

**2016 SOTC (as prepared for delivery)**

Good evening and thank you for coming. Thank you Legislator Rapp for that kind introduction. Kathy Rapp is a great County Legislator, not only for her district but for the entire county. She takes the time does her homework and her voice is always one of the most reasoned and thoughtful contributions to any issue being discussed. I enjoy working with you Kathy and appreciate you being here this evening.

I would also like to thank Tim Burtis for leading us in the pledge of allegiance. Tim is our newest legislator and he was just elected to his first full term this fall. Congratulations Tim and thanks again.

Welcome Chairman Ryan McMahon, Floor Leaders Pat Kilmartin and Linda Ervin, Ways and Means Chair Dave Knapp and all the County Legislators.

I would also like to welcome Sheriff Gene Conway and our new County Clerk Lisa Dell. Congratulations Lisa and we are happy to have you here. And our County Comptroller whom said he'd be a little late.

Welcome Mayor Miner and the members of your team who have joined us this evening.

There are also representatives of our state legislators, members of the common council, representatives from Governor Cuomo's office, Congressman Katko's office, our college Presidents, elected officials from towns and villages and superintendents from our school districts here tonight and I would like to thank all of you for joining us.

I would also like to welcome Empire State Development President and CEO Howard Zensky who is joining us tonight.

Also with us tonight are the three people I rely on daily and they do a great job moving county government forward: Deputy County Executive's Bill Fisher, Ann Rooney and Mary Beth Primo-thank you for all your hard work.

We are also joined tonight by our Department Heads and I would like to take a minute to welcome all of them and introduce those who have joined our team in the last year: Dan Wears, Director of Emergency Management, Lisa Alford Commissioner of Adult and Long Term Care Services, Barrie Gewanter

Executive Director of Human Rights, and County Attorney Bob Durr. We have an excellent team and I am always impressed with their efforts to look at what we do and ask if it can be done better. Their day in and day out commitment benefits all of us. Thank you all for your hard work.

And welcome to all the county employees who are here tonight -- those of you in the trenches who are working hard to deliver the high quality services our residents have come to expect. Thank you for all you do.

I am pleased to report that from a fiscal perspective the state of the county is strong. We ended 2015 with a surplus of \$11.5 million dollars thanks mostly to lower state mandates. The State has gradually begun to take more responsibility for its own bills and that is reflecting positively in our budget. Working in partnership with you in the legislature, the property tax levy is less than \$140 million dollars for the second year in a row, a level we haven't seen since 1989. The lower tax levy combined with growth in property values makes it possible to lower the tax rate to \$5.10 per 1000. It is a 30 percent reduction since 2008 and represents an historic low.

In addition to the property tax levy, the bulk of the money collected locally comes in the form of sales tax revenue. A reliance on sales tax revenue is the reason we make an almost constant effort to generate economic activity and draw people to our community. Sales tax is affected greatly by the cost of gasoline. While lower gas prices are good for all of us in many ways, they do present a bump in the road in terms of providing funds for the operation of county government. Consider this-In February of 2014 the average price of a gallon of gas in Onondaga County was \$3.52. Today that average is \$1.83 per gallon. That's a drop of \$1.69 per gallon or 48%.

Despite this, our sales tax revenue for 2015 was virtually flat—which means that, outside of what has happened with gas prices, our sales tax is growing and is an encouraging sign that our efforts are indeed reaping benefits.

Our strong fiscal condition is how we are able to make the investments we do and to provide a high quality of services to the taxpayers. The investments are perhaps most noticeable in the area of infrastructure. In fact, as I begin my third term, it is interesting to see the progress we've made since I've been County Executive. Since 2008 Onondaga County has:

\* paved 393.5 miles of roads and surface treated another 319 miles, including Adams Street and Harrison Street in the City of Syracuse

- \* Replaced, repaired or installed more than 16 miles of large diameter sewer pipes, many of which are in the city of Syracuse.
- \* We Replaced roofs on 11 county buildings, including, the War Memorial, the Justice Center, Jamesville, the Convention Center and the Civic Center which itself had 8 different levels of roofs
- \* We Repaired 32 bridges and Completed 180 different Save the Rain Projects
- \* We expanded the War Memorial Ice Rink to meet NHL standards so the Crunch can play on regulation ice and
- \* Constructed 9.1 megawatts of solar arrays at the metropolitan water board, WEP and Jamesville Correctional facility.
- \* We replaced 636 windows in the Civic Center—and Thank you all for your patience by the way. Many of our employees worked in a construction zone for much of last year.
- \* We Built a spectacular amphitheater in just 6 months and we Renovated the Central Library. We will have a beautiful new ground floor space to welcome the public in the Galleries.

I think we are joined here tonight by our former Deputy County Executive Ed Kochian. Ed continues to be extremely helpful to me in his retirement and I think he will be pleased to know that our facilities department has remodeled almost the entire Kochian Office Building and is ready to begin on the Civic Center

Here is a picture of the recently renovated third floor of the central library. It is now open and we are looking forward to sharing pictures next year when the entire project is complete.

