



News From

Maggie Brooks

Monroe County Executive

For Immediate Release

2008 State of the County Address

Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks

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Good evening and welcome.

Before I begin, please join me in a moment of silence to honor the brave men and women who are fighting for our freedom overseas, and to remember Monroe County's own heroes who paid the ultimate sacrifice during the past year. They are:

Staff Sergeant Steve Butcher, Jr. of Penfield

And Specialist Kevin Mowl of Pittsford

Thank you.

In these challenging times, we must all give thanks to our fellow citizens in the armed forces and our veterans, who make sacrifices daily to guarantee that we all have the privilege of living in a free society.

Please also join me in recognizing the following Monroe County employees who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan during the past year. They are:

Jeffrey Boyer, Guy Carlo, Michael Chambry, James DeCann, Mark Duris, Dale Fair, Robert Farina, Charles Lane, Eric Lanpher, Daniel Markle, William McLaen, and Stephen Worden.

Thank you.

I would like to thank my friend and partner in government, County Clerk Cheryl Dinolfo, for leading us in the Pledge of Allegiance tonight.

I would also like to thank RIT President Bill Destler for his wonderful introduction.

President Zyra, Majority Leader Quatro, Minority Leader Bronson, Sheriff O'Flynn, County Clerk Dinolfo, District Attorney Green, Mayor Duffy, Chairman Minarik, Chairman Cook, Chairman Colon, distinguished guests, friends, and fellow taxpayers...

Nearly 180 years ago, Colonel Nathaniel Rochester led the charge to establish the Rochester Athanaeum, an association created to promote the study of arts, sciences and literature. First located in the Reynolds Arcade, this cultural center quickly grew in prominence and earned a reputation for scholastic excellence.

Several years later, the Athenaeum merged with the Mechanics Literary Association and continued its commitment to intellectual pursuits. Legendary figures such as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Charles Dickens, and Rochester's own Frederick Douglass journeyed to the downtown campus to offer their unique perspective on literature, public policy, and law.

This decorated and respected institution was renamed the Rochester Institute of Technology in 1944. Twenty-four years later, due to its rapid growth, RIT relocated to this spacious Henrietta campus.

Today, RIT stands proud as one of the world's most renowned and distinguished institutions of higher learning.

Since 1979, seven RIT alumni have been awarded ten Pulitzer Prizes for excellence in photojournalism.

And though RIT is known for excellence in Ice Hockey, a certain football coach named Tom Coughlin got his first head coaching job right here at RIT.

More than 30 years later, all of us were thrilled to watch our hometown hero lead the New York Giants to one of the greatest upsets in Superbowl History.

But it's more than famous alumni and an illustrious history that have enhanced the reputation of this fine institution. More than anything, we appreciate RIT for its commitment to groundbreaking research and academic excellence.

I want to thank RIT President Bill Destler, Vice President Debbie Stendardi, and their first-class team for hosting tonight's event.

Through the efforts of the Golisano Institute for Sustainability and innovative facilities like the CIMS Center that we admire tonight, RIT has truly built itself into a world-class institution.

RIT has become one of Monroe County's most valued partners in the development of a new generation of innovators and entrepreneurs.

Its continued success is one of the many reasons why the State of our County is strong, and growing stronger every day.

Make no mistake - the challenges facing Monroe County and the rest of Upstate New York remain as pronounced as ever. High taxes, not enough good paying jobs, violence

that threatens our public safety, and the loss of young entrepreneurial talent - these are real barriers to a healthy future.

But as Robert Kennedy once said, “the future is not a gift, it is an achievement.” We must come together and work as a team to achieve change. We must take pride in ourselves, and believe that we can survive and thrive. If we believe it, we can achieve it.

Monroe County is well positioned to meet these challenges head on, by leveraging our community’s spirit of innovation to improve our quality of life.

However, we cannot grow and prosper without a strong economy.

In 2007, Monroe County helped 165 companies grow, which will result in the investment of more than \$471 million in our local economy. 1,925 new jobs will be created over the next three years and 11,580 jobs will remain in our community because of our support for business.

