
**BROOME COUNTY LEGISLATURE
REGULAR SESSION
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2000**

The Legislature convened at 4:02 p.m. with a call to order by the Chair, Daniel A. Schofield. The Clerk, Louis P. Augustini, read the fire exit announcement and called the Attendance Roll, Present-19, Absent-0.

The Chair, Mr. Schofield, led the members of the Legislature in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, followed by a moment of silent meditation.

WRITTEN OR ORAL PRESENTATIONS BY THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Chairman Schofield introduced County Executive Jeffrey P. Kraham presenting the State of the County Address for 2000.

Chairman Schofield, Respected Members of the Legislature, and Distinguished Guests:

In recent days and months as I have traveled around the County from Killawog to Deposit and everywhere in between to take part in.....the 25th "Almost Annual" Crappie Derby in Whitney Point.....the long anticipated opening of the V.A. Clinic at the State Psychiatric Hospital, the Binghamton Hockey Hall of Fame, the STOP-DWI Holiday Basketball Tournament, and the promising kickoff of the Empire State Games.....I've sensed a renewed spirit and energy in this community.

Many of you have even echoed what I've been hearing around the County.....that things are going very well and that we are moving in the right direction. If you have taken in a movie at the new Gardens on Front Street, walked through our new Justice Building, driven by our new County Library on Court Street, or been to Greenwood, Dorchester or Cole Parks since we've waived the fees.....you have seen evidence first-hand of what I'm talking about.

It is my distinct pleasure to stand before you again today to proclaim that the state of Broome County is very strong.....and getting stronger every day.

Our economy is the healthiest it has been in more than ten years. As I speak with you today there are nearly 120,000 people working in our region.....an increase of nearly 7,000 since 1996.

One key indicator of the strength of our local economy is the region's real estate market. New residential construction in Broome County has more than doubled in the last four years. There has also been a dramatic increase in commercial investment. New home building shows the confidence our county's families have in our future. But more than that, each and every new home built brings thousands of dollars and many new jobs to our community. We're finally beginning to see investment dollars increase. This is a strong indication that our economy is on the upswing.

We need to continue to find ways to promote the advantages of living and doing business in Broome County.

This will be the major theme of my remarks this afternoon: what we need to do...the steps we need to take.....to keep the momentum moving forward.....to continue to rebuild and remake our economy and the communities across the County that comprise it.

Last year, I talked about the 3 Cs.....cooperation, communication, and common sense. And no one has put these ideas to work more effectively than the employees of Broome County.....let me give you an example:

One very important facet of our consolidated economic development efforts involves creating a countywide Geographic Information System (GIS) that will offer the County, other municipalities or interested companies with information about soil, water, sewer, utilities, demographics, and available acreage in the communities in the County. Our Real Property Tax Service Department is responsible for providing correct and updated County maps to the GIS System.

In 1999, Real Property put out a request for proposals for mapping companies to correct and update the present maps we use. These maps are necessary for us to utilize the GIS System effectively. The cost estimates were just shy of \$100,000 and indications were that it would take a long time to complete. Dane Clark, a member of our mapping division, developed a new methodology that will save Broome County nearly all of this money and move us closer to having a countywide economic development system up and running. Dane, would you please stand up and be recognized?

Dane is only one example of the effort put forth by Broome County employees every day. As you may remember, some weeks ago we made a change over from 1999 to the year 2000. The various potential problems associated with the dawning of the millenium became known as "Y2K."

For more than one year our Y2K Readiness Team met to make preparations and develop contingencies for what might go wrong. They examined virtually every aspect of County government.....evaluated every service we provide from Willow Point to the County jail.....and developed a plan.

Now some people thought this whole exercise was unnecessary. But we used the Y2K dilemma as an opportunity to develop systems and procedures that we will be able to utilize in any emergency or critical situation.

I would like to take this opportunity along with you to express my gratitude to all of the men and women who serve and work for Broome County.

This speech isn't about only what my administration has done.....it's about what we have done and what we have accomplished together.

It's about this Legislature.....giving our County workforce the tools necessary to get the job done efficiently.

All our valiant efforts and best-laid plans would be meaningless without the support and approval of you, the members of the Broome County Legislature. Ladies and Gentlemen.....will you please take a moment to help me recognize the members of our Legislature.

I'm very proud of the groundwork we've laid together for a more responsive and effective County government.

Our record on taxes and spending is truly remarkable. Last fall in my year 2000 Budget, I recommended.....and you authorized....a reduction in County property taxes for the fifth consecutive year.....and we are reducing County spending for the third consecutive year. We may be the only County in New York State that has accomplished such a feat. I know we're the only County that has accomplished such a feat while: renovating our County airport, building a

new County library, constructing a County justice building and doubling the investment in roads and other infrastructure improvements.

And next week our historic decision to eliminate the county sales tax on clothing purchases of less than \$110 will take effect.....this effort will save taxpayers more than two and a half million dollars this year alone. Four years ago, Lou Augostini approached me with this idea and I thought it was a very good one. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge Lou.

I made this proposal to Governor Pataki as a way of giving our retail businesses here in Broome County a leg up on our competition. The Governor agreed and, with the support of Senator Libous and Assemblymen Warner and Dinga, it became a reality.

Now for some this may not seem like a big deal, but having been in business myself, I know this move has a huge psychological impact. We know that people will drive one hundred miles to save on sales tax. And we remain the only large Upstate County to make this move.

Today, I'm asking you to consider providing additional property tax relief to senior citizens, volunteer firefighters, and volunteer ambulance squad members. I'm requesting for senior citizens that the income level for their property tax exemption be increased by one thousand dollars. Many of our seniors are on fixed incomes and this measure will provide tax relief for all seniors with incomes up to \$27,900. This amount increases if the seniors have unreimbursed medical and prescription drug expenses. I know you will agree that our senior citizens help to make Broome County the wonderful place that it is to live. I believe it is our obligation to do all we can to make their lives easier.

Our volunteer firefighters and ambulance squad members are the backbone of the emergency response teams for a majority of Broome County residents. In order to be certified and re-certified these volunteers must undertake numerous hours of training on their own time and frequently at their own expense.

In an effort to encourage recruitment and retention in the ranks of our volunteer corps, I'm proposing a local law that would provide a 10 percent real property tax exemption for qualified members of volunteer fire departments and EMS squad members. Not only would this provide an incentive for volunteers with over five years of service, it would also provide a lifetime tax exemption for anyone with twenty years of certified active service.

I have spoken to Senator Tom Libous and Assemblymen Warner and Dinga who have indicated they would sponsor the necessary State legislation. It's important that we recognize the contributions and sacrifices made by these life-saving volunteers.

By keeping our taxes and spending in check we continue to make Broome County a desirable place to locate or expand a business. And we remain near the very top of communities from across Upstate New York enjoying a strong resurgence in job growth and economic development.

But we can't let our guard down.....that's why in recent weeks and months I've been evaluating our economic development system in Broome County seeking ways to make our efforts more efficient and effective.

In my conversations with economic development officials across the County and the region.....I've heard.....over and over again.....that the system we have in place has had some success, but it has not done what it set out to do. It remains a splintered representation of our community.

There are more than 40 organizations that work in economic development in Broome County.....still out there working independently without any overall direction or coordination.

Currently, companies who want to do business in Broome County have to meet independently with regional and local agencies, municipal leaders, state representatives, EDZ coordinators, local development corporations, utilities, educational institutions, and others.

You've probably heard me talk of instances where a company has received up to seven separate letters from our community describing the incentives available if they locate or expand here. We often can't even tell them if we have the land they want because about five different organizations compile this information in Broome County.

The public sector needs to play a more productive and better coordinated role.....we need to create a single agency that incorporates all the others and serves as the lead economic development force in Broome County. We are definitely not as effective as we need to be in order to compete with other counties and other states.

With your support, I have already taken several important steps. I've set out to develop an economic development mechanism that would consolidate our efforts and make us more competitive.

I started by rebuilding the County's Planning Department. I want to have the Planning Department act as the central information resource in Broome County. I have directed the Planning Department to gather all the information on potential economic development sites that are available in Broome County.

With this effort already in motion, it is now time to focus our attention on the County's economic development community with one goal in mind: to create a strong public sector economic development organization that will incorporate local government, State and local economic development agencies, and the private sector that will best represent Broome County. This will ultimately be the mechanism whereby we create better job opportunities for the residents of Broome County.

In this vein, let me thank you for voting last week to approve the move of the Broome County Industrial Development Agency and its very able Director Dick D'Attilio here to the County Office Building. With this action, you have made it possible for the County to partner with the IDA to form that seamless and proactive economic development unit that we need.

By providing professional office space to the IDA, this will.....for the first time.....make it possible for the IDA to have direct access to all of the County's resources.....the Planning Department.....the Department of Public Works..... and the Department of Real Property Tax Services.

And thanks to you we are finally giving this new partnership the tools it needs to get this job done. One tool was to budget the monies to get this initiative off the ground. A second tool would be to create a business investment tax exemption for real property constructed, altered or improved for the purpose of commercial, business, or industrial activity. This will provide the opportunity for businesses to further grow and expand in Broome County. Our new coalition of representatives from towns, villages, and school districts representing the entire County will administer this exciting business investment tax exemption.

With these tools in place we no longer have to wait for businesses to come to us. We will be able to more aggressively go after businesses we think would work well within the existing fabric

of the Southern Tier. We will now be able to get out there and convince others that Broome County is the place to be.

We've already begun to move forward. Early last month, we became aware that I-3 Communications was considering the acquisition of Raytheon's flight simulation and government training services businesses.

I brought Dick D'Attilio together with members of our staff and working in tandem with Governor Pataki, Senator Libous, and Bob Moppert from the Empire State Development Corporation, we were able to put a deal together that saves nearly 300 jobs and maintains the grand tradition Edwin A. Link established in this community.

And as you remember there have been many times in the past few years when we thought we were going to lose those jobs altogether. We extend our special appreciation to the employees in Kirkwood who have displayed great courage and conviction throughout this trying period.

I admit that much of what motivates our desire to bring the IDA into the County is my desire to get involved personally when it may be useful. I called Frank Lanza, the I-3 Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, and expressed my strong desire to keep the flight simulation business here in Broome County where it began and where it belongs. And I have pledged my commitment to working with the executives of I-3 to find ways to bring even more jobs to Broome County.

Let me just pause here for a moment to introduce Dick D'Attilio. Dick has for several years been a driving force in the resurgence of this community. Recent deals involving among others Lockheed Martin, Bomag, Willow Run Foods, Universal Instruments, and Frito-Lay bear his imprint. Dick, we thank you for all you have given to Broome County and look forward to the next chapter. Dick, please stand and be recognized.

Now that we have streamlined our economic development system, I'm pledging here today that at the top of the list of things for the new IDA/County partnership will be to personally work very closely with the county's towns and villages and the City of Binghamton. I invite you to join me to meet with the leaders of your communities to see specifically how our newly resourced and energized economic development system may be of benefit to your district.

As you know.....last week Governor George Pataki came to Binghamton to inspect the progress on the Binghamton Regional Airport and unveil a \$700 million economic plan for Upstate New York. While my absence was indeed "conspicuous" as I was suffering from that wicked flu going around, I want to today thank the Governor and Senator Libous for the \$3 million each they provided for whatwhen it is finished.....will be a state-of-the art aviation facility.

Our airport is a powerful symbol for our community. For years, our community has been judged, unfairly, by the dilapidated nature of our airport. We are working hard to basically rebuild this facility while continuing to deliver the kind of service and hospitality that is our community's reputation. If you haven't had a chance to get up there to see the renovations, I urge you to do so.

While we're talking about the airport let me underscore my commitment to expanding the availability of flights and keeping fares down. In the past two weeks I have met with representatives of various airlines to express my concerns about fares and my desire to establish a regular route to New York City. I relayed to them what local business leaders have confirmed to me.....that there is a strong demand for service to New York. However, the economics of aviation goes well beyond the normal supply and demand curves we read about in the textbooks. There are many complex issues.....and without going in to them.....let me say

we are doing everything we can and that we may have an announcement about this in the near future.

I return now to a point I made at the outset of my remarks to you today. Indeed as our community continues to be the beneficiary of numerous job openings and opportunities.....for individuals with all levels of education, experience and expertise.....we must do a better job preparing our workforce to adapt to the needs of what's often called the "digital" or "new" economy.

The good news is that Broome County is already a leader nationwide in workforce development. Through collaboration with key local partners and Tioga County, we are putting in place a grant with the New York State Department of Labor.

When all is said and done we will have a one-stop job placement center for displaced workers and for individuals who are on public assistance and are willing and able to make the transition to work. This will help us to continue to be at the forefront of efforts across the country to move our citizens from welfare to work.

We will have a place right here in our community where all the resources are at the individual's fingertips, and the ability to build skills, learn how to interview, or participate in specialized vocational training are all under one roof.

This joint "Welfare to Work" and Job Placement Center is combining expertise from various levels of government, and will include the private sector as well toward helping people secure and maintain jobs in Broome County.

Let me take a moment to highlight what I believe to be one of the jewels of Broome County that has been recognized by the New York State Association of Counties and the National Association of Counties as a leader in its field. 5,000 of our Medicaid recipients receive services through the MAX Program, a public-private partnership between our Department of Social Services and Corporate Care Management. The MAX Program offers managed health care which has proven to be extremely cost-effective while providing service that consistently satisfies the expectations of clients and providers. Through its unique dental max component, 1,300 children receive care in private dental offices.

Because of the documented effectiveness of the MAX Program, in the coming months I will be actively exploring ways to expand this model into other areas of health care.

We must do everything we can to help all our citizens grow up healthy.....able to learn and develop the tools necessary to be productive citizens in the coming century. Partnership 2000, through its Chief School Officer's Committee has been working with the County, local school districts and community organizations to assure that all of our children enter school ready to learn and leave school ready to work.

In line with this effort I'm directing Tom Hoke to establish an "Early Childhood Coalition" to maximize the effectiveness of our relationships with the young children and families that we serve. Larry Kiley, Frank Kelly, and John Spencer have been instrumental in spearheading this effort.

While I'm on the topic of human services, I want to update you on the progress of the Health Department's move to Front Street. In last year's address I outlined the advantages of consolidating the divisions of our Health Department under one roof.

A few weeks ago I had an opportunity to meet with Jerry Willard of the First Ward Action Council. He was enthusiastic about our Health Department moving there and presented me with a proposal for "New Dwightsville".....an initiative to restore the historic homes located in the immediate neighborhood where our Health Department will soon be. I was glad to pledge my support to Jerry's project. In the coming months I will begin discussions between our Health Department, Lourdes Hospital, and the First Ward Action Council on what additional steps may be taken to help bring back this historic area.

This neighborhood is a gateway to Binghamton and we are committed to working with Mayor Bucci in this effort. Our recent decision to move the Department of Motor Vehicles Office from the Metrocenter to Clinton Street is a further indication of our commitment to this area.

I am very excited to have worked with Senator Libous in acquiring grants to complete more than one million dollars in improvements to the Broome County Veterans Memorial Arena. The new siding, a portable wheelchair lift making the facility accessible to the handicapped, a new basketball floor, a new multi-purpose turf for indoor soccer and lacrosse, and a new marquee will allow us to expand the use of the facility far in to the future.

As you know, the Broome County Veterans Memorial Arena was built 27 years ago to serve as a resource for our community while honoring those who've fought and died for our country. On their behalf I would like today to formally request that we refer to the Broome County Veterans Memorial Arena as just that: the Broome County Veterans Memorial Arena.

It has been said that if you build it, they will come. Well they're already coming. The past year has been one of the most exciting ever at the Broome County Veterans Memorial Arena. We have hosted the Wizard of Oz on Ice, Sesame Street Live, a number of exciting basketball tournaments at the high school and college level, the B. C. Icemen, and many high school graduations, musical concerts, and other exciting events. And we are absolutely thrilled that Tony Bennett will join us in late March and Elton John in early April. Today I'm pleased to announce that ABC Sports will televise nationally the Hershey Kiss Figure Skating Challenge to be held here on April 11th.

The Broome County Veterans Memorial Arena is well on its way to becoming the world-class community arena I envisioned three years ago when I took office.

Finally, coming soon to a computer near you, the Broome County Website. Our website will be a comprehensive source of information for not only County government but our community. County offices are typically open during the daytime hours and are often unaccessible to busy citizens.

Our new website will make it possible for Broome County to be open 24 hours a day with information about starting or growing your business, various County programs, and exciting cultural and recreational activities like this summer's Chris Thater Bike Race, the Aviation Show in August, and the Empire State Games. We believe our website will be a very powerful tool for keeping our citizens abreast of our activities, and for marketing the County to prospective businesses and residents.

Ladies and gentlemen, the state of Broome County truly is strong.....and it's getting stronger every day.

My goal has always been to create an environment conducive to job growth and economic expansion while reducing the costs of government and improving County services.

Cooperation, communication and common sense are guiding principles that do work.....together, we've proven that time and again.

And together, we'll continue to face the challenges of the future, and we'll continue making Broome County a better place to live, work and raise a family.

Thank you.

Mr. Shafer made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Pasquale. **Motion to adjourn carried.**
The meeting was adjourned at 4:32 p.m.