Successfully maintaining infrastructure is perhaps the most fundamental function of government and it is a duty we take seriously. Thank you to everyone who has helped us maintain our focus on this core function.

Besides infrastructure, one of the county's most visible assets is our parks system, 2015 was an excellent year and we intend to build on that success with new docks at the Amphitheater and a kayak and canoe launch on the Seneca River. Thank you very much to the members of the Legislature for continuing to support the projects that will truly make Onondaga Lake one of the best places to be in Central New York in the summer.

Last summer the Parks department built a Family Fun Zone deck at NBT Bank Stadium. The new structure provides a great “on the field” experience for fans. When the internationally known Bassmaster organization hosts its Northern Open Fishing Tournaments each year throughout the Northeast, they generally expect around 100 participants. When they came to Oneida Shores in August though, they set an all-time record and tripled their past attendance records, attracting 392 anglers, to compete for a portion of more than \$250,000 in prize money. In addition, Bassmaster ranked Oneida Lake one of the best fisheries in 2015.

I was very happy to hear after we hosted Governor Cuomo’s cabinet here last fall that he plans to bring his fishing tournament to Onondaga Lake this summer. The Rosamond Gifford Zoo broke ground on an outdoor patio for zoo events. The Patio was funded by the Friends of the Zoo and will allow us to hold events outdoors.

Our elephant herd will be swimming in their new pool this summer. The pool provides a more diverse and natural environment for the zoo’s herd of Asian elephants. The project was an important part of the zoo’s accreditation which keeps us among the top 10% of zoos in nation. It will be great to see elephants swimming once again in a naturalized pond and this project too was funded by Friends of the Zoo.

Those of you who know me well know that one of my favorite parts of my job is when I get to introduce the new babies who join our zoo family. In 2015, we were joined by:

- \* Monterey and Jack, North American river otter pups
- \* Batu, an Asian elephant calf, and;
- \* Rohan and Pumori, Red panda cubs

We expect many more babies this spring and I will thank Ted Fox and our extraordinary zoo keepers in advance for putting up with me because I will be there a lot. If you haven’t been in a while, I encourage you to visit the zoo or any of our other outstanding county parks. Thank you to Commissioner Bill Lansley and your team.

I’m hoping that many of you have had a chance to meet our Health Commissioner Dr. Indu Gupta. We are so happy to have Dr. Gupta back in Central New York. Under her dynamic leadership and a fresh set of eyes looking at everything we do, the Health Department is truly engaging with our community

in ways it never has before. Dr. Gupta has injected Healthy Families with a new spirit of community participation and collaboration, and the department is well on its way to becoming only the third accredited county Health Department in New York State.

Through Dr. Gupta's tireless efforts, and in conjunction with her staff, the frightening heroin epidemic is coming out of the shadows. Many of you attended the Opiate and Heroin Forum, sponsored by the County Drug Task Force in January. The need for safe and controlled treatment is essential to addressing this epidemic, and we currently have a severe shortage of available treatment in the community. In the coming month, I will propose to the Legislature that they add \$100,000 to our partnership with Crouse Hospital's outpatient treatment program so that Crouse professionals can expand their treatment operations.

To that end, keeping prescription drugs off the street is an important part of this effort and I am proud to announce that Onondaga County has created a Prescription Drug Drop Box program. It's a place for residents to dispose of prescription drugs and ensure that they are not left someplace where they could pose a danger or make their way into our water systems. This is a partnership with Citizens Campaign for the Environment, the Onondaga County Department of Health, the District Attorney, the Sheriff and the Office of Environment.

Thank you to Travis Glazier for coordinating this important effort.

On the public safety side, both 911 and Emergency Management have been busy. In 2015 the dedicated call takers and dispatchers at 911 answered more than 600,000 calls and dispatched more than 500,000 police, fire and emergency medical incidents. This represented a 6.8% increase in calls over 2014 and yet still our 911 employees continue to score high marks on customer service surveys and remain among the best trained and most competent in the business.

And our Emergency Management office has been focused on ensuring that our community is prepared in the event of a disaster. Commissioner Dan Wears has been a great addition to our team and in 2015, Onondaga County participated in full scale exercises with the Syracuse Airport Authority, Syracuse University, the Health Department, Sheriff's Office and Probation department as well as Oswego County relative to their nuclear plants.

The department also participated in more than 10 table-top exercises with organizations across the county and led the design, development and implementation of a plan for a hazardous materials involving the rail lines.

On a similar note, the County Department of Transportation really stepped up last year when our state was bombarded with snow. Commissioner Brian Donnelly's team assumed responsibility for a number of state roads so that the New York State DOT could deploy additional resources to the parts of the state where they were hit especially hard. This was a tremendous help for our neighbors across the state and it was accomplished seamlessly by the men and women in our transportation department. Thank you all for what you do.

Please let me take a minute to update you on the human services reorganization we undertook a few years ago. You might remember that we reorganized to knock down silos and improve outcomes for the people we serve. We strive for efficient delivery of high quality services and have been particularly focused on outreach and outcomes. As you hear about our accomplishments, you may notice that I don't refer as much to specific departments as I have in the past. That is an indication that the reorganization led by Deputy CE Ann Rooney has been successful.