We are now home to nearly 5,000 small to mid-sized businesses in the ten to 1,000 employee range, and for a community that once thrived on big business, we are now seeing a shift in economic prosperity to the savvy entrepreneurial start ups, to the innovative, new wave technology companies, and to the booming industries of optics and large format printing.

Monroe County is the community of choice for national and world leaders in various industries - and this should fuel our optimism, and be a source of encouragement.

Not only are companies attracted to our highly educated and skilled workforce and to a quality of life that is second to none, but also to the variety of incentive programs that Monroe County offers to support local business, and help them grow and succeed.

In 2007 we introduced a number of new economic development programs including Green JobsPlus and the Monroe Manufacturing Rewards Program. In fact, since announcing the Manufacturing Rewards Program in last year’s State of the County Address, twenty-six small manufacturing companies have applied for benefits and have purchased equipment.

One of those companies is Phoenix Tool, a female-owned business. Phoenix Tool took advantage of our Manufacturing Rewards Program, purchasing a new lathe to improve operations and increase their competitiveness. Renee Cassano is here tonight representing this growing company. We thank Phoenix Tool for its investment and commitment to local manufacturing.

Flower City Printing was our January 2008 Business of the Month. Known as the premier large format printer in the United States, Flower City Printing’s customers include Wegmans, Kodak, Ralph Lauren Brands, Hanes, American Greetings and more. And they have been proud to call Monroe County their home since 1970. George Scharr

from Flower City Printing is here tonight, and I thank him for his company's investment in our local economy.

Adecco USA is a division of the largest human resources company in the world and chose Monroe County for its Eastern Shared Services Center. Grand Rapids, Michigan and Chattanooga, Tennessee wanted the business. But Adecco will create 89 new full-time jobs right here in Monroe County.

Weldrite Closures manufactures welded marine enclosures and flood protection products. Founders Jason Nelson and Greg Scace are here tonight and they will tell you that County incentives coupled with our highly skilled workforce gave them good reason to open their US operation in Monroe County instead of Connecticut. That means 45 new manufacturing jobs will be created in our community. Gentleman, we thank you for your investment.

And, ESL Federal Credit Union recently announced plans to build a six-story corporate headquarters in downtown Rochester. ESL is the first company to take advantage of our Green JobsPlus program. The new headquarters will be a "green" building and should be a source of pride and excitement for us all.

These are just a few of the many corporate success stories that prove Monroe County is in the business of helping business. And our efforts are paying off with job growth, increased job retention, and a reenergized confidence in the local economy.

We're headed in the right direction. With continued investment in existing businesses, a daily focus on keeping young professionals here, finding resources to support entrepreneurs and turning the innovation housed on college campuses like RIT into local opportunities, we will be able to sustain this momentum.

While jobs are a critical priority, Monroe County has a fundamental responsibility to protect our children and families and ensure the safety of all residents.

This is a County blessed with a collaborative ability to deliver first-rate public safety services. With our strong partnerships with the City of Rochester, our towns and villages, and the state and federal governments, Monroe County has become a model law enforcement community.

We are all aware of the violence plaguing many neighborhoods in the City of Rochester. Young people are dying – a tragedy that affects each and every individual in Monroe County, city resident or not. I would like to highlight the extraordinary steps County government has taken to help fight this violent crime.

Our Monroe County Sheriff's Department has teamed with the Rochester Police and the New York State Police through "Project Impact." It's an initiative targeting violence in the city's high crime, high drug areas. The County's highly skilled and trained deputies

were deployed to target areas five times in 2007. Those two-week long deployments produced incredible results.

33 illegal guns were taken off city streets.

1,247 arrests were made.

7,185 grams of drugs were seized, and more than 34 thousand dollars in drug money confiscated.

And deputies helped clear 6,112 street corners, promoting safer neighborhoods.

The leadership of Sheriff Patrick O’Flynn and the outstanding professionalism of the entire Sheriff’s Department have ensured the success of Project Impact. Thank you all for your year-round efforts to keep our community safe and secure.

Our commitment to fighting violence also extends to the Monroe County Probation Department.

Probation officers canvass high crime neighborhoods and gather intelligence on offenders.

