approved projects involving over 40 businesses. Of those, 15 companies are new to Rockland County. These 40 companies are projected to create over 900 new jobs over the next five years. Some of the companies new to Rockland awaiting Empire Zone approval from New York State include Kohl Industrial Park, Lowe's Home Centers and Blue Beverage Group. We as a County must do everything we can to ensure they get that approval, allowing Rockland County to continue to be a viable location for companies to grow and thrive, even when the economy is in a downturn.

Clearly, we need to do more than ever on a County and state level to attract new jobs and help preserve the businesses that now make their home in Rockland. To further that goal, I announce tonight the creation of the **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Group**. The group, which will be led by Ron Hicks of the Rockland Economic Development Corp., will comprised of members from the business community, the banking and labor industries and others in the private sector. They will be an action-oriented committee designed to help draw an "economic roadmap" for Rockland County in order to diversify and strengthen our economic base. They will use their collective

expertise to analyze the current business demographic in Rockland and find ways to attract new business, create new jobs and use our County's unique advantages to boost our economic development. The group will identify and provide short and long term plans for Rockland's economic challenges, design strategic projects, programs and activities designed to boost business, and help prepare us to better respond to incentives like those offered under the federal economic stimulus package. The work of the group will be a permanent addition to our efforts to retain and create jobs, with the Rockland Economic Development Corp and in cooperation with the Rockland Business Association. We will further describe this concept and work with Chair Cornell's Economic Stimulus Working Group, which she established earlier this year to assist Rockland in the difficult economy. The group will also coordinate with the Hudson Valley's Regional Council for Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) funding through the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

Private sector business people in this County know that as CEO of Rockland's Economic Development efforts, I have been their proponent and advocate. I am certain this Legislature will continue to work with me on their behalf. I look forward to working with Chair Cornell, Al Samuels and the Rockland Business Association and Ron Hicks and the Rockland Economic Development Corp. in this new endeavor, and I thank them for their support and valued input.

Even as the economy worsens, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and the New York State Legislature is considering a mobility payroll tax – a tax that I strongly oppose and could cost our small, independent businesses, not-for-profits and school districts more than \$18 million per year. This mobility tax, if passed, will further widen the \$40 million value gap that this Legislature and I have long protested between the services we get from the MTA and the taxes we pay. Now is not the time to place any more jobs in jeopardy, and this mobility tax would do exactly that.

We have been criticized for relying on sales tax revenues when they continue to drop as people are tightening their budgets and cutting out discretionary spending. Despite that

criticism, this administration, in partnership with this Legislature, has been proactive in addressing the drop in sales and mortgage tax revenues.

In anticipation of the difficult economic times ahead and in partnership with this Legislature, we created a \$5 million sales tax reserve in this year's budget – and we did not stop there. We also set aside 75-percent of each department's discretionary budget – a total of \$15 million - in an appropriation reserve that couldn't be spent unless each department met revenue goals. This appropriations reserve will help forestall any additional revenue shortfalls due to the unstable economy. An additional \$14 million in Intergovernmental Transfer (IGT) funds were used to put our Hospital and Nursing Home back in the black in 2008 after more than a decade of losses.

Last week, Moodys Investors Service reaffirmed the County's highest short-term bonding rating. Our Standard & Poors rating remained high at AA. However, recognizing the economic challenges facing many counties across New York State, Moodys downgraded the County's long-term borrowing rate from A1 to A2. Primarily because of the effects of the Mirant bankruptcy of 2007 and declines in sales tax revenue. Although we adopted a budget this year that did include a tax increase, it is a last resort – the last thing we want or need to do.

But mandates from New York State continue to rise, currently making up more than 70-percent of our total budget. We have had to cut programs and services because of ever-increasing reductions in state aid. We continually review our long-term plans and make difficult decisions to cancel, delay or close projects in order to save as much taxpayer money as possible – like a new \$30 million highway garage, a three-story, \$15 million municipal parking facility and \$6.5 million in improvements to the County Office Complex here in New City. Another \$3.5 million for the purchase of a badly needed emergency services helicopter has also been cut, and \$50 million in non-emergency drainage projects have also been delayed.

Many people however, do not realize that for all the services we provide and despite rising state mandates, County property taxes remain one of the lowest portions of taxpayer's bills.

For example, in 2003, Town and School taxes combined cost Rockland residents a total of \$687.4 million. In 2009, those same Town and School taxes rose to \$978.2 million, an increase of nearly \$291 million in six years. In comparison, County taxes totaled \$42.3 million in 2003 and are \$59.1 million in 2009 – an increase of less than \$17 million in the same time frame. In 2003 and now, six years later, County taxes still represent less than six-percent - the smallest portion - of residents' total property tax bills. School and Town taxes make up 94-percent of Rocklander's total property tax bills.

This administration has fought to keep Rockland County's property tax rate, at \$1.28 per thousand dollars of assessed home value, one of the lowest rates in New York State – even while sharing sales tax revenues with our Towns and Villages - a total of \$41.9 million since March 2002. Last year alone, the total share was \$11.5 million. County property taxes still provide the greatest amount of help to the most people for the least amount of money.

We know, however, that we must do more to keep taxes from escalating. We must hold Albany accountable for the rising costs of mandates and the shifting of costs to Counties that our taxpayers cannot afford and should not have to pay for.

Last year the state task force recommended a four-percent statewide cap on school property taxes. The New York State Senate passed the concept, but the New York State Assembly did not, and the issue is still being discussed in Albany. The state task force actually called for a number of things to be considered to relieve the over-burdened property taxpayer, including, and most importantly, mandate relief for local jurisdictions. As we all know, the tax burden of New York State and local taxes for New Yorkers is the highest in the nation.

While most of the property tax goes to our schools, the combined burden of school tax, town tax, village tax, and other taxes associated with municipal government, including the County property tax, is making it difficult for folks to live here, particularly younger and fixed income populations. This burden must be eased. It is time for fundamental reform in New York that would relieve the property taxpayer from the crushing burden of escalating taxes.