We focused on improving outreach within the Hispanic community by translating multiple informational materials regarding vital services such as health insurance and counseling, Medication Management and the Neighborhood Advisor Program.

And our NY Connects was selected as one of three pilot counties to assist and recommend procedures to the NYS Office for the Aging with the statewide implementation of "No Wrong Door". No Wrong Door is a single point of access system. When people come to the county for help their concerns cross multiple departments and no matter where they enter, we can help them. It is what we are supposed to do and we work all the time to do it better.

We are also bringing services into our school systems to tackle some of the barriers that our children face when they are trying to learn. Thanks to funding provided through Assemblyman Magnarelli's efforts, we now have more than 100 child welfare staff in the Syracuse, East Syracuse-Minoa, and Solvay school districts. These workers focus on student family issues in an effort to help with academic performance and improvement. As part of this, we created a special unit of Child Protective Services caseworkers and attached it directly to the Syracuse City School District.

Our efforts regarding juvenile justice center on diversion for low risk offenders. We maintain contact after the formal case closes, and I am proud to say that the

effort has resulted in a 40% reduction in the recidivism rate.

Unfortunately, one of the most visible signs of failures within our support structure is homelessness. Our services agencies have been focused heavily on this important issue. We are working with the Downtown Committee and the Homeless Housing Coalition to develop a coordinated street outreach to address homelessness and individuals with severe mental health and substance abuse conditions.

Jamesville Correctional Facility came in under budget last year because they were able to better manage overtime without compromising security.

At the same time, the community crew was still very active providing labor at Onondaga Lake Park, NBT Stadium, Veterans Memorial Cemetery, Jamesville Beach, and others. In 2015, the inmate crew exceeded the number of hours it worked from the previous year and provided 4,806 hours of labor for the County.

With the support of our legislature we also built the Second Chance Canine Adoption facility at Jamesville. It was completed and dedicated in October and has not only met our expectations but has far exceeded them in the very short time it has been operating. Here, take a look.....

I'd like to thank Christopher Nadeau for graciously agreeing to be interviewed about his work at the shelter.

Many, many people made the shelter a reality but I want to single out two of them for going way above and beyond to make it a big success- Assistant Corrections Commissioner John Heisler III and Justin Sayles from the County Executive's office. Thank you both for a job well done.

Also happening at Jamesville is a wonderful program for our military veterans. We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to our veterans and in December, we launched another new initiative at Jamesville to focus on Veteran Services for our incarcerated veterans. Appropriately called the "Soldier On Program", the mission is to provide inmates, who are veterans, with the services and support they need to prepare them to carry on healthy, productive lives, in homes of their own, upon discharge from incarceration.

Our Veterans Service Agency worked with more than 4,600 Veterans and 4,100 Spouses of Veterans to obtain the benefits they have earned. Last year our Veterans Service Agency processed an average of 551 claims per month,

making Onondaga County one of the leading counties in New York State. Thank you to our director Corliss Dennis and her team.

You have heard me mention a few of our talented department heads and I wish I could highlight them all. I am very fortunate to work with an incredible team of managers and a strong, dedicated workforce. They excel, even though we have a lot fewer employees now than we did when we started. To our department heads, managers and staff; you make it look easy. You do great work and I appreciate it very much.

In addition to covering the basics and making sure our roads, sewers, water pipes and facilities are in good working order and the people we serve are having their needs met, we have continued to strive to do even more and have good progress to report:

The \$70 million dollar renovation of the Hotel Syracuse is nearly complete. The new Marriott Syracuse Downtown is already accepting reservations for this summer. Onondaga County has designated the new hotel as its official convention center hotel and we can't wait for it to open. This is a project the community has been hearing about for a decade and we are proud of our role in bringing it back to life. I want to personally thank Deputy CE Bill Fisher. Bill has had a weekly standing meeting on this project for the past 2 years. He has lived it and has been involved in nearly every detail. Thank you Bill for your hard work to make this happen-- It will be very gratifying to meet you in the hotel lobby for a toast to our past as we look forward with great expectations for the future.

A few months ago we told you that 420 jobs will be coming next door when SORAA opens its facility to manufacture LED lights using a unique process that creates better lighting. As you can see, the plant is well under way and will be up and running by end of the year. SORAA is investing \$1.3 billion in this operation and we are excited to have them here.

Projects like SORAA are possible because of our collaboration with our partners in State government. The regional economic development council and the upstate revitalization initiative, created by Governor Cuomo and the state legislature are having an incredible effect on this region. You may know that we won the \$500 million URI competition, but did you also know that we have been *the* most successful region over the past 5 years? Between the RED-C and the URI (as we have come to refer to both,) Governor Cuomo and the state have invested \$844.5 million dollars in Central New York.



As I mentioned earlier, ESD President and CEO Howard Zemsky is here—let's give him a round of applause. Thank you

The RED-C investments are the primary reason that downtown and beyond have experienced a rebirth. The investments can be seen all over the county and on behalf of our whole community, I am grateful to our partners in the state for making it happen. Here is just a sampling of the projects that have been supported with RED-C investment from the state.