Teams of probation officers and police conduct warrant details in an attempt to apprehend fugitive probationers, parolees, and other suspects who pose the highest risk to our community.

In 2007, 226 wanted probationers were arrested during these details.

And in 2008, 90 offenders have already been apprehended. Through these efforts, we are often able to prevent crimes from ever taking place.

Project Impact has had real results, arresting dangerous criminals and taking them off our streets.

But the work of our Probation Team goes far beyond Project Impact. I’d like to take a moment to recognize one of our outstanding Probation Officers - John Zito.

In January 2008, during a routine inspection, Officer Zito noticed an assault rifle in the home of a probationer. With assistance from the Sheriff’s Office, a search was conducted, which resulted in the confiscation of numerous loaded rifles, magazines, black powder, and a rocket launcher. The offender is now being held at the Monroe County Jail, and is awaiting felony charges.

Thank you, Officer Zito, for going above and beyond the call of duty. I’d also like to thank Probation Administrator Bob Burns for the important work his department does each and every day to keep our community safe.

Monroe County understands that those who enter the criminal justice system deserve the right to counsel, no matter what their economic or social status is. This is a charge the Monroe County Public Defenders Office takes seriously. Our local office is well respected for its quality attorneys and devotion to serving those who need a voice in our community.

This year we appointed a new Public Defender, but he is certainly not new to the challenges facing our community. He is a veteran of the office he now leads, and is recognized for his legal expertise, his commitment to excellence and his compassion for those less fortunate who need legal representation. I would like to ask Tim Donaher to stand and accept our community's best wishes and support as he undertakes this important mission.

Our Public Defender's Office, and our District Attorney's Office led by Mike Green, will continue to work together to uphold the integrity and reputation of our local criminal justice system. And Monroe County will continue to work with Police Chief David Moore to crack down on crime and violence so our city can continue its renaissance and re-emergence as the envy of Upstate New York.

I can't emphasize enough the value of the relationships we have built within our community. And I would be remiss if I didn't recognize Mayor Bob Duffy for being the strong partner that he is. Working together is not just a nice phrase. It is a daily reality.

The County and the City have both recruited a team of the best and the brightest who embrace collaboration and cooperation as guiding principles and that has benefited the entire community.

Like any relationship, there may be disagreements. But the County and City have demonstrated that we can disagree in a civil and respectful way.

Mayor Duffy, on behalf of the taxpayers of Monroe County, I want to thank you for your partnership. We are one community and must lead by example. It's the only way we will achieve meaningful results.

The 911 Emergency Communications Center is one of the original collaborative initiatives undertaken by this community and it has become a model for 911 operations across the nation.

In 2007, the Center received the prestigious national honor of being named Outstanding 911 Center. This award shines a spotlight on the County and City's dedication to high performance standards and inter-governmental systems that save taxpayer dollars. Steve Bowman, Monroe County's Public Safety Director, and John Merklinger, our 911 Center Director, are both with us tonight. Let's thank them for putting us on the map.

This year, the County will pay for vast technology upgrades to many of our critical public safety communications systems, and introduce an exciting and critical new tool: “Next Generation 911.”

This will allow citizens to register their cell phone information directly on the Monroe County website and receive reverse calls from 911 on their mobile phones. An option will even be available to receive emergency notifications via text message.

The ability of 911 to be able to reach out to targeted populations during local emergencies by calling or text messaging is critical to Monroe County’s efforts to effectively communicate with the hearing-impaired population, and will benefit all residents who increasingly rely on cellular phones for communication.

“Next Generation 911” technologies will soon allow citizens to take photographs, write text messages, and record live video of suspicious activity or a crime taking place and then transmit that information immediately to police vehicles.

Through these vast state-of-the-art technology improvements Monroe County stands ready to take public safety to the next level.

State-of-the-art technology doesn’t just apply to communications. CSI fans know that the processing of criminal evidence is often times the key to making an arrest and establishing a suspect’s guilt or innocence. For years the dedicated staff at our County crime lab have been doing great work despite the challenges of working in an antiquated environment.

