

Chairman Ward, Majority Leader Commisso, Minority Leader Mauriello, Comptroller Connors, Sheriff Apple, District Attorney Soares, County Clerk Hidley, members of our State Legislative delegation, members of the Albany County Legislature, invited guests and my fellow citizens of Albany County, I thank you for joining me for my State of the County address.

Thank you also to Katera Edwards from Colonie Central High School for that inspiring rendition of our National Anthem and to Father Lefebvre for that beautiful invocation.

Four years ago, in my first State of the County message, I promised that we would work every day to make a positive difference in the lives of the residents of Albany County.

I promised that we would stabilize county finances; make our county safer and more secure; make the delivery of critical County services- to our seniors, to our youth, to our veterans, and to those who are disadvantaged more effective and more efficient; and I promised we would do all of these things without placing any undue burden on the real property tax payers of our County.

Tonight, I am pleased to again deliver a State of the County message that clearly demonstrates that I have kept each of those promises.

Albany County's financial picture has improved dramatically since I took office. For two consecutive budgets, this year and last, we have not raised taxes and for three years straight, we have remained under the cap.

We put into place efficiencies and reforms that enabled us to dramatically turn the corner on County finances.

For four straight years, I presented structurally balanced budgets without the use of County reserves or one shots. And during that time period, we began significantly adding to County reserves, growing our fund balance to over \$40 million, the highest amount ever in recent history.

But perhaps most importantly, for the real property tax payers of the County, we not only stayed within the state's tax cap mandate, but for the past two years, we prepared budgets with no tax increase.

Key to achieving our financial turnaround has been our ability to deal effectively with our wonderful county workforce in negotiating fair contracts that recognize their value and contribution in making Albany County great. So tonight, I want to thank all of our outstanding employees for their dedication and service.

Also key to our financial success has been the turnaround at our county nursing home. As you know, for years the nursing home placed a significant financial strain on County finances, operating at an annual deficit of nearly twelve million dollars. With changes in the management structure, partnership with the unionized employees and by moving forward with renovations and an application under DSRIP to create a Primary Care program onsite, plans for the nursing home are on target.

We've reduced our financial subsidy of the nursing home by half and anticipate even further savings within the next two years. In fact, if we are successful with creating a primary care center, the nursing home may even begin to generate revenue to the county.

What is happening at the nursing home is truly transformational and I am pleased to report that similar transformation is happening throughout Albany County.

Framing is nearly complete on a new convention center and construction on the new façade and upgrades at the Times Union Center will be underway this summer.

When completed, these two projects will bring in thousands of new patrons, insuring sales tax revenues, job growth and economic development opportunities throughout our county.

Regarding economic development, the County is fortunate to have the Albany County Business Development Corporation; it is a powerful economic development tool to help fuel business growth in our county. Through the AI Tech Loan Fund, more than \$4.2 million in loans were approved in 2015 that resulted in more than 275 jobs created or retained.

Encouraging economic development and fostering reinvestment in our communities is critical to our county's success and to the overall welfare of our residents. In 2014, we announced we were establishing the Albany County Land

Bank Corporation to end blight and the devastating effects it has on our neighborhoods.

In its first year of operation, the Albany County Land Bank acquired its first 123 tax foreclosed parcels from Albany County, approved the sales of 12 properties, closed on seven properties, demolished seven failing and unsafe properties, started work on five full rehabs, and is working on or completed stabilizing an additional 17 properties.

In support of this effort, we have committed another \$500 thousand dollars to the Land Bank in this year's budget, bringing the county's total commitment to \$1.5 million and we look forward to continuing to work closely with the Land Bank in revitalizing neighborhoods throughout the County. I want to congratulate the Land Bank Board for their incredible efforts.

Also on the subject of housing is our continued work for veterans in our partnership with Soldier On. Over 19,000 veterans call Albany County home, and those returning from service frequently need help with housing, a job, or alcohol, substance abuse or other mental health issues. With Soldier On, we are working on establishing a campus-like setting for local veterans to get such help and we expect to put a shovel in the ground on this project later this year.

Also, in a partnership with Soldier On, we continue to offer a special program for veterans in our County Jail where they receive special counseling and other services to prepare them to get back into the community and reduce their rate of recidivism.