- \* The Hotel Syracuse
- \* INFICON – which expanded its manufacturing operations supporting 200 jobs.
- \* the Inner Harbor
- \* the 420 new high tech jobs at SORAA
- \* US Optical – which built a new clean room to expand its manufacturing.
- \* St Joseph's Hospital which has seen tremendous growth
- \* Crouse Hospital which is renovating both its NICU and Emergency Departments
- \* Rapid Response – which projects 175 new jobs as a result of its expansion
- \* Improvements to Armory Square
- \* Great projects to support The Near West Side initiative
- \* Downtown housing projects on Warren Street and Jefferson Street, And so many more

Now that we have *a/so* won the URI competition, we have so much more to look forward to. Thank you to co-chairs SU Chancellor Kent Seyverud and Centerstate CEO president Rob Simpson and all the members of the regional economic development council.

Success builds on success. When projects like the ones just listed are completed with the assistance of either the county IDA or the county civic development corporation, the transactions generate fees which we use to fund

worthwhile projects in the community. Here is a sampling of some of the things we did last year with the fees that were generated:

- \* We supported the Community Prosperity Initiative with a \$500k grant to link low-income job seekers to career opportunities with local employers and together
- \* We also purchased 437 North Salina Street as business incubator space on the North Side of the City
- \* OCIDA also purchased 435 North Salina Street, another deteriorating building bought in cooperation with OCC as a center to train individuals as owners and operators of restaurants
- \* We supported Juneteenth, a Celebration which also provides health screenings, employment opportunities and social services information to a predominantly African American audience
- \* The Near Westside Initiative is constructing rehearsal and theater space in an old downtown building with money from our civic development corporation.
- \* Our funds provided the loan guarantee to the Strathmore-Huntley project to create affordable housing in an historic building located in a city neighborhood
- \* And we supported the Eat to live Food Co-op in the 2300 block of South Salina Street
- \* One of the ways taxpayers benefit directly is that we use the fees generated by our projects to pay economic development staff salaries, and rent for the combined city/county economic development office.

All of these projects are possible thanks to the good work of OCIDA, OCDC and our economic development team led by Julie Cerio. Thank you all for what you do.

In addition to the economic development investment, the State is also investing \$50M in the New York State Fairgrounds. When combined with the Lake improvements and the road work and reinvestment in Solvay, it will completely change the look of the west side of Onondaga Lake. The grandstand and the old front entrance are already gone. When the fair opens this year you will see a brand new front gate, an expanded midway and an RV park which will all

complement the new Amphitheater. Concert promoters tell us that we are creating an ideal location to host music festivals. In addition, there will be a new pedestrian gate from Bridge Street and beautiful improvement in the village. Community Development Director Bob DeMore and his staff are working on the design for 17 commercial properties around the intersection of Milton and Bridge streets. Here is a picture of a before and after photo from a property they did in the Village of Camillus. They do outstanding work and are ready to go in Solvay this year. Solvay Mayor Ron Benedetti and Geddes Town Supervisor Manny Falcone have been great partners.

The Lake itself continues to make progress. When I took office and changed course from construction of sewage treatment plants to a more environmentally friendly strategy using a more balanced approach with Green infrastructure we called the program Save The Rain and we agreed in Federal Court to increase the amount of overflows we would capture from 89% to 95%. Many people cautioned against our agreeing to the higher standards because they thought it would be very difficult to meet the goal but I am pleased to report that we met the higher standard 4 years ahead of schedule. Commissioner Tom Rhoads and his team have done a tremendous job and are now expanding the focus from the quantity of overflow captured to one of water quality. We are introducing a new marketing campaign to help with the effort and it is called "Connect the Drops". It's a public awareness outreach program to engage the community to help clean up and prevent litter. As Commissioner Rhoads says, "We intend to run through the finish line."

And when we talk about success and potential and excitement, just take a step back and look around you.

The SUNY Poly Film Hub has brought a whole new excitement to our region. This is an industry that people have been trying to bring to Syracuse for years but with little success. Announced at the State of the County in 2014, the Film hub is fundamentally changing the way people look at Syracuse.

Growing up, the movie Slap Shot was filmed here and we talked about it for years because it was so rare.

Now we have an almost constant film making presence with Film House studios as a permanent tenant here in the hub. Ron Perlman's Wing and a Prayer Productions recently wrapped the filming of its movie *Pottersville* here in January. In addition to the excitement of seeing the film crews around town, it's a great

economic boost. When I was here in the studio talking to some temporary transplants to our community, I asked them what they were enjoying while they were here they very quickly ticked off a long list of favorite restaurants and places to shop.

*American Dresser* starring Tom Berenger and Keith David was filmed here and its budget gives you a glimpse into why it is so valuable to us to have movies made here. The budget for *American Dresser* included over \$100K for hotel rooms, over \$120k to rent cars, RVs and art supplies purchased locally \$500k local payroll for labor, crew, extras and more totaling over \$800k spent locally. That is a lot of money circulating in our economy and that is just one film. Film Commissioner Eric Vinal and the SUNY Poly team are continuing to grow the fledgling business and word is out that we have a state of the art facility and a community filled with great people who are very welcoming to the film makers. As a matter of fact, we like having the filmmakers here so much that we don't actually let them leave. Joining us tonight is writer, director and actor Carmine Cangialosi and with his permission, I would like to show you the trailer for his feature film, *American Dresser*.....It is very exciting for us to have the trailer for the first movie made here at our hub. Watch carefully and you will see some familiar places.....