Tonight I would like to recognize and thank Senators Joe Robach, Jim Alesi, George Maziarz, and Mike Nozzolio for their efforts to secure \$10 million to build a brand new regional public safety laboratory. I would also like to thank Senators George Winner, Cathy Young, and Dale Volker, who represent other areas of Western New York and also expressed support for this important project.

This \$10 million in state dollars fortifies funding secured by Congressman Tom Reynolds, Congressman Jim Walsh, Congressman Randy Kuhl, and Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, allowing us to soon break ground on this important project.

And, the new crime lab will be one of Monroe County’s first “green buildings,” constructed in accordance with environmental standards. This is one of the many steps Monroe County is taking to focus on energy conservation and protecting our environment.

A commitment to environmental protection is the key to building a more sustainable future. And that is a critical mission for our community.

With rising gas prices, and our nation’s dependence on foreign oil, we must embrace alternative energy research and development.

And we all have to do our part to conserve and protect our precious natural resources.

We must recognize the relationship between job creation and environmental protection.

It was the late Senator Barry Goldwater who said that while he was a “great believer in the free enterprise system and all that it entails,” he was “an even stronger believer in the right of our people to live in a clean and pollution-free environment.”

I believe we can have it both ways.

We can create jobs and grow our economy, while protecting our environment and building a sustainable future.

In Monroe County, we are achieving real results through real action.

We have set goals and achieved them -- from educating our children about recycling and the environment, to making our County buildings more energy efficient, to developing alternative energy resources, and researching cutting-edge green technology.

Since becoming County Executive in 2004, I am proud of several groundbreaking initiatives designed to move our community to the forefront of environmental protection.

In August 2007, Monroe County, through a partnership with Waste Management, began turning landfill garbage and waste from our sewers into clean, renewable energy – all at the County’s Mill Seat Landfill in Riga. We’ve actually turned our landfill into a working power plant.

This cutting-edge process uses live enzymes collected at the VanLare wastewater treatment facility which, when mixed with landfill waste, activate the production of natural methane gas. The methane gas is captured and used to power electrical generators.

In only 5 months, our Waste to Watts initiative generated over 18 million kilowatt hours of electricity.

To put this in perspective, 18 million kilowatt hours is five times more electricity than was consumed by all County Parks facilities, including the Zoo, in 2007.

18 million kilowatt hours is also about half of the total electricity used at the VanLare facility in 2007.

Many consider our innovative process to be the future of landfill development.

And our landfill power operation has led to state and national acclaim for Monroe County. This year, we received the prestigious Environmental Project of the Year Award from the New York State Chapter of the American Public Works Association.

There's more good news. The Riga landfill project is having a positive environmental impact on the residents of Irondequoit.

Now that wastewater sludge is being used to create power at Mill Seat, there is no more incineration taking place at the VanLare Sewage Treatment plant.

For children with asthma, for outdoor enthusiasts who treasure Lake Ontario, and for the residents of our community, who were quite honestly, sick of the smell, this is an incredible achievement.

The concept of a creating a sustainable future is also supported by our County's new Green Building Policy.

All new construction and major renovation projects of more than 5,000 square feet in size will be required to comply with the Green Building Rating System and Green Building design practices.

And to ensure compliance, the County has established a Design Review Team to oversee green construction projects.

Two projects at Monroe Community College are the first to apply the policy. The planned PAC center for athletics is one. And the second is a 22,800 square foot addition to the Center for Excellence in Nursing.

So what makes these projects compliant with the County's Green Building Policy?

First, the projects will be pursuing LEED Silver Certification with the U.S. Green Building Council.

Second, many sustainable design features have been integrated into the structures, including low-flow plumbing fixtures, a highly reflective roof, and a building envelope designed to optimize energy performance.

Third, construction materials will have a minimum of 20 percent overall recycled content. These materials must be manufactured, harvested, extracted, or recovered within 500 miles of the project site. The buildings will also have high levels of lighting system control and thermal comfort control.

Earlier this year Monroe County announced our Green JobsPlus Program.

Green JobsPlus is a COMIDA-sponsored program that offers tax abatement benefits to manufacturers, technology-based service companies, and other businesses undergoing expansions.