Our Department of Social Services along with the Veterans Service Bureau and local veteran organizations has implemented a unique nationally recognized "Veteran Identifier" program to assist veterans and their families in navigating the matrix of DSS services to which they are legally entitled.

Our veterans have selflessly served our country and we will continue to make their needs our priority. They deserve no less!

Ensuring the safety of our children has been another one of my priorities. There is a crisis that has been sweeping across the country that is placing so many of our children at risk. I'm talking about the dangers of opiate addiction. Whether it

involves prescription drugs, heroin or other opiates, they are as commonplace in our towns and villages as they are in our cities.

Our county law enforcement officials are doing an excellent job coordinating information and resources from Federal, State and Local authorities and will continue to target and cut-off opiate supply to the region. But we need to do more to educate our children and teens on the danger of opioid use; and to provide help to individuals and families dealing with the crisis.

That is why last year I announced a three-prong approach involving Action, Awareness and Progress and created an Opioid Taskforce focused on the opioid challenge. The members of that task force, have over the past year worked with communities and with school districts offering outreach and education on warning signs and resources for help including information on New York's Good Samaritan Law and Narcan.

Additionally, along with Catholic Charities, we organized training for Albany city school nurses, trained participants and staff in the drug courts of Judges Maney and Herrick and started training probationers at the Department of Probation.

In concert with these efforts, our County Health Department has been offering Narcan classes monthly to the general public training and arming them with this important and lifesaving drug.

In the next few weeks we will be hosting an opioid summit, bringing together experts, service providers, law enforcement, and community members among others to further discuss the efforts we are taking to deal with this priority issue.

But tonight, I have an important announcement. At my request, Albany County Department of Health Commissioner Dr. Elizabeth Whalen will issue a standing order that Naloxone will be available without a prescription at participating pharmacies in Albany County.

Now, family members and friends of those who are struggling with opioid addiction have the power to buy this lifesaving medication at their neighborhood pharmacy.

Anyone who is concerned that one day they may find a loved one collapsed and not breathing may now purchase this medication, and with a simple injection or nasal spray, reverse the effects of an overdose and save a life.

By issuing a standing order for naloxone, we have put into place a proven methodology for saving lives and reducing deaths.

While we now become one of only a few places in the nation to take such action, it is our hope that other counties will follow our lead as well as the recommendation of the American Medical Association that naloxone be available for purchase in pharmacies without a prescription.

I want to thank Dr. Whalen for her cooperation with my office on this initiative and I also want to thank all participating pharmacies and encourage others who wish to be a part of this proven and effective lifesaving effort, to contact our health department or my office for further information.

We have seen too many of our children, too many of our county residents, die tragic deaths because of opioid abuse.

It is a true health care crisis in our community, and as such, we must take a multi-faceted approach to effectively deal with it.

That approach must include education, increased treatment options and increased naloxone availability.

Tonight, through this standing order, Albany County has taken a major step forward in the battle to prevent the tragedies of overdoses and to additionally provide a path for those seeking recovery.

Those suffering from addiction have a difficult struggle but this initiative and the efforts we are making here in Albany County will go a long way toward offering them the help they need.

Together, we will put a stop to opioid deaths in Albany County!

In other areas during 2015, our Department of Health was awarded a highly competitive three year local IMPACT grant to implement strategies in community

and health settings to prevent and control obesity, diabetes, heart disease and stroke and to reduce health disparities among adults.

Each year the Department serves thousands of residents, workers and visitors to our county in its critical mission to prevent communicable and chronic diseases, injuries and disabilities; to protect against environmental hazards that affect health and safety; to promote the wellness of our citizens and communities and to prepare for and respond to public health emergencies.

In 2015, the Albany County Department of Mental Health was honored as a “Community Champion” by local leaders in health care for “exemplary leadership, commitment and progress in making organizational changes that support tobacco-free living for people with mental illness.”

Additionally in 2015, the Department strengthened its partnership with the Albany Police Department through participation in multiple community initiatives designed to reduce recidivism and improve quality of life for individuals with behavioral health challenges and travelled to Seattle as part of a community delegation to inspect and evaluate a model Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion program.

In 2016, the Department plans to develop a Mental Health Court in Albany County. Mental health courts have been successfully created in numerous jurisdictions throughout the United States in response to the increasing number of defendants with serious mental health conditions who have become involved in the criminal justice system.

The development of a mental health court in Albany County will go a long way towards addressing the growing 21st century national problem of our local jails becoming de facto psychiatric hospitals. The goal will be to create a therapeutic pathway through the criminal justice system for eligible individuals living with serious mental illness so that they can get the treatment they need without unnecessary incarceration; and, will be modeled after the success of drug courts in Albany County.

Sadly, the scales of justice are not equal when it comes to those who need legal defense services. We have excellent Public Defenders and Alternate Public

Defenders in our County but the resources of their offices are not equal to those available to the prosecution or those who can afford private representation.

A year ago, I proposed that the state accept the responsibility of paying for what the Supreme Court ordered in 1963... to provide legal counsel for the poor. New York State passed that responsibility to the counties as an unfunded mandate.

The bill I proposed has now been introduced by Assemblymember Fahy and Senator DeFrancisco in the State Legislature and is moving forward with widespread and statewide support.

There should not be two systems of justice, one for the rich and one for the poor. This is wrong and it must stop!

As I look around this room, I am reminded of what makes our country so great. That is diversity. The national rhetoric which has fueled anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic sentiment is wrong and cannot be tolerated. That is why I called for a series of public meetings with the Muslim community to foster dialogue, education and understanding and to break down barriers and fears.

I want to say “thank you” to the members of our Muslim community for all they have done and continue to do in Albany County. In Albany County, we support building bridges not building walls.

Not too long ago, I had the honor to host a visit to my office by the Mexican Ambassador to the United States. She expressed to me her deep concern about so many of the challenging issues facing immigrants, legal and otherwise, and she asked for my help.

I was moved by her request, and so pleased that Albany County applied for and received a three year grant to host a Regional Immigration Center- the first of its kind in New York State. The Center, in partnership with strategic allies such as Albany Law School and Citizen Action among others, will provide a variety of unique services and training and counseling from Albany County north to the Canadian border, to deal primarily with advising immigrants and their attorneys on issues that arise when they are involved in criminal or family court issues.

We will be a resource and hopefully, a national role model, and I couldn't be prouder of our efforts on this important issue.

Fighting for Albany County... we have continued our strong efforts to get our federal and state governments to respond to the concerns we have raised about a critical public safety and environmental justice concern. Specifically, the dramatic growth of crude oil being transported in the County and the proposal by Global to expand their facilities near the Port of Albany.

In 2014, we placed a moratorium on a plan by Global Companies to significantly expand the amount of crude oil shipped through the City of Albany and down the Hudson River and to build a 2,600 square-foot facility with up to seven boilers at the Port of Albany.

In 2015, my expert advisory committee released its comprehensive report calling for a full environmental impact review. I believe that largely through our efforts and the attention we have brought to this issue, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation rescinded its Negative Declaration. I continue to call on the DEC to do the logical next thing and require a full Environmental Impact Statement on this project!

Also, I have filed extensive comments with the United States Secretary of Transportation for the phasing out of DOT- 111's and the implementation of Positive Train Control more quickly.

We have called for mandated reductions in train speed for trains carrying flammable liquids proximate to densely populated urban areas yet the US Department of Transportation has largely ignored our concerns.

In June, I brought together individuals from across the country for a Crude Oil Transportation Summit at the College of Saint Rose. Those on the panel were experts, qualified because they had lived through deadly crude oil train accidents and spills in Lac-Megantic, in Virginia and in Illinois.

Their messages were clear that we need to do all we can to protect Albany County and that is what I am continuing to do.

Just last month, I filed suit with a broad coalition of partners against Global because we believe they are violating the Clean Air Act.

And we served notice on the DEC to follow the requirements of state law and require a full environmental impact analysis.

You have my pledge that I will continue to speak out on this issue and to fight for the public safety of those who live and work here in Albany County and that I will fight as well to protect our environment. So tonight, I renew the pledge I made four years ago to make Albany County the most environmentally friendly and the greenest county in New York State!

As another example of that effort, for the past four years, we have been working to open a nine-mile stretch of the old Delaware & Hudson Railroad between the Port of Albany and Voorheesville as the Albany County Rail Trail.

Once completed, the Rail Trail will link municipalities along a safe and accessible pedestrian and bicycle route. We have made great progress and I am happy to say that the majority of the trail is open!

We have done this with the help of many volunteers and partnerships and I thank everyone who has been involved in this effort.

Significant work has also been done at Lawson Lake County Park. Volunteers, including many of our great union trades, completed our Visitor's Center and more day camps were offered by St. Catherine's Center for Children, the Boys and Girls Club of Albany and the Pride Center of the Capital Region last summer.

Our newly created County Recreation Bureau has produced amazing results not only at the lake but in numerous efforts throughout the county. They have partnered with AAU, the Amateur Athletic Association, and launched karate, flag football and lacrosse programs in a third of our Albany County communities bringing our sports, physical fitness and education programs to over a thousand kids so far.

In less than two weeks, for the first time ever, we will host the AAU East Regional District Karate Tournament at the College of Saint Rose.

And in a few days, we will be launching our learn to skate and play hockey program at the Albany County Hockey Facility.

The future of Albany County rests with our children and making sure they are safe when they play sports is critical. Across our country, over 2 ½ million adults and children's lives have changed because of traumatic brain injury. Many of these injuries are caused by sports or recreational activities.

New York State enacted the Concussion Management and Awareness Act of 2011 and every parent, teacher, coach and child must know and follow the best practices when it comes to identifying, reacting and responding to concussions.

That's why the Albany County Recreation Bureau will be spreading that message throughout our communities with an education program to ensure the safety of each and every child that takes part in any sport or recreational activity.

Albany County's Department for Children, Youth and Families serves thousands of children and their families each year with programs that help strengthen and support them. In 2015, we served over 5,000 kids in 30 community based programs and started our first Father's Support Group to focus on engaging dads in all of our programs.

The Department's Healthy Families Home Visiting Program works in collaboration with Parsons Child and Family Center to provide comprehensive parent programs with the goal of creating safer homes for our county's children, and has achieved tremendous success serving over 250 families.

The Department has also partnered with our county Probation Department that has taken the lead in making Albany County one of only six pilot programs in New York State implementing a Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative. Its important goal is to decrease the number of youth unnecessarily or inappropriately detained in the justice process and to reduce the disproportionate minority confinement in that system.

Together, these departments are actively working on recommendations and plans to better serve at-risk youth in Albany County.

From our youth to our seniors, Albany County has strengthened its outreach efforts. We held another Summit on Aging last September and have partnered with the state Office for Community Renewal and the Albany County Rural Housing Alliance to start a Senior Housing Rehabilitation Program for income eligible seniors.

Albany County has pledged additional funds so that over 1 million dollars will go to our seniors to fix their homes so they can stay in them as long as they can.

The Department for Aging works closely with our County Department of Social Services in a number of ways to provide resources and home assistance to seniors to allow them to remain home, healthy and independent for as long as possible.

And we worked hard with the Town of Berne and Peter Young Industries to open a new congregate meal site at the Hilltown Senior Center. This was accomplished through collaboration and volunteer resources to make sure that seniors in our hilltown communities could get a nutritious meal and socialize with others.

During the last year, a triage team was created at Social Services to streamline the experience for clients and to facilitate comprehensive, timely services for applicants with emergency situations.

Last year, the Department's Medicaid division provided over 36,000 individuals with health insurance and chronic care coverage. The Department also supplemented the fuel and utility budgets of 20,000 financially eligible county households.

During 2015, an average of between 400 and 500 individuals entered the department's doors seeking assistance and an opportunity for a better life.

In fact, tens of thousands of Albany County residents are touched by and benefit from programs administered by or sponsored through all of our county departments. That's why we have put together an easy to read brochure on 101 different ways that Albany County serves individuals and strengthens the quality of life in our communities. I encourage you to take a look.

You can find out about some of the wonderful things we have been doing like the fact that this building has earned the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) ENERGY STAR certification, which signifies that the building performs

in the top 25 percent of similar facilities nationwide for energy efficiency and meets EPA energy efficiency performance levels.

Or you'll find out that Albany County leads the industry in waste disposal by the process we use to lower the amount of waste we send to landfills. Go to our website or pick up a copy at a town hall and see all that Albany County has to offer.

I began this State of the County message by stating that over the past four years, my administration has worked hard to protect the health, safety and welfare of the residents of this County. And tonight, I've offered significant tangible evidence of what we have accomplished and our record of success.

Through strategic partnerships and collaborations and effective leadership, we've expanded the programs and services that we offer, and delivered even better care to our children, veterans, seniors, residents of the nursing home and all of those who need our assistance.

For all of these reasons, I am confident in the belief that the State of our County is strong and our future is bright!

But there is much more work to be done. We need to insure that all of our residents have full and equal access to opportunities that enable them to attain their full potential. We need to embrace and to promote a true Equity Agenda in the development and delivery of all county services, so as to more effectively serve those left behind due to race, poverty, age or disability.

Toward that end, tonight, I'm excited to announce a bold new initiative in concert with the Center for Human Services Research at the University at Albany. I have asked the Center to systemically assess the operations and efficiency of all of the county's social and human services related departments, with the goal of assisting us in developing an equity agenda in our efforts to more effectively deliver services to improve the health and wellbeing of all of our residents.

While Albany County's social and human services programs are among the best in our state and, indeed, in our nation, significant portions of our community are being left behind, particularly if looked at by race, ethnicity, income and neighborhood.

One in six Americans now lives in poverty and this poverty is spread beyond cities to rural and suburban communities and is passed on from generation to generation. We know that expanding access to affordable housing, good schools, jobs, transportation and even to supermarkets and parks and green spaces can mean

better health and wellbeing for residents and this in turn can benefit our entire community. Our ability to create such communities is influenced by our policies and programs. And while Albany County has well regarded pro equity policies and programs, there is no doubt more needs to be done to insure even greater levels of institutional and regional equity.

With the assistance of the Center for Human Services Research, we will look at our county departments to assess how we can develop a new paradigm and use our policies and programs to improve access and opportunity for all our residents, particularly those groups who have long been left behind.

We will look at how we can best deliver county services through the prism of an Equity Agenda so as to best deal with issues of poverty, inequality, racism, discrimination and social and environmental justice.

In researching this issue, King County in the state of Washington stood out as a model. There, by ordinance and through the adoption of a strategic plan, the county transformed its work on equity and social justice from an initiative to an integrated effort in all the county does in order to achieve equitable opportunities for its residents. So here in Albany County, with the assistance of the Center for Human Services, we will follow the King County blueprint to insure that an equity and social justice agenda is embedded as a core element of the goals, objectives and strategies of our county government.

Listen to what Angela Glover Blackwell, the founder of Policylink, has said on this issue, “years of antipoverty work have revealed two things: community interventions achieve their greatest success when they are connected to policy and policy solutions and are more effective when they draw on what is working in communities. Research shows that communities that pay attention to equity grow stronger, and that the effects of any equity agenda may be most pronounced in areas that have struggled most. We need to think differently about how broad policy agendas and legislation can incorporate equity-focused solutions that work. And we need robust alliances in fields like civil rights, environmental justice, health, education and economic development to fight for investments to create communities of opportunity everywhere and for all. It is a big task, but it need not be daunting.”

There is no doubt, the time is right to address this issue in Albany County, and by doing so, we will make Albany County an even greater place to live, to work and to raise a family.

Last year I began my State of the County address by sharing my belief that this message, must be at its core, a report on our progress in fulfilling the important mission we have as county leaders.

As we begin our new term of office, it is important to remember that fundamentally that mission is to serve those in need and to create better opportunities, economic and otherwise, for our struggling middle class and for our poor and disadvantaged, so as to improve the quality of life of our communities and to make a better life for our children.

These are big challenges, but I believe that through effective and strong leadership, through strategic partnerships and through thoughtful and inclusive vision, we can and we will meet these challenges.

As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote “we are all tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

You have my pledge that I will do all that is within my power to work with you, so in that spirit of cooperation, we can make Albany County the most innovative and progressive county in the nation- always putting the interests of the people we serve before any other.

Thank you for your support and thank you for joining me this evening. May God always bless Albany County and its great residents.