Here it is.....*American Dresser*

Thank you Carmine. We love working with you and look forward to hosting you again. What was only an idea a couple years ago is a reality now and the future is bright for film making in Central New York.

So, you see some very good things are happening in the County. We are fiscally sound, I highlighted some of our department accomplishments to illustrate for you the quiet competence of a county government getting things done every day and I even had the chance to tell you about some of the extraordinary things that are being accomplished.

But there is another side to the coin and this year we also heard a troubling report about how our successes are not yet being shared by everyone....

Dr. Paul Jargowski from Rutgers University came to town and put into words what all of us can see. Onondaga County still suffers with some of the highest concentrations of poverty among African Americans and Latinos. We very much live in a segregated community and some of us are doing better than others. Interestingly, we have heard multiple times what Dr. Jargowski said the *current* situation is but there has been much less said about what he called our possible

solutions. I attended the sessions with Dr. Jargowski in Syracuse and had the opportunity to listen to him and speak with him afterwards. He made a pretty compelling case for an overhaul of our land use planning and strongly encouraged us to recognize that we are all in this together.

With that in mind, I encourage you, the members of the County Legislature to read Dr. Jargowski's report and I also call on you again this year to conduct committee meetings to discuss the county's land use planning report. The community celebrated when my predecessor, Nick Pirro unveiled the county's 2010 plan. A crucial part of that plan was that it be updated every five years. The Syracuse Onondaga County Planning Agency prepared an update several years ago and it is an outstanding document in terms of the data it provides. With my support it was sent to the Legislature years ago and I implore you to consider it. Ask questions, make suggestions....even vote it down if you must....but come up with your own plan if you do because what we are doing now is clearly not working for all of us and it is an abdication of our responsibility to the people we serve to just avoid talking about it. It is difficult enough to be poor but it is exponentially more difficult when everyone around you is also poor. This is Central New York in 2016 and it is simply not okay to let *any* of our neighborhoods be left behind.

In county government we work continuously to break down barriers and level the playing field. We've made it a priority to hire minorities both inside and outside of county government. We've partnered for several years with OnPoint for college to make sure their students have access to summer jobs. Last year I told you we were going to pilot a summer job program with People's AME Zion church and I am happy to report that it was very successful and that we will be expanding it this summer. Several years ago we changed the language on the requests for proposals that go out to vendors requiring a plan for Minority participation and it has had a very good effect on the number of minority contractors that have been able to work for county government.

The recent construction of the Amphitheater is a good illustration of the work we have done to make sure that there is equal access for minorities to participate in county projects. It was important to me that we be given permission from the state to construct with a design build model in order to speed up the process. A requirement from the state in exchange for that permission was that the project be performed with a Project Labor Agreement and I want to publicly thank our partners in labor not only for a job well done but for the effort you put in to breaking down barriers for minorities. Greg Lancette of the Building Trades Council negotiated first of its kind language to accommodate minority

participation. I also want to publicly thank Gilbane for going above and beyond. Together we held two outreach meetings with Minority and Women owned businesses and we funded a pre-apprentice program through SUNY EOC with the help of Joseph Bryant and Tim Penix, we held weekly meetings to monitor our progress and WE GOT RESULTS.....

Whether measured by the number of employees working on the Amphitheater, the dollar amounts of the contracts or the number of hours people worked we exceeded our goals and I am happy to report that we had a participation rate of 22.18 percent. I do not know of any other public or private development that has achieved such success with minority and women participation. As a matter of fact, it was a high compliment when I received an email from the Urban Jobs Task Force that our reports were great...

It takes tremendous work and a lot of tenacity to keep knocking down the barriers and I want to publicly thank Mary Beth Primo, Sean Carroll and Duane Owens for keeping everyone's feet to the fire. It is especially gratifying to have a beautiful facility built in record time and to do it with a lot of new faces.

And while I am proud of the accomplishment, there is still much work to do. The best way to break the cycle of chronic poverty is to invest in our youth. I have said many times that there is a linear path---We can either invest when children are young and give them the tools they need to succeed on their own or we can spend our tax dollars making up for our failure to do so with inflated social services costs to support those who are unable to support themselves.

We have been making the investment in our youth in many ways and I'd like to highlight just a couple:

Imagination Library is a program which provides children with a free book mailed to their home every month from birth through age 5. It started in two zip codes in Syracuse several years ago and it has been incredibly effective. Our friends at LeMoyne College have carefully researched the program and because we have children who have participated since birth and are now headed to kindergarten we can see real data. The children who have participated in Imagination Library in the 13203 and 13206 zip codes in Syracuse are doing nearly as well on Kindergarten readiness tests as children in our highest performing school districts.