To qualify for benefits, companies must seek LEED Certification for their construction or renovation projects. They must also meet a minimum goal of 10 percent increased job creation within three years. Of course all companies receiving IDA benefits are required to use local labor for construction.

The bottom line is – tax incentives benefit businesses and help create jobs, and green construction projects benefit our environment. This is a win-win for our entire community.

I am sure that at one time or another, each of you has seen a Monroe County fleet car out on the road. Currently, our fleet has 58 flex fuel vehicles that use E-10, E-20, or E-85 alternative fuels. Our Sheriff's department utilizes 40 flex-fuel cars.

We have 14 hybrid vehicles on the road that are powered jointly by electricity from a stored battery and gasoline.

And to ensure optimal fleet performance, Monroe County has an ongoing partnership with our friends right here at the RIT.

Through a unique collaborative between the County and the Center for Integrated Manufacturing Studies, RIT students and faculty assess the performance of our E-85 flex-fuel vehicles.

Students learn about flex-fuel technology, and the County receives helpful feedback on how to maintain a safe and sustainable fleet with a reduced environmental impact.

Tonight the County is ready to launch a new initiative to make our fleet even more environmentally sound. This new program is called Green Fleet.

The goal of the Green Fleet program is to develop the cleanest, greenest, and most efficient vehicle fleet possible.

Starting right now, whenever possible, every new vehicle purchased by Monroe County will be powered by E-85 flex-fuel, an electric-gasoline hybrid engine, biodiesel, or another alternative energy source.

The Green Fleet symbolizes our commitment to all County residents to phase out traditional gas vehicles over the next few years until all of our cars use alternative fuels.

Simply put – by 2012, the entire County fleet, including all Sheriff's vehicles, will be fully converted to alternative fuel or hybrid vehicles.

Not only will we be reducing harmful emissions with a green vehicle fleet, but we will be leading by example in our community, encouraging our neighbors to consider the environmental impact when they make vehicle purchases.

Achieving a sustainable future means we must support emerging technologies, and ready ourselves for the next generation of alternative-energy vehicles.

Monroe County is truly excited to be working along side General Motors to evaluate hydrogen fuel cell technology.

Monroe County is one of only a handful of communities in the country - and the only one in Upstate New York - selected by GM to participate in this pilot program, known as Chevrolet Project Driveway.

Thanks to this public-private partnership, Monroe County will have the unique opportunity to test the cutting-edge hydrogen-fueled Chevrolet Equinox Fuel Cell Electric Vehicle – a true zero-gas, zero-emissions automobile. Incredibly, the only thing that our new fuel cell electric vehicle will release into the air is water vapor.

By driving the vehicle, we will position our community to prepare for the next generation of alternative-energy vehicles.

For Monroe County, the fuel cell electric vehicle will serve as the flagship of the Green Fleet – and it is my pleasure to present it to you tonight.

GM's Fuel Cell Development Center is located right here in Monroe County, in Honeoye Falls. That's right – Monroe County is home to one of only four GM fuel cell research and development facilities in the world. Daniel O'Connell of the GM Fuel Cell activities group is here tonight, and I would like to thank him and General Motors for their partnership.

It was former President Richard Nixon who said that “the destiny of our land, the air we breathe, the water we drink is not in the mystical hands of an uncontrollable agent...it is in our hands.”

The future of our environment is truly in our hands today, and there is no question that Monroe County is leading the way towards a more sustainable future.

While the challenges that confront us are numerous and may seem daunting, one thing is clear – Monroe County operates with an eye towards the future, and invests in the ideas, people, and businesses that will bring our community to the next level of success.

We challenge ourselves to innovate, streamline, and be creative to solve the problems that face us – because business as usual is not an option.

If we accept the status quo we accept the failed policies that are barricades to our collective mission: assuring that the best days of Monroe County are ahead. Accepting the status quo means accepting the decline that has cast a shadow and is ready to rain on the parade of progress that is the cornerstone of our current optimism.

Our future must be sustainable for business, sustainable for the environment, and most importantly, sustainable for taxpayers.

Reducing the cost of government and providing quality services for the people of Monroe County have been among my top priorities since taking office as your County Executive.

Project SAVE continues that commitment.

This critical initiative enables our Department of Human Services to reduce welfare costs, improve outcomes for children and families, and achieve significant savings by reducing caseloads – all resulting in a savings of \$13.4 million over the next four years.

Smaller caseloads give caseworkers a chance to more effectively engage families, evaluate the safety of children at risk, monitor case progress, and facilitate long-term solutions. Project SAVE will reduce the average length of stay in foster care by three months per placement.

The shift in focus from intervention to prevention has shown that a new culture of self-sufficiency and personal responsibility is bringing about real reform, and real results.

Giving more public assistance recipients the chance to enter the workforce and achieve economic stability makes a powerful statement about the future of our community. Public assistance is not a government handout. It is a loan from taxpayers to those in need. We expect recipients to give back by becoming hard-working, productive members of society.

Everyone should have the opportunity to be successful. Project SAVE will help us reach this goal.

I would like to recognize Commissioner Kelly Reed and the Department of Human Services for their hard work and continuing success. Kelly, thank you.

We must also recognize the importance of ensuring the proper care of our children.

The Nurse-Family Partnership is an evidence-based prevention service, and is a critical part of our efforts to bring hope and opportunity to parents and their children.

Nurse-Family Partnership, or NFP, is a nationally recognized home visitation program. It focuses on at-risk, first-time mothers, offering guidance and assistance as they prepare to become parents.

Highly trained registered nurses become involved with mothers early in pregnancy and continue visitation through the child's second year of life, providing support, education and counseling on health, behavioral, self-sufficiency and parenting issues. By helping families before a first child is born, NFP lays a foundation for a lifetime of health and economic stability.

Since August of 2006, 191 families have enrolled and 160 are currently active. The program has been a great success and continues to grow. We are currently recruiting 4 more nurses, bringing the total to 12.

NFP truly is a cost-effective program. In fact, NFP will save Monroe County taxpayers more than three dollars for every initial dollar invested by the time a child is 16 years old.

It was Frederick Douglass who once said that it is easier to build a healthy child than fix a broken man. With that thought in mind tonight we launch another initiative.

Building Healthy Children is a collaboration between Mount Hope Family Center, the University of Rochester Medical Center's Department of Pediatrics and Social Work Division, and the Society for the Protection and Care of Children. Representatives from each of these organizations are also with us tonight, and I thank them.

Building Healthy Children, or BHC, is designed to help us learn more about relationships between teen mothers and their babies, and then determine which services are most effective in improving outcomes.

A partnership between the County and United Way, the goal of BHC is to decrease the number of families entering the child welfare system.

Families are helped with parenting education, employment, maternal depression therapy, and teen support services. The results after the first year are striking.

Of the 79 families being served in BHC, not a single one has entered Child Protective Services or the Foster Care System.

That is real reform - and real results.

While we are pleased with our success in restoring hope and opportunity to the less fortunate within our community, I have never forgotten that we cannot grow and prosper without a County government that operates in a fiscally responsible manner.

The State of our County is strong because we take a conservative approach to finances. Our guiding principle: the strongly held belief that the only special interest government should ever serve is the taxpayers.

Public dollars do not belong to government, or any elected official, or any single constituency. They belong to you - the taxpayers of Monroe County.

In 2007 I proposed and the legislature passed a cut in the property tax rate, and prior to that our County property tax rate was stable for three straight years. There are not many counties in this State that can claim an equal accomplishment.

Last year, I joined with the Monroe County Legislature, under the leadership of President Wayne Zyra, to propose the Taxpayer Protection Act. This groundbreaking legislation controls the growth of non-mandated County spending, keeping it below the rate of inflation.

An overwhelming majority of Monroe County residents voted to pass the Taxpayer Protection Act. Passage of this initiative strengthens our resolve to spend your money wisely and only when absolutely necessary.

To my colleagues in the County Legislature - those of you who cast aside partisanship to vote for the Taxpayer Protection Act - I thank you for standing up for our property taxpayers. Your actions will leave an important legacy of fiscal responsibility for our community, one that will benefit generations to come.

Reducing spending in the small portion of the budget that our County actually controls has been a top priority of this Administration. In 2006, my budget proposal actually included an unprecedented decrease in non-mandated spending, saving the community \$400,000. And in 2007, my budget kept spending far below the rate of inflation.

Despite this clear and unmistakable progress, our work to stabilize County finances is not done. Let's face it, I can do everything in my power to keep County property taxes from going up, but the disturbing reality is documented right on your tax bill. Your costs are going up and up every year. Why is that?

The main reason: the State of New York keeps requiring counties to provide more and more of their services at our own expense. Unfunded state mandates will bankrupt this County and every other if left unchecked. I've heard two Governors talk about the perfect storm of unaffordability and the need for immediate reform. Talk is cheap. We need action.

The second reason costs are rising: ever increasing school property taxes and spending, which have each grown three times the rate of inflation since 2000.

Last September, we introduced the FAIR Plan - a bold solution to remove the overwhelming burden of Medicaid from the backs of property taxpayers. We took advantage of a Medicaid swap, so homeowners don't have to pay more taxes to cover the increasing costs of this out-of-control state mandated program.

The FAIR Plan asked our suburban school districts to give back only 2 percent of their budgets to help our community overcome this historic Medicaid challenge.

Well as you know, not everyone agreed with the plan and we lost the most recent round of the legal challenge. Judges who don't even live in Monroe County blocked our ability to bring property tax relief to local homeowners and adopt a long-term sustainable solution for ending the County budget deficit.

After the FAIR Plan was implemented, many teachers told me to stay out of their classrooms, superintendents told me school dollars were off limits, and school districts threatened to cut programs. My goal has never been to micro-manage our schools and in the wake of another record increase in State aid for public education, and proposed tax increases in many school districts across the County, it will be up to district voters to decide if additional school taxes are needed.

I will continue to fight for a fair outcome in court as we exhaust our legal options. But regardless of the outcome, we as a community have a \$29-million dollar resource gap to overcome and I have the elected responsibility to lead the conversation.

And let me be clear: I will not support any budget solution that will raise Monroe County's property tax rate.

I believe there is a better way.

In the days ahead we will launch a budget solution website. The public will be able to weigh in on our options. Residents can e-mail feedback on specific service cuts and revenue raising opportunities. Taxpayers can also offer their own ideas to help shape the financial future of the County.

Starting next week, I will host the first of several virtual town hall meetings. Taxpayers can discuss budget solutions with me over the phone while at the same time talking to thousands of their neighbors. Every member of our community with a publicly available phone number will receive a call from me and have the chance to participate.

And beginning next month, Budget Director Bill Carpenter and his team will join me as we host several community forums across the County.

We will partner with taxpayers, but also with government leaders at the city, town, and village levels. We will work through our Council of Governments, and invite our school districts to join in, as we examine potential opportunities for collaboration and cost savings.

Our legislature has asked my Administration for answers. Tonight I will challenge those lawmakers to come off the sidelines and work together in a bi-partisan way to advance practical cost saving options.

I did not sign up to manage a County that's failing and you did not elect me to be your County Executive to take the path of least resistance.

I will continue to propose bold solutions, even if not always popular, that reform the way we do business. I will continue to point the finger of blame at policies that are driving people and business from our State. And I will continue to call for accountability at every level of government and demand respect for your tax dollars.

We face many challenges but I firmly believe that we have many more opportunities.

I am an optimist and have great faith in the spirit of the people who live here.

Imagine a sustainable community with good paying jobs for our residents and entrepreneurial opportunities for our young talent. Imagine a sustainable community with low taxes where achievements outweigh entitlements. Imagine a sustainable community where people live in safety in our neighborhoods and our quality of life supports the hope and dreams of our children and families. Imagine a sustainable community where community pride is more important than political credit.

That's the kind of community I want to live in, and the kind you deserve to live in.

It's been said that the only way to predict the future is to create it. This is our future, and it is our choice to create it. Now is the time to believe and achieve it together.

God bless you all and God bless Monroe County. Thank you.

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