Tonight, I call for a **cap on County property taxes** of no more than three-percent per year. This cap can only be achieved with the removal of some part of the state mandated programs for which the counties are currently required to pay. For example, the state can start by removing the required payment for the state mandated Early Intervention and Pre-School Special Education Program or by taking over significant portions of the Medicaid program.

All the property taxes we collect as a County in 2009– \$59.1 million – paid for only one state-mandated program: Medicaid. Even with a cap on expenses, the Medicaid program cost Rockland County \$63.7 million this year – more than 111-percent of our total property tax revenue. If this reform is not undertaken now, we will see property taxes across the state escalate substantially in the near future. It is important to note in this regard that as Governor David Paterson attempts to try to expand the Medicaid Program and make it a public health insurance program, the cost of Medicaid will escalate in years to come. Rocklanders and New Yorkers simply cannot afford it. The mandates must stop.

We should ask the State of New York to approve statewide legislation capping County property taxes, with an ironclad statutory provision of meaningful mandate rollbacks.

This is the time to seriously discuss fundamental changes in the way the State of New York overburdens local property taxpayers by requiring them to pay for state programs. This economic and financial disruption allows us a moment in time to begin to alter the methodology of mandates and the resulting rise in property tax burden for counties. Let's

put a cap on County property taxes, let's pass a cap on school property taxes, and at the same time begin the rollback of mandates to help turn this state around. NOW IS THE TIME.

Let's cap County property tax with the required mandate relief NOW.

In Rockland, we have so far avoided putting people out of work during this recession by decreasing the size of government and consolidating services to achieve efficiencies. We offered eligible employees an early retirement incentive, which reduced our County workforce by 112 positions and saved almost \$4 million of taxpayer dollars. A hiring freeze I instituted last year and 300 positions that have been abolished or left vacant in the past two years in cooperation with this Legislature has reduced our workforce by 10-percent. County staffing levels, which peaked at 3,064 workers in 2001, is now down to 2,732 employees – lower than a quarter-century ago.

During my State of the County address last year, this room was filled with union members calling for a contract. After long and protracted negotiations, we reached a contract settlement with most of our unions. I would like to take this time to thank each and every one of our employees tonight for their dedication and service to the people of Rockland, especially during the current recession. We will work with our union leaders in the coming months in order to work to meet these economic challenges.

These trying times give true public servants the opportunity to re-commit to the core mission of effective government – providing help to people in need. And so many people of all different financial backgrounds are, for the first time, finding themselves in need of services – whether it be job counseling, child care subsidies, help with health benefits, utility payment assistance, eviction prevention or mortgage foreclosure – now more than ever, Rocklanders are reaching out to their County government for help. This is the time when government needs to be at its best, and as leaders, we must respond.

We in County government are on the front lines – handling emergencies, providing housing, food stamps, medical services and counseling for those who need it most – and those who may never have had to ask for help before. More than ever, that requires prioritizing, dedication and renewed commitment to our responsibilities as public servants.

Here are just some of the ways your County government has met these unique challenges over the past year:

Despite cuts to its staff, our **Department of Health**, which provides health care and medical services to the most needy, stepped up to meet the increased demands for services during these hard economic times.

Dr. Joan Facelle and her staff at the **Health Department** facilitated the 2008 opening of the **Hudson River Community Health Center in Haverstraw**, which serves the under-insured and those who can't afford medical care. A total of 1,028 patients were seen in more than 2,080 visits to the clinic.

The **DOH's Prenatal Clinic** increased the number of **new patients seen each day from two to five**, and **92 new patients** were admitted to the clinic this year. A total of **804 babies were delivered in 2008** – including four sets of twins!

The **DOH's Public Health Division** helped increase awareness about the dangers of smoking and **reduced the smoking rate in Rockland to 11.4-percent** – surpassing New York State's 2010 goal of 12-percent a year ahead of schedule.

The **Environmental Health Division** located a site for the **County's first permanent Ambient Air Monitor (AAM)** at the Conklin Farm, so that our health professionals now have a definitive method to measure air pollution and the quality of the air we breathe. The AAM should be up and running this spring.

In cooperation with United Water New York and the Lamont-Doherty Laboratories, our Environmental Health specialists began **quarterly rounds of testing for the migration and concentration of arsenic** in our water supply. The testing began last October and inspectors are nearly through with the second quarterly sampling round.

Joyce Altieri and the Department of General Services has taken 17 of the oldest, least fuel-efficient vehicles from the road and have not replaced them. We have also reduced emissions and saved money by ordering vehicles with four-cylinder engines rather than six for the County fleet. These fuel-efficient cars will help reduce the County's carbon footprint and keep our fleet as "green" as possible while saving taxpayer dollars.

Gordon Wren and the Office of Fire and Emergency Services initiated and facilitated a mass-casualty drill at Summit Park Hospital last September. More than 350 members of Rockland's dedicated firemen, police, and emergency medical personnel participated in the half-day event, which was designed to insure the safety of the hospital, the nursing home and the residents who live there.

Sheriff James Kralik and his Department's Police Division increased arrests by 25-percent, including 100 DWI arrests.

MaryAnn Walsh-Tozer and the Department of Mental Health provided assistance to 3,594 people with mental and emotional illness in the County's mental health and crisis clinics.

Terry Grosselfinger and the Department of Consumer Affairs processed over 700 consumer complaints last year, and instituted 163 criminal prosecutions of unlicensed contractors – an increase of 35-percent over 2007.

The **Office for the Aging** and its director, **June Molof**, assisted more than 6,000 Rockland seniors with the Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Program.

Skip Vezzetti and the County Highway Department surpassed their 2008 road resurfacing goal – 15-percent, or 25 miles of County roads are now rated as excellent, and 98-percent of our County roads are rated good or better.