The key to success for Imagination Library is getting children enrolled as early as possible. Last summer, in that vein, the Department of Children and Family

Services hired a very energetic young man to enroll children. This young man, a former foster child in Onondaga County, took on this challenge with unbelievable enthusiasm. Asked to enroll 300 children over the 10 week summer program, he was able to sign up well over 700 children himself. I am proud to introduce Jamel Carey, and also happy to let you know that he now works for the county full-time, and since last May has enrolled over 1,500 children.

Jamel, please stand up....Thank you.

It is incredibly powerful to witness the results of this program and is the reason I included funding in the 2016 budget to expand the program county wide. I want to thank the members of the Legislature for supporting the program.

We have also been involved from the beginning in the Say Yes to Education program.

When you think Say Yes to Education, you think of the free college tuition and I hope you have learned that it is really so much more. But the promise of the free college education is the part of Say Yes that can be so transformative for our community. Education is the best ticket out of chronic poverty and it is very important that we make sure our kids have access to college.

The key component is the Syracuse College Promise Endowment. The City school district, the say yes foundation and the county have all worked together to prepare kids for college and we have been telling the students that if they do their part and work hard, we will do our part and make sure they have the ability to attend college. Over the last seven years more than 1,000 donors, individual and corporate, have built an endowment of \$10 million (just today Crouse Hospital joined the list of local organizations that are helping us fulfill our promise) and thousands of students have attended college under the Syracuse College Promise compact.

Say Yes promises free college tuition, but without a fully funded endowment the promise is not sincere. The \$10M raised locally is very generous but it is not enough. We have come up short and the future of Say Yes to Education is in serious jeopardy. We need to do more.

And people have been doing more---particularly the incredibly dedicated teachers--- but the clock is ticking and the college funding will not be available for long unless something changes. A tremendous amount of work has gone into the program in the last seven years and the county's model where we bring services right into the school buildings is now a national model. The seeds of

success have been sewn and there is real data to show it works both in terms of keeping kids in school and in test scores---particularly the ninth grade Algebra regents and the graduation rates that are trending upward. It would be tragic to let it come apart now for a lack of funding.

Chairman McMahon and the members of the Legislature are aware that not only is it the right thing to do to support the children in the program but that it makes good economic sense. A successful Say Yes program means a better trained workforce and lower social services costs.

So the Chairman and I have made it a top priority and working in partnership with the Regional Economic Development Council, we made fulfilling the College Promise, and saving Say Yes To Education a priority in the Upstate Revitalization Initiative. You all know that we were successful in the URI competition and awarded \$500 million dollars. What you may not know is that Governor Cuomo included \$20 million dollars to the Central New York Community Foundation to complete the Syracuse College Promise Endowment. The Say Yes endowment is funded and we will now be able to keep the promises we made to our children.

Thank you Chairman McMahon, the county legislature, the members of the REDC and Governor Cuomo for making our kids a priority and sending a clear message to parents of children going to Syracuse schools that we care. And if you stay in school and graduate a college education—and a brighter future will be yours.

And now that I have your attention, another component in the URI is Consensus and it has generated some healthy discussion. We will always have the voices that oppose all change and they are easily tuned out when they have nothing constructive to offer but some of the discussion has been very productive and I was happy to learn that the public comment period has been extended.

I think some people have lost track of the origin of consensus. It is an outgrowth of the Syracuse 20/20 organization and was funded through a grant obtained by Senator DeFrancisco. It is ably led by former Congressman Jim Walsh, Attorney Catherine Richardson and retired ESF President Neil Murphy. The two year effort was pitched to the Regional Economic Development Council for funding and it was included in its application for the URI competition. Many, many elected officials over the last several decades have touted some form of consolidation in an effort to create a more modern and efficient government but this effort had impressive data behind it and a commitment to robustly engage



the public. The Consensus part of our URI application made CNY stand out and is a big reason we won the \$500M competition----which, incidentally, also includes the Say Yes Scholarship fund among other great things.

It has been a little disappointing---but not at all surprising—to hear the negativity. Negative is easy. Have you ever really stopped to think about that? No is much easier than yes. If you say no to everything then you have no work to do....but yes? Yes is hard. Yes takes work. Yes takes leadership. When you propose a brand new park with an amphitheater on the shore of Onondaga Lake the “no’s” go home and have dinner with their families. There is nothing else to do. “I said no.” It’s the yesses that do all the work. It’s the yesses that put in the long hours to make the community a better place for our kids.

But I will let you in on a little secret....the negativity fuels us. It inspires us to prove them wrong. We take all the reasons people tell us why we can’t do things and then we go do them. Blame my parents if you want but it’s in my DNA...I joke with people that it’s the reason I have this job....If I had a nickel for every person who told me I couldn’t do it I’d be a very wealthy woman. It is very gratifying for me to be able to prove naysayers wrong and the Amphitheater was a tremendous opportunity to do that.

First we had a whole round of “it’s impossible to build on that site. It will never happen.” Then came the “no way will they do it that fast. This is one of my favorite letters to the editor....

“Timetable for Onondaga Lake amphitheater is far too ambitious” and it says:

“Gilbane as a construction manager still has to bid all the major subcontracts under public bidding rules, so it is doubtful that there will even be major subs under contract by, let's say, February or March. That leaves four and a half months to complete a \$60 million+ project. Better add a year and it still might be tight. That's a huge unusual site and they have to drive piles for all the big supporting columns, which is an agonizingly slow process, and there is a lot of environmental work as well. That would be a miracle.”

Well, miracles DO happen --- with a lot of elbow grease.

After that, we heard: “we can’t afford it.” This one is ridiculous...we can’t afford NOT to make these kinds of investments. For those hoping for failure they point to revenue generated by ticket sales and compare it to the capital cost of the park. Really? Do you really not get the big picture? Do you really not

understand how the economy works? We already have 18 shows booked for this summer and expect 200,000 people. Those people will spend \$17.5M dollars while they are here and that increased spending will induce an additional \$8M in indirect spending for a total economic impact of over \$25M and affect jobs for 374 people and that is in the first year! That money helps our local businesses and generates sales tax every time it circulates. I implore you to pick your head up and look around. Look at this picture from opening night. Do you really think it's about the \$15k the event generated inside the park or do you get it that this is bigger in every way? When the season ends, ask the business owners what they think. And ask the young people who want a quality of life in Central New York. Stop being constant nabobs of negativity and appreciate that this is a wonderful thing for us and it was the Yesses who got it done.

Consider this too: Revenue from the Turning Stone which we use to pay the bond is exceeding our projections.

But the negativity hasn't stopped....

"Artists won't want to play there."

"People won't want to go there."

"Parking will be bad"

"All country"

And now? People are complaining that they can't get tickets to Dave Mathews because reserved seating sold out so quickly.....um...listen to that one....and tell me again why this was such a bad idea?

We have 18 shows booked so far and are joined here tonight by Jon Garland from Symphoria who plans to bring the orchestra to the Amphitheater for a 4th of July concert complete with fireworks. It is going to be a great summer.

Before I finish tonight I thought it might be interesting, in light of some of the comments I've heard about Consensus, to remind ourselves that the conversation isn't new.

As a matter of fact, it's difficult to give you the history very succinctly because we have talked about it for a long time but I believe in times like these there is value

in a little historical perspective:

For decades the city and county governments fought about whether to consolidate purchasing operations. It's been fun to reread the old news articles in light of the current consensus conversation and I think there is some value in remembering that we've done this before.

In November of 1993 a Herald Journal Editorial touted the fact that Republicans held the County Executive office, the Syracuse Mayor's office and control of both the common council and the county legislature and the paper said consolidation "at last, should be on the fast track" and they said that "these are not new ideas." It was 1993.....

A very few weeks later CE Nick Pirro and Mayor Roy Bernardi announced that the city and county would merge their purchasing departments; Nick calling it "an important first step" and Roy saying "its long overdue....we're one entity here, really" and "we service the same people day in and day out. It doesn't matter if it is done by the county or the city."

In December that year the Herald Journal again editorialized in favor of the purchasing merger and said "we hope that once the towns see what the city and county are doing, they will join in and realize some savings for their taxpayers as well stating "In this age of shrinking public resources, consolidation only makes sense."

March 5, 1994 at his STATE OF THE COUNTY address....(much like the one I am giving right now....) Nick said "for years we've supported the elimination of overlapping governmental services. But traditions die hard. And "The way we've always done things" is not reason enough for maintaining old spending habits.

Sure enough...and I'm editing for you but want you to get the gist... in September of 1994 the headline in the paper read "CITY-COUNTY CONSOLIDATION STALLS" and the editorial which followed asked if consolidation was a dead issue.

In November 1994 the headline was "TOWNS TURNING TO SHARED SERVICES: MUNICIPALITIES, SCHOOL DISTRICTS LOOK FOR WAYS TO CONSOLIDATE" and Nick Pirro was again quoted saying "consolidation doesn't necessarily mean elimination. It can mean working together, sharing equipment and sharing services. It doesn't mean someone has to lose their identity" The paper went on to quote Governor AL SMITH from the 1920s for heaven's

sake...Gov Smith called for “a full and comprehensive study of county government throughout the state looking to a reform that will promote efficiency and make it more economical” A state panel in 1935 agreed and Clay Town Councilor Don MacLaughlin was quoted in 1994 saying “they knew it back then. Isn’t it about time we did something?”

March of 1995 The Herald Journal announced that the city and county purchasing operations would merge in July of that year.

And on January 31, 1996 the Syracuse Post Standard read “MAYOR CALLS FOR MERGED SERVICES. BERNARDI SAYS THE TIME HAS COME TO CREATE “A NEW, ALL-ENCOMPASSING METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT.” “We should combine our strengths. The city’s budget woes are the budget woes of this entire community and we cannot shy away from them” he said. County Executive Pirro had attended Bernardi’s speech and was quoted saying he supported the mayor’s message and would be glad to merge some operations...including purchasing with the city of Syracuse.

In August of 1995 control of the common council had changed and the headline read “MAJORITY COOL TO MERGER IDEA. A PLAN TO COMBINE CITY AND COUNTY PURCHASING DEPARTMENTS DOESN’T SEEM TO HAVE SUPPORT...” And then two days later the Herald Journal again editorialized asking “In what way are city taxpayers better served by maintaining a redundant administrative department? Don’t invoke that conveniently murky but serious-sounding old bromide, “control.” What would city residents actually be losing besides the expense? How would their lives change?”

The paper further chastised the negative vote stating “this action insults voters’ intelligence. A worthy argument has nothing to fear from open debate. This really isn’t about policy. This is a turf battle plain and simple that would be underwritten by taxpayers. And they said “Genuine leaders wouldn’t let that happen.”

In October of 1997 city council candidates said things like “if we are going to make a difference in the financial condition of the city, it’s going to have to happen through consolidation.”

“The purchase department should be rolled into the county.”

“the same shovel that the school district buys is the same shovel that the city and the county are going to buy.”

And “unless we consolidate, this city, I think, will continue to struggle fiscally.”

In August of 1998 Nick Pirro was back on the record saying “the merger couldn’t happen soon enough for him. For the city to claim they don’t have any money, a half a million dollars would have bought a lot of snowplows and kept a lot of school programs.”

September 1998 a city councilor was quoted saying “we’ve never been against consolidation. The problem was not having enough time.” SOUND FAMILIAR?

OCT. 1998 there was a great headline in another Post Standard Editorial: HERE YE! HERE YE! NOW FOR THE NEXT INSTALLMENT IN THE GREAT PURCHASING DEBATE. UH, ARE YOU STILL WITH US?

The Paper asked who cares who buys pencils and snowplows and answered their own question with “here is who cares...councilors who are still nervous about county government moving in on their turf.”

I wish I had more time because the articles are completely on point and could be written again today. The words used today are sometimes precisely the same as they were 20 years ago.

But for purposes of time, I will tell you there are a lot more articles and encourage you to look them up. Roy Bernardi made a presentation to Thursday Morning Roundtable and called for a regional government to more efficiently deliver services to the 19 towns and 15 villages and proposed a community wide effort with business and community leaders to plan for the creation of a metropolitan government. He said he wanted to assemble a committee from outside the “so called political arena” to complete a study that will show the “enormous benefits” to be gained by breaking down costly layers of government.

“We have too much government” he said.

A survey by FOCUS greater Syracuse (God Bless Chuckie Holstein) said in 1999 that most people want consolidation and sharing of service.

In 2000 and 2001 the same conversation continued...more talk of fear and giving up control and politics....and here is where I made a small cameo.....

April 2001 Syracuse Post Standard article....

“Councilor Joanne Mahoney said the city would be taking a step back if it abandons consolidation talks.”

And then fast forward to 2011 when that same councilor Joanne Mahoney...are you ready for it? It's anti-climatic after all the debate but here is the June 27, 2011 article...

“Three employees of the Syracuse city purchasing department will start work Friday for Onondaga County under a consolidation of purchasing offices that won its final approval Monday from the Syracuse City Council. County Legislators previously approved the consolidation and Mary Vossler, city budget director said “the city will save \$221,000 a year in salaries and benefits thanks to the merger.”

So we did it.

And that is just salaries. The purchasing department consolidation saves millions with its volume purchasing power and has partnered for purchasing with over 70 municipalities including towns, villages, the city, the city school district, fire districts, and even outside counties. And guess what? No one even notices....

It's one of the many ways we are able to continually reduce the property tax levy.

So please, as we engage in yet another community wide debate about consolidation, Dust off your history books. This isn't happening “last minute”. It isn't “too quick” or “happening in the dark of night and being shoved down our throats” as the nabobs like to say.....and it isn't being driven by me. And it certainly isn't being driven by Governor Cuomo. If you are looking for a governor to blame you will have to start with Al Smith.....Governor Cuomo is guilty of supporting our lastest effort (which the REDC asked him to do) by allocating state money for the process.

And there is a long history of people supporting the effort...from Al Smith, one of the most progressive governors the state has ever had to Nick Pirro one of the most conservative County Executives and a lot of mayors, councilors, legislators, town and village officials and.... everyday citizens who want their children and grandchildren to stay in Central New York.

So this is your time. The public has the chance, once again to weigh in on our future. Maybe we will do something differently this time. Or maybe we will just compile more news clippings for our community scrapbook. Check out this one from last night....

“Concerns about political power dominated a session about the potential city-county merger.”

“city councilor hostile to the plan”

He says “a public referendum on metropolitan government should be postponed for at least 18 months of discussion....”

I have some sobering news for you councilor....we’ve actually been debating it since before you were born. And if you take an honest look around, the city hasn’t gotten stronger during the debate. Maybe it’s time to actually do something.

And the truth is that there is a lot we can do. The report includes 51 recommendations, most of which the county already does. We stand ready in county government to find ways to work together on any of the recommendations the community wants us to.

And in closing, I just want to say thank you. I cannot believe this is my 9th state of the county address. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to do what I do. My husband is here tonight along with our two older boys who are now in college. Here’s them the day I was sworn in and asked for the opportunity to make our community a place where all of our kids could grow up and thrive. Everything we do is filtered through the lens of what’s best for the next generation and I’m proud to say that we are making progress.

Thank you all for coming.