

Suffolk County State of the County Address – 2010
February 3, 2010
Charles B. Wang Asian-American Center, Stony Brook University
Steve Levy, Suffolk County Executive

Thank you President Stanley, and our gracious hosts here at Stony Brook University -- the jewel of our state system and the school from which I proudly graduated. This school has come a long way since my undergraduate days some thirty years ago, and is now recognized as one of the top 100 universities in the nation. Thank you as well Supervisor Mark Lesko for your kind words and outstanding leadership of our county's largest town. Thank you ladies and gentlemen of the Legislature for your cooperation throughout these very difficult times. Thank you to News 12 and, for the first time, FIOS, for broadcasting this address live. And finally thank you to the many residents from Amityville to Montauk for tuning in this evening.

The State of the County paints a verbal picture of where we have come from, where we are now, and where we are heading. Where have we come from? Last year we experienced the deepest recession since the Great Depression. A year ago at this time I warned that it would be a rough year. But even that cautionary speech did not fully foretell the extent to which our national economy would falter. And as the national economy suffers, so does our economy here in our great county.

How bad were the economic conditions in 2009? Consider this: Many towns on Long Island both increased taxes and laid off personnel. The State of New York announced that it would have to impose mid-year cuts to education and health care and that it was going to have trouble paying its bills late last year. Pennsylvania furloughed more than 700 workers. Schools in Hawaii reverted to a four-day week. Virginia cut funding to its colleges by 15 percent. Iowa's governor ordered a 9 million dollar cut to Public Safety. Missouri cut 16 million dollars in aid to the poor. Illinois laid off 100 of its 700 parks workers. And California not only raised taxes and laid people off, but began releasing as many as 6,500 prisoners out of jail because it no longer had the money to guard them.

In Suffolk, we faced similar financial difficulties due to this economic downturn. We lost over 100 million dollars in sales tax revenue. In good times, we used to gain 100

million dollars over the previous year. That is a swing of 200 million dollars. With rising unemployment and higher foreclosures, more people were unable to pay their property taxes, which left us over 30 million dollars short from our usual collections.

Yes, like the rest of the country, the state of our county last year was indeed perilous. But thanks to the immediate, aggressive and decisive action that we took in a bipartisan fashion, we ended the year with a surplus, with all of our services in tact and I was able to submit a budget for 2010 that froze county general fund property taxes for the sixth year in a row.

Think about it: an executive budget with no tax increases, no layoffs and no disruption of our services. How did we do it, while others could not? Early last year, upon learning of our steep drop off in sales tax collections, I immediately called for a 10 percent across-the-board reduction in spending. We tapped some money from our rainy day fund. It is important to remember that during the good times, while some governments went on wild spending sprees, we spent conservatively and set aside money into a stabilization fund. Last year, we used just enough money to stabilize our taxes, without jeopardizing our historically high bond rating.

We asked our hard-working employees to be part of the solution, and they delivered. To prevent layoffs, employees banked two weeks of salary until retirement. To lead by example, I and all the members of this legislature were the first to agree to this lag payroll. It was a difficult thing to ask from our employees, but in retrospect it was the right thing to do.

It is essential that government continues to tighten its belt, just as private businesses do and just as our families do.

When we shrunk the size of government through an early retirement program, we exercised strict position control. We must continue to hold the line on refilling or adding positions, despite the pressure from special interests to spend and hire, hire and spend. In a vacuum, that sounds good. In the real world, however, that results in one thing: Huge tax increases to the public we serve. Tax increases they simply cannot afford.

Aesop taught us the fable of the grasshopper and the ant. While the grasshopper sang, danced and played all summer long, the ant worked diligently to store food and

prepare for the winter. We in government must always be aware that even in the good times, our role is that of the ant – to prepare for the difficult times ahead.

For we did not weather the economic crisis of 2009 just in 2009. We prepared for the oncoming storm in 2008, and 2007, and in the years before that by shaping a leaner, more efficient county government.

A smarter government means we don't have to sustain a larger government. While many municipalities these days are doing less with less, Suffolk County has been able to do more with less.

Our smart government policies actually enable us to maintain, and in many cases, enhance our services, while not having to always ask the taxpayers to dig deeper into their pockets.

It was these smart government policies that we began implementing in 2004 that helped soften the blow of this brutal recession.

Upon taking office, we placed our employee health care system out to bid, injecting competition into the system and professionalizing its oversight board. What did this mean? It meant we were able to save a collective 100 million dollars over the last six years. Imagine where our budget would be today without these savings.