Along with my staff, **Jerry Donnellan of the Veterans Service Agency** and **Paul Piperato and the County Clerk’s Office** introduced the “Return the FAVOR” veterans assistance program, which provides discounts on services and retail purchases from 150 vendors around Rockland and helps inform vets of their benefits.

Allan Beers and the Division of Environmental Resources, along with the New City Chamber of Commerce, celebrated the first full year of the Dutch Garden Restoration—the gateway to the Downtown New City Revitalization program.

Heather Duke and the Department of Tourism helped launch Rockland’s participation in the statewide Quadricentennial celebration of Henry Hudson’s voyage down the Hudson River.

Karen Cassa and the Department of Insurance instituted a health insurance buyout offer for employees, negotiated as part of contract settlements with our unions, designed to help save taxpayer dollars.

Sal Corallo and the Department of Planning designed and implemented the County’s GIS Portal, a gateway to County mapping resources via the Internet. The department also successfully challenged the Census Bureau’s Population Estimate for Rockland for the third year in a row, adding more than 500 people to the County’s official population - 297,005 people as of July 2007 – the highest recorded population in Rockland’s history.

The Department of Transportation celebrated the 30th Anniversary of the TRIPS bus service, providing a record 81,740 rides - an increase of 7,000 rides over 2007 – to the elderly and disabled. TRIPS ridership has seen its most significant increase in rides since 2006 – the largest two-year increase in rides since the service was founded in 1978. With

the purchase of discount ticket booklets, the fare is only \$.75 – the same price it was when the service began 31 years ago.

Our **Purchasing Division, led by Paul Brennan**, saved more than \$253,000 taxpayer dollars in 2008 by purchasing natural gas for the Pomona Health Complex directly through producers.

Dennis Fleming and the Rockland County Youth Bureau held their 10th Annual Youth Fest to help raise awareness about services and programs for young people and their families, reaching more than 6,000 people who attended the event.

Dianne Philipps and the Sewer District No. 1 collected and treated an average of 20 million gallons of wastewater per day in 2008.

Ram Nagubandi and the Commission on Human Rights conducted a conference on the effects of sub-prime mortgage crisis to help people avoid the pitfalls of the volatile home loan market.

Joe Abate and the County's Community Development Office helped finance the redevelopment of the former Tappan Zee Playhouse in Nyack, creating a retail market and 10 affordable housing units for volunteer firemen. And in Suffern, the County contributed \$1.5 million for 80 new affordable housing units for senior citizens at the Ester Gitlow Towers that will open shortly.

It is important to point out that every single one of these accomplishments I have just listed has touched the life of at least one resident of Rockland every day last year. A volunteer fireman will be able to afford an apartment above the market in downtown Nyack, and a senior citizen will hold on to their independence and in a new home at the Ester Gitlow Towers in Suffern. A family will enjoy a sunny afternoon in Dutch Gardens. A healthy baby was born because of our prenatal clinic. A Rocklander with disabilities got to a doctor's appointment because of our TRIPS bus service. Someone quit smoking

and added years to their life because of our smoking cessation program. A vet returning from combat sought help from our Veterans Service Agency and is getting the assistance they need. That is where your tax dollars go in Rockland County. That is the difference County government can make every day in the lives of the people it serves.

I pledge you tonight that we will continue our long record of successes here in Rockland County. We will remain adaptable, we will increase accessibility, and we will be accountable for every dollar spent and every service rendered as we proceed to monitor international, national, and local economic developments. Our residents deserve no less than a responsive and responsible government, particularly when so many around us have exhibited the characteristics of greed and dishonesty. We must continue to be straight with the public and forthright about why we are here – *“To serve the people of Rockland County well by providing needed services in a high quality, ethical, courteous, timely and cost-effective manner.”*

Leading by example: Partnering with municipalities, community

One of the many things that makes Rockland County unique is the cooperative partnership we have established with our Towns and Villages. Indeed, this cooperation is crucial to accomplishing many goals on both the County and the local municipal level and improving the quality of life of our residents.

One of the goals that this administration has made a priority since Hurricane Floyd hit in 1999 is improving drainage, and we are making great progress with many of these joint projects. In 2008, the **Rockland County Drainage Agency** began Part One of the Countywide Watershed Study, which will provide a Countywide “snapshot” of separate watersheds and problem drainage areas throughout the County. The study will assess the impact of past development and set guidelines for municipalities to consider when planning development and re-development. The study, which will also map parcels identified by the National Flood Insurance Program as claim sites, is an effort funded by

the County to have our independent municipalities join together and plan as a region. It is scheduled for completion later this year.

Work on the Demarest Kill-New Hempstead Road Project in Clarkstown, the Brook Street-Nakoma Brook Project in Sloatsburg and the Call Hollow Road Culvert replacement project in unincorporated Haverstraw were all completed last year. This year, I am happy to report that construction work on the Union Road Culvert Replacement Project in Spring Valley and the Nauraushaun Brook Project on Blauvelt Road in the Town of Orangetown also began.

Another major project that we are working on in cooperation with the Town of Orangetown is the Oak Tree Road Bridge project, for which we have applied for \$1.7 million in federal stimulus funding. The bridge's insufficient opening causes the Sparkill Creek to back up and create major flooding problems for the Village and the residents of Sparkill. The new bridge will allow for an improved, safer realignment of Oak Tree Road and mitigate the flooding that now plagues the area. We are currently in the final design and land acquisition stage of the project and hope to begin construction early in 2010.

We're happy to report that, along with Legislator Patrick Moroney, the County was able to solve a longstanding flooding issue in the Town of Orangetown by paying \$477,000 for the repair of two culverts for the Cherry Brook under Central and Gilbert Avenues in Pearl River. The repairs were completed last year, improving the quality of life for many residents in the neighborhood whose homes were damaged for years by the continual flooding.

Perhaps the most significant drainage projects we have worked on with our Towns and Villages is the Countywide Flood Insurance Rate Map, or FIRM project, sponsored by the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA) and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's (NYSDEC) Bureau of Flood Plain Management. The focus of the project is to draw new digital maps for all the flood plains

in Rockland County – a vital database of information that will help us mitigate current flooding problems and, through proper Countywide planning, prevent new issues from occurring in the future. As the project leader, the Rockland Drainage Agency helped gather maps from all of our Towns and Villages to provide to FEMA and NYSDEC. We expect the draft maps to be presented to the public for comment and review later this year.

Another area of successful municipal collaboration has been our ongoing effort to preserve Rockland’s parklands and historically significant properties. As of 2009, Rockland has acquired **a total of 1,120 acres** in Towns and Villages across the County through our **Open Space Acquisition Program**. Last year, in partnership with the Palisades Interstate Parks Commission, I am very proud to announce that we made our largest and perhaps most significant acquisition to date – the 497-acre Wrightman Plateau. This beautiful stretch of pristine parkland is the crown jewel of the magnificent ridges of the Torne Valley, and it is now preserved in perpetuity for all to visit and enjoy.

Another very special property the County has been interested in preserving is in the Town of Orangetown. It is a 4.3 acre piece of land informally known as the “Dinosaur Property,” which sits atop a hillside on Greenbush Road in the hamlet of Blauvelt. This property is of particular interest to me because of its historical significance – there are clearly discernable dinosaur footprints that date back to Triassic-Age, approximately 240 million years ago. Originally thought to be dinosaur tracks, these footprints, which were discovered by Dr. Paul E. Olsen and Robert F. Salvia in 1971, are from a Silesaurid, a predecessor to the dinosaur that is now considered an early reptile.

It is the most significant archeological find in Rockland to date and perhaps in the entire state of New York. Our Planning Department, along with the Division of Environmental Resources and the Town of Orangetown, succeeded in convincing the owner of the property to donate the portion of the land where the tracks were found to the Town of Orangetown, which will preserve it as historic parkland.

Contract discounts for Rockland's not-for-profits

Sharing services goes beyond collaborating with just our municipalities. Economic times are hard, and although we had to cut some funding to our not-for-profit organizations in this year's budget, we know they are struggling to provide many valuable services to our community. In order to help them make ends meet, I'm happy to announce that our Purchasing Department has amended its procurement policy to offer **County contract pricing to eligible non-profit and charitable organizations in Rockland**. Agencies were already approved for participation with the New York State Contract Extension Program were also approved for the County's Non-Profit Contract Extension Program. They can now take advantage of the County's purchasing power and receive the same discounts and contract pricing offered to the County by its vendors. It's an example of how pooling resources can help save money.

Just a few of the agencies now eligible to save thousands of dollars a year are Camp Venture, Jawonio, Dominican College, Good Samaritan Hospital and the Girl Scouts of Rockland County. We are pleased to offer them any assistance we can in this time of need so they can continue their good work in our community.

New opportunities for municipal economic development

The recent stimulus program has had far-reaching affect, and has provided us with an opportunity to help Rockland's municipalities generate jobs and economic development in this difficult economy.

The Rockland County Office of Community Development has received **\$576,000 in federal economic stimulus funding** that will be distributed this year through a competitive short-term bidding process to municipalities with economically driven projects that meet Community Development Block Grant criteria. The funding, which will be awarded by the Office of Community Development in maximum grants of

\$100,000 each, is meant to stimulate the County's economic development and will go to projects with the potential to retain existing jobs or create new permanent jobs. We envision the grants being used for downtown redevelopment and revitalization projects in downtown areas like the Villages of Haverstraw, Suffern and Nyack and the hamlet of Pearl River. Small business owners who need help with necessary improvements or those seeking to open new businesses that generate jobs could also be eligible for the grants through their municipalities.

We are pleased to be able to offer this good news to our Towns and Villages as an exciting opportunity to revitalize Rockland's economy during a time of great fiscal challenge. This and all the projects I've mentioned are good examples of how working in partnership with each individual Town and Village can benefit our County as a whole.

Update on FAA Lawsuit

As you are aware, our County has led the fight against the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and its airspace redesign plan, filing a lawsuit on behalf of all residents of Rockland in the United States Court of Appeals, District of Columbia Circuit, in Washington, DC in September 2007. Rockland is the lead petitioner in the lawsuit, which includes the State of Connecticut in its list of plaintiffs. Since then, my administration has been on the forefront of the movement to stay implementation of the flawed project, which could direct hundreds more planes over our skies, in an effort to preserve the quiet, peaceful County our residents expect and deserve.

Last month, we discovered that funding for the airspace redesign project may be included under the 2009 FAA Reauthorization Bill, which states, rather ambiguously, that the FAA may "carry out such airspace redesign initiatives as the Administrator deems appropriate." Federal financial support for this project would cause a serious setback to our already extensive and costly legal efforts.

I immediately wrote to our federal representatives, including Congressman Eliot Engel and Senator Charles Schumer, to make them aware of the potential funding and asking their help to block it.

We join with many citizens like John Tormey, Tom Sullivan, the voices of the advocacy group Quiet Rockland and the many other Rockland residents who have expressed serious concerns about the FAA's redesign plan when we say that the FAA will no longer ignore Rockland County, and we do not expect our federal government to do so either. We know the members of this Legislature join us in our call to stop any and all federal funding for the FAA's New York/New Jersey/Philadelphia Metropolitan Airspace Redesign Project.

The new Rockland County Internet GIS Portal

We are also continuing with our efforts to make County government more accessible to the people it serves. The GIS team, within the County Department of Planning, designed and implemented the Rockland County GIS Portal, a website which is a gateway to Rockland County mapping resources. Through this GIS Portal, which was launched in October, customers now have access to maps, data and interactive mapping applications via the Internet. This is a more efficient way of making maps available to our customers. More than 600 maps each month have been downloaded from the website since it was launched earlier this year.

"Green" goals realized in Rockland

We are proud that in keeping with this administration's commitment to preserving the environment and promoting "green" initiatives in County government, we achieved United States Green Building LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification on the Technology Building at Rockland Community College. The building met stringent requirements during the design and construction phases of the building, which began in 2005 and was completed last year. It is the first County building to meet

Silver LEED standards and we pledge to continue to meet or exceed them with future renovations and construction projects.

My administration has also set forth a policy to purchase a percentage of our energy from renewable sources. In 2009, we will purchase **15-percent of our electrical load from clean, renewable Biomass Energy**, which is derived from materials found in plants. Biomass energy is cleaner than standard energy sources and less expensive than some other green sources, including wind energy. Next year we will increase our renewable energy consumption to 18-percent in accordance with the “green” goals I set for the County in 2003.

Bus ridership increases

More good news for the environment - ridership on the County's bus systems continued to increase last year. July 2008 set a new record for Transport of Rockland (TOR) when ridership reached more than 300,000 in one month – an increase of 20-percent over the same month in 2007. August, September and October ridership also topped 300,000 each month. More people are also traveling on the Tappan Zee Express bus system, with ridership in 2008 reaching almost 484,000 – an increase of almost 18-percent. Combined, TOR and TZx provided almost 3.9 million rides in 2008.

Hybrid buses coming to Rockland

Last year, the County awarded a contract to purchase new buses for Transport Of Rockland (TOR). By the end of this year, riders will begin seeing 16 new low-floor, **clean diesel-electric hybrid buses** in the TOR fleet. These will be the first hybrid buses in our fleet and are just one more way the County is helping to do its part to reduce emission pollution. The buses cost approximately \$566,000 each and no County tax dollars were used to purchase them - the Federal Transit Administration and New York State Department of Transportation will provide 90-percent of the funds, with an additional 10-percent provided through local transportation funds. This year, depending

on the availability of federal funds, we will also exercise the option to purchase up to 17 additional hybrid buses for TOR to put in service in 2010 and 2011.

With the federal stimulus funding the County will receive for transit, we will purchase three new 45-foot diesel-electric hybrid commuter coaches for the Tappan Zee Express fleet to replace our oldest buses that have reached the end of their usefulness. The federal stimulus funds will cover 100-percent of the cost of this purchase, which could be upwards of \$4.2 million.

And by the end of this year, 45 County-owned buses in our existing fleets will be retrofitted with particulate traps, which, in combination with the ultra low sulfur fuel already being used, will reduce bus emissions by up to 90-percent. The County has been awarded a \$1.5 million federal Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality (CMAQ) grant to pay for this retrofit project, which will also cover the cost of the next phase: retrofitting the Highway Department's diesel fleet.

Railroad Crossing Safety Improvement and Quiet Zone Project

I am encouraged by the significant progress we have made with our Railroad Crossing Safety Improvement and Quiet Zone Project along the CSX West Shore railroad line. Residents can soon look forward to an improvement in their safety and quality of life.

In 2008, the County held public information sessions on this project and completed the Diagnostic Team Review (DTR) – a process required by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) in which conditions at each grade crossing are evaluated to ensure the recommendations being made for Supplemental Safety Measures (SSMs) are appropriate. Representatives from the Town or Village responsible for the roadway at each crossing participated in these site visits along with staff from the County's Highway and Planning Departments, the NY State Department of Transportation (DOT), FRA, CSX Railroad and the railroad's engineering consultants. In addition, the County led

Stakeholder Meetings throughout the year in which the project team met with local officials and emergency responders at the crossings.

So far this year, we have completed the preliminary engineering agreement with CSX Railroad and are awaiting approval of the project's Design Report, which is under review by the NYS DOT Local Projects Unit. We continue to remain current on all of the reporting requirements for this Federal Aid project, and, as lead agency, will do everything necessary to keep it moving forward. If NYS DOT and CSX Railroad keep pace with what we believe is a reasonable schedule, the County expects to begin construction in early 2010. Once completed, this project will enable the County to establish a train horn Quiet Zone along the length of the West Shore Line, from Orangetown to Stony Point. Rockland County has the potential to be the first community in New York State to be able to implement a Quiet Zone under the new FRA Rule.

Tappan Zee Project Advances

This past year, the Tappan Zee Bridge/I287 Corridor Study Team, led by the New York State Thruway Authority, the New York State Department of Transportation and Metro North announced the preferred alternative for a new Tappan Zee Bridge. The option would provide bus rapid transit in designated lanes cross-corridor, connecting Suffern to White Plains. It would also provide a commuter rail connection from Suffern, connecting to Metro North's Hudson Line in Westchester, bringing passengers to an ultimate destination at Grand Central Station in Manhattan. My administration will continue working with the Study Team and directly with the DOT and Metro North to ensure that this project continues to move forward so that Rockland commuters can enjoy a one-seat ride into New York City.

Rockland County is also actively working with Metro North on its West of Hudson Regional Transit Access Study, which is examining many transit options, including a potential rail connection to Stewart Airport in Newburgh. This proposed rail connection

could provide Rocklanders with a one seat, “train to the plane” ride to Stewart Airport – in well under an hour.

These innovations in transportation will once again lead to a new era for Rockland, one that will establish us as a regional transportation hub, enhancing infrastructure, increasing travel options and improving the quality of life for our residents.

A Time of change at Summit Park Hospital

Despite a difficult year that included a very tragic accident, consistent improvements are being made at the Summit Park Hospital & Nursing Care Center. Under Commissioner Richard Maloney, we increased our occupancy rate at the Hospital to 91-percent last year, up from 57-percent in 2007. Our average daily census went up from 32 patients in 2007 to 52 in 2008. Overtime costs have been reduced and payroll costs are flat. We promised change, and we have delivered.

On the medical front, construction is nearly complete at Summit Park’s new three-station renal care unit. We expect the facility, which will provide acute dialysis for six patients, to be up and running this spring. While we have had to put our new 320-bed nursing home and 57-bed acute care health center on hold because of the tightening economy, I believe in the long-term value of this critical facility and hope to go forward with it when financial conditions improve. Rockland County’s elderly population continues to grow, and our seniors will need a reliable, quality health-care facility to turn to as they age.

Population Projections Project

The Planning Department, in conjunction with Cornell University, has recently completed the County’s Population Projections project, which has determined projection figures for population by age and sex, housing units, households and householders for the County to the year 2035. This effort has resulted in a County-endorsed set of projections for Rockland County, its Towns, Villages, Hamlets and School Districts, informed by

local knowledge regarding Rockland's demographics, land use and potential for development.

Results indicate that Rockland's population is projected to increase to nearly 320,000 people by 2020. This would be an increase of almost 24,000 people, or 8.1-percent, between 2005 and 2020. This projected increase would include a more than 12,000-person rise in the number of seniors 65 years old and over and a 33-percent increase in that population, from around 36,400 to over 48,000 seniors, between 2005 and 2020. This projected increase would also include a nearly 4,000-person increase in the number of youth under 18 years old and a nearly 5-percent increase, from about 82,400 to over 86,000 persons, in that population between 2005 and 2020.

Results also indicate that Rockland's population is projected to increase to over 343,000 people by 2035. This would be an increase of nearly 49,000 people and 16.6-percent between 2005 and 2035. This projected increase would include a more than 23,300-person rise in the number of seniors 65 years old and over and a 64-percent increase in that population, from around 36,400 to nearly 60,000 seniors, between 2005 and 2035. This would also include an increase of more than 16,000 in the number of youth under 18 years old - more than a 19-percent increase, from 82,400 to over 98,000 people, in our youth population between 2005 and 2035.

The population project was accomplished through the cooperation of the project's Projections Review Advisory and Technical Committees, as well as land-use and transportation planners and officials, and a panel of real estate and economic development experts. The projections will be made available for public use and, because of the sub-county detail, will serve as a vital tool in the future planning for Rockland's municipalities, as well as the County's own planning efforts. This project has also provided the Planning Department with a County-specific projections model, which can be modified as demographic and land use factors change over time.

The 2010 Census

The Planning Department's efforts in challenging the Census Bureau's Annual Population Estimates is one of many initiatives undertaken to improve the accuracy and completeness of Census Bureau data for Rockland County in preparation for the upcoming Census in 2010. Recent Department initiatives have included the review and successful challenging of the Census Bureau's Housing Unit Estimates for Rockland County, as well as the review and updating of the Census Bureau's Master Address File, which will be used for 2010 Census data collection and was completed as part of the Census Bureau's Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) Program. Rockland's Towns and Villages have played a key role in helping to accomplish all of these initiatives.

Numerous other data quality and outreach initiatives will be undertaken by the County of Rockland and its Planning Department in preparation for the 2010 Census over the next year. The Planning Department will be responsible for the review of all of Rockland's census geography to be used in the 2010 Census. The Planning Department will also be working with the Census Bureau to provide updated housing unit information to supplement the Census Bureau's Master Address File. In terms of outreach, the Planning Department will be a source for updated information regarding the 2010 Census and will maintain a contact database of local agencies interested in learning about 2010 Census operations. To ensure the most accurate count of Rockland residents as possible, the County will also form a Complete Count Committee to increase awareness about the 2010 Census and its importance.

Database for Decision-Making: Rockland FACTS

Understanding our residents and their needs is vital for a responsive and accountable government in order to gain an understanding of Rockland's families, kids and seniors and for planning their future. Rockland is the first County in the state to gather the type of information, facts and figures, by each town and village, which gives us an accurate, clear

profile of our Rockland families. Collected for the past three years by a Rockland CARES subcommittee from a wide range of federal, state and local data sources, we are proud to introduce the **Rockland FACTS** database, which provides comprehensive information about the economic, demographic and socioeconomic well being of our families.

Issues such as housing, education, health and income in Rockland’s diverse communities, factors which have a significant impact on children's lives, will soon be available in one user-friendly format for planners, advocates, educators and policy makers to access and analyze. By choosing from more than 500 different categories, or “indicators,” users can access demographic information on population, health and economic issues, educational statistics, and more. Information can be accessed by Town, Village, School District, or the County as a whole and compared to other municipalities statewide. This is the first time such detailed information has been made available on the county level, and Rockland once again is on the forefront of technology and information. **Rockland FACTS** is truly a “one-stop-shop” for data on the County and its people – and it will help us provide better services to strengthen and support our families.

We will invite legislators, community leaders, educators, advocates and the press for a dynamic, interactive session on the “Rockland FACTS” website, scheduled for release in June. It is a comprehensive database that puts a face on the people of Rockland - a tool everyone can use to help make our County an even better place to live.

Rockland County Workforce Housing Initiative

We have long been concerned about the issue of housing, and now more than ever, this administration is committed to providing housing opportunities for all Rocklanders, from our young people just starting out to our older folks who can no longer afford the large homes they raised their families in.

Last year, another 90 units of affordable housing were built in Rockland for a total of nearly 2,000 since I first came into office in 1995. We are very proud of that achievement and are working hard to continue to keep Rockland affordable for people of all ages and income levels.

Over the years, we have established several mechanisms to study housing needs in the County and increase our inventory of affordable housing for all Rocklanders. Last year, I announced that this administration would move forward with the Housing Opportunities Commission, a plan originally conceived by me in 2005 as an outgrowth of the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Force. This year, I am proud to announce that Joe Abate of our Office of Community Development will chair the **Rockland County Workforce Housing Initiative**, whose mission, through public/private partnerships, is to create housing opportunities for Rockland residents of all economic brackets. We will also invite outstanding community activist and businessman Hector May as a member of the private sector to take a key role on the Workforce Housing Initiative committee.

Under the County's leadership, the committee, which is made up of community members, public officials, planners, people from the business sector and emergency service volunteers, will work with private developers, municipalities and the business community to provide a wide range of housing opportunities for sale or rental here in Rockland County. They will work with Joe and the Office of Community Development to establish guidelines for workforce housing. The committee will also work with the Rockland County Economic Development Corp. (REDC) to find ways to utilize the County's Industrial Development Agency (IDA) to create incentives to promote workforce housing and collaborate with banks and lending institutions to obtain grants, low-interest construction loans and other types of funding to promote workforce housing opportunities.

We look forward to expanding the County's opportunities to create affordable housing for our residents by reaching out to our broader community and tapping the resources it

has to offer to keep Rockland a growing, vital County that is affordable to all those who want to make their home here.

Preventing homelessness in Rockland County

In February, we announced the results of our “Point In Time” count of homeless persons living in Rockland County. Of a total of 192 people who were counted as homeless, 69 people were housed in emergency shelters, 52 were in transitional housing and 71 were listed as unsheltered and living in makeshift outdoor encampments around Rockland. Many of them struggle with mental illness, drug addiction, family problems and other issues that keep them from finding a stable home. In these difficult financial times, however, the threat of homelessness is something that is no longer isolated to those dealing with drug addiction, mental illness or domestic violence.

The economic downturn has affected people from all income brackets, all over our diverse County – from the very wealthy who have lost money through the volatile stock market and unscrupulous investors to those who live just above the poverty line and are in danger of losing their jobs. People in every part of Rockland are struggling to pay their mortgages, make their rent payments on time and keep up with their utilities. Many wonder what would happen if they couldn’t pay the bills. The thought of losing their homes either to foreclosure or eviction looms as a threat to many who have never faced it before.

Last year, I announced the County’s Foreclosure and Eviction and Assistance Program, designed to help people who may be on the verge of losing their homes to stay in them. Using federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) HOME funds, we were successful in helping a number of Rockland families avoid eviction in 2008. This year, we hope to assist even more with **\$869,000 in federal stimulus funding to help prevent homelessness in Rockland.**

The funds, which are part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, will enable us to help people who meet HUD income guidelines in the following areas:

- Residents facing eviction
- Residents who are behind on utility payments and are in danger of having them shut off/terminated
- Residents with credit issues who can't afford to put up the needed security deposits to set up new accounts with utility companies

The Emergency Shelter funds, which are designated specifically to prevent immediate or impending homelessness, will make it possible for our Community Development and Social Services Departments to assist tenants who may be on the verge of eviction by negotiating with landlords and paying back rent, allowing them to hold on to their homes. The funding will also allow County government to help people who have fallen behind on their utility payments to catch up and keep the lights, heat or water on in their homes. Others with credit issues who can't afford to pay required utility security deposits could get financial assistance to help set up their accounts.

In these ways, we can help with the immediate needs of eligible families and individuals who, for the first time in their lives, might otherwise end up without a roof over their heads.

Innovations in Fire Safety: Introducing the Code Enforcement Task Force

There were some close calls, but there have been no fire-related fatalities in Rockland County for the past two years. We believe the successful Countywide Smoke Detector Campaign we launched has contributed to the increased safety of our community. The entire Rockland County volunteer firefighting community has helped raise awareness about the importance of working smoke detectors in homes, giving away more than 500 from 2007 to 2008.

Many of you here tonight have read the testimony in the Black Sunday trial. On January 23, 2005, firefighter John Bellew of Pearl River lost his life and Jeffrey Cool of West Haverstraw was severely injured jumping five stories from a burning apartment building in the Bronx. Six firefighters were forced to jump that day, two to their death, because they couldn't get out any other way - exits were blocked because of the illegal walls and blocked doorways that cordoned off the building and made it impossible to escape. Two of our own, Firefighters John Bellew of Pearl River and Jeffrey Cool of West Haverstraw, were involved in the fire that day. John Bellew lost his life and Jeff Cool was critically injured.

Tonight, we intend to learn from the terrible lesson of Jan. 7, 2005, by establishing the **Code Enforcement Task Force**, designed to crack down on the owners of illegally divided homes and rooming houses in our Rockland community.

For years, the Rockland firefighting community has answered the call to fires in buildings that aren't legally habitable. Gordon Wren, who has been fighting fires for 40 years and was a former Rockland building inspector, has described fire calls in homes with people crammed into what amounts to cubicles - 20 or more people living in a cellar with no windows, very little light and inadequate ventilation.

These illegal rooming houses are found in neighborhoods all over Rockland, in the best and worst neighborhoods in the County. Firefighters responding to these calls feel anger and frustration. Attics, porches and cellars illegally partitioned make it hard, if not impossible, to figure out the layout of the house and rescue the people who might be trapped inside. Like that day in the Bronx, firefighters meet a wall or a locked door instead of egress. They and the victims alike become trapped and can't find their way out.

Illegally divided homes and rooming houses are now cropping up all over Rockland as the economy worsens. Some unscrupulous people make a great deal of money renting out space illegally. This has been going on in our County for years, but it is getting worse, and the problem must be addressed.

The landlords of these illegal dwellings in all parts of Rockland need to be found and heavily penalized for endangering people's lives. We need to shut down these buildings and get the message out to people who are buying them and altering them without proper permits that this will not be tolerated. This is the mission of the Code Enforcement Task Force. The Task Force will be commissioned to encourage enforcement of building, fire and health codes on the local level, investigate housing stock and look for repeat offenders. We've reached out to officials from all of Rockland's municipalities to join the Task Force, which will be led by Gordon Wren and inspectors from our Department of Health, and we have received a very positive response. The Task Force will recommend the Rockland County Board of Health and local municipalities levy stiff fines when violators are caught, and that fines be increased with each subsequent violation.

We do not want what happened in the Bronx to ever happen here in Rockland. We must find and stop any type of illegal occupancy or construction, by those who do it for the money alone. We will learn from the death of John Bellew and the courage of Jeffrey Cool. We must protect the lives of our firefighters and residents alike and make our community safer for everyone.

Department of the Year: Social Services

More than any other one County department is on the front lines every day when it comes to serving the many people who live in Rockland, providing support, services, medical care, emergency shelter and more to people whose needs are increasing with the declining economy.

Ten years ago, this department helped 15,293 people get food stamps. Last year, they assisted 23,640. About 2,700 residents needed HEAP assistance in 1998 – nearly 4,000 people applied for help in 2008. Medicaid recipients more than doubled in a ten-year period – from 20,512 in 1998 to almost 46,000 in 2008. More and more people are applying for help under our Temporary Assistance Program (TAP).

The needs of the people of Rockland have increased dramatically, and not just for those in lower income brackets. An ever-increasing number of our residents now need our help. Every day, our InfoRock service information hotline gets calls from people needing job counseling, financial assistance, family support services, public assistance programs, and help with utility bill payments. In January, Paula Dlouhy and her InfoRock staff handled their highest volume of calls – 1,127 – up from an average of 1,000 calls per month in 2008. The InfoRock website, launched last April, has hosted over 18,000 information searches. Use of the Rockland Rx Card, a discount drug card for the under-insured or those without insurance, is up since it was first mailed Rocklanders in 2005. Residents are saving an average of 24-percent off their discount drugs each time they use the card.

Analyzing these facts, one thing becomes very clear – this recession is causing people to reach out for help they may have never needed before, and the **Department of Social Services** is answering that call.

And that task has not been an easy one. Commissioner Susan Sherwood and her staff have had to deal with drastic state budget cuts and loss of personnel from cutbacks, elimination of positions and retirements. DSS staff have stepped up to serve the people of Rockland in spite of it all, making sure that the individuals, families and children that come to them for help get the services they need, now more than ever, each and every day.

Last year, DSS partnered with the District Attorney’s Office to find a location for the Rockland County Child Advocacy Center (CAC) on the grounds of Good Samaritan Hospital. The CAC, which will be part of the DA’s Special Victims Unit, will improve the community’s response to child abuse. The CAC will be fully operational this summer.

DSS has also developed “**A Helpful Resource Guide: For Rockland residents needing assistance in our changing economy.**” It’s a comprehensive community directory listing sources where residents can go for the help they need, whether it be for rental

assistance, tax preparation help, insurance questions, child care subsidies, or housing and shelter needs.

The department has improved customer service by instituting an Electronic Imaging Project, which allows workers to access TAP, Medicaid, Food Stamp and HEAP cases immediately at their desks. And Rockland CARES, a division of DSS, has prepared a **Supportive Resources Guide** for parents and caregivers that puts programs and services for infants, children and youth at the fingertips of those who care for them so they can become the best nurturers possible.

Here is what some of our residents that DSS serves have to say:

“Thank you so much for everything you have done for us and are still doing! I truly appreciate your devotion and care!”

“I would like to express my sincere gratitude for everything you do for me and my family. Every month when you refill my Food Stamp card, I thank you in my heart for enabling me to feed my family with dignity. Your help is enabling me to raise a happy, healthy serene family. I will always remember your kindness to us.”

“I just thought someone should know what a wonderful and caring support unit caseworker I have. She should be commended for the wonderful job she does. I don’t know what I would do if I didn’t have a caseworker like her: caring above and beyond the call of duty.”

This is the true mission of government – to help people in need. These are the people whose lives are directly affected by the services we offer. The dedicated staff of DSS works every day for the people we serve, giving them the support they need in a time of crisis. For that we thank Commissioner Sherwood and her dedicated staff for balancing the budget crisis with people’s needs – at a time when government should be at its best. And at the Department of Social Services, it is.

Medal of Valor: Specialist Salvatore Galgano, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment

While we here in Rockland are focused on ourselves, struggling to negotiate a difficult time here at home, we must never forget those who struggle with much greater peril – those who are fighting for our freedom overseas.

Tonight we have with us one of the bravest examples of that fight – Army Specialist Salvatore Galgano of Pomona, who, at 23 years old, was truly on the front lines of the war in Afghanistan. A member of a combat patrol of about 20 soldiers, Specialist Galgano immediately went into action when 70 enemy fighters set upon the patrol. Without thought for his own safety, Specialist Galgano exposed himself to heavy fire by rushing to the top of a nearby hill to establish an outpost and cover for the rest of his patrol. For nearly three hours, more than 50 rounds of enemy fire landed within inches of him as he defended his watch and the members of his company.

The confrontation lasted six hours, with most of the fighting at close quarters. Machine gun, sniper, and rocket-propelled grenade fire pelted the battlefield. At the end of the fight, about 30 enemy fighters were either killed or wounded – Specialist Galgano is credited with saving the lives of countless soldiers. He was awarded the Army's Bronze Star Medal with Valor Device for exceptionally meritorious service while under fire.

Specialist Galgano exhibited bravery and valor far beyond his 23 years. Tonight, we honor him for his selfless service to our country, and we remember that no matter how things are difficult here at home and what sacrifices we must make, there are brave men and women overseas who are sacrificing far more every day. May Specialist Galgano's bravery serve as a reminder to those of us in government that courage, perseverance and leadership are what gets us and the people we serve through the hard times.

In conclusion, we are pleased to note that while working in partnership with this Legislature, we have reduced the size of our workforce, reduced the rate of government

spending, carefully managed County finances in a volatile economic climate, and, despite an increased unemployment rate, helped create private sector jobs while simultaneously serving a growing number of our residents seeking assistance from their government.

We will persevere, and we will emerge a better government – a responsive, responsible, accessible and accountable government - to serve a County with inherent attributes that make it a truly wonderful place to live and work.

Thank you, good night, and may God bless America and our beloved County.