We adopted the best practices of the private sector and required our health care system to use generic rather than name brand drugs, saving an additional 12 million dollars a year. No loss of service, yet a 36 million dollar savings over the last three years. We overcame special interest objections and stopped competing against the private sector in the HMO market. Privatizing our HMO service not only injected us with an immediate 18 million dollars, but thereafter gave us an additional 9 million dollars over the past three years. The patients were easily absorbed by existing agencies, and again we saved money without disrupting care.

Service was enhanced at some of our health centers with a new point of delivery model, which again borrows upon the best practices of the private sector. When you or I go to our private physician, we are seen in one exam room by a nurse and doctor. Believe it or not, in the past at our health centers, it was the patient who had to travel from room to room several times during the course of a visit, with long waits in the lobby

in between. Our new system has lessened the time patients spend at health centers – allowing us to serve 20 percent more patients and lowering our annual costs.

Working with New York State, we uncovered potentially fraudulent practices in the Medicaid program and saved taxpayers 5 million dollars this year alone.

We opened our prescription drug purchasing process to the general public regardless of age or income. This helped our residents save more than 1.2 million dollars with discounts up to 50 percent on their prescriptions while also expanding our pool of users, thereby saving the county a million dollars.

The Alternatives for Youth program that we created rescues families in crisis. This innovative program seeks to keep children with their families, rather than sending children into very expensive, de-personalized institutional care. And it saves taxpayers millions of dollars each year.

This past year we expanded that same concept to the foster care system – working with families to avoid a foster care placement where appropriate. Thanks to our program, Suffolk County’s placement rate of children in foster care is one-half that of the rest of the state. Once again, families are made stronger, and the county saved 5 million dollars in 2009 for our taxpayers.

So, to people who would say you can’t enhance a service without inflating the size of government, increasing spending or raising taxes, I say: “Take a look at what we have done in Suffolk County.”

We cut the red tape and improved cash flow to the many contract agencies that help us serve people in need. By listening to and partnering with these agencies, we took a process that was once 6, or 7, or 8 months long and streamlined it to as little as six weeks. This places the money in the hands of these agencies faster -- decreasing the amount they pay for borrowing, and increasing the amount that is available to serve their clients.

And at a time when many municipalities have cut aid to food pantries, my 2010 budget actually increased funding to these vital agencies.

Caseloads have been reduced in child protective services and in our Medicaid application unit, enhancing our responses to these vulnerable populations. Working with this Legislature, we began evening hours at four Social Service centers to better serve our

working families, without incurring overtime expenses. And Suffolk County continues to collect more in child support than any other suburban county in the state.

Last year in my State of the County address, I outlined an initiative with our school districts to ensure that students eligible for the federal free lunch program were enrolled. Today, we work with 47 school districts on this program and have ensured that hundreds and hundreds more students are properly nourished. No student should be distracted from learning because he or she is hungry.

Indeed, these difficult economic times have not prevented us from following through on our core responsibilities as a government. But it is only through years of preparation and responsible fiscal management that we have been able to maintain our services without massive tax increases.

Different levels of government provide different core services, yet all levels of government have some very common needs when it comes to purchasing supplies and equipment. In the upcoming month I will be developing the Long Island Purchasing Consortium. I will be inviting Nassau County, other municipalities, school districts and even not-for-profit organizations to enjoy the economies of scale we can create when purchasing in bulk. Our local consortium is likely to produce more competitive pricing from local or regional firms than is found on the statewide lists, and it can supplement purchasing efforts under way by BOCES. While the statewide list can provide a discount, our consortium will bring many governments together as one entity to maximize our economies of scale and encourage vendors to sharpen their pencils. This is not re-inventing the wheel; this is making the wheel larger for maximum efficiency.

We have put stimulus funds to good use here in Suffolk, creating jobs in the construction industry with road projects on Motor Parkway, Commack Road and the Expressway Service Roads. And we are keeping people working with County improvements on Nicolls Road, Portion Road, Patchogue-Holbrook Road and Route 58 in Riverhead, just to name a few.

By securing more than 13 million dollars in federal stimulus funds, we are expanding our Neighborhood Stabilization efforts in many communities hardest hit by the recession. These funds allow us to acquire foreclosed homes, renovate them and get them back on the tax rolls with qualified buyers. I am pleased to recognize here tonight

one of the first homeowners in this program, Tamara Wheeling of Brentwood, who this month will be moving in to her new home thanks to this program.

To sustain us into the future, these are the times we must continue to enhance economic development, expand our tax base and keep our economy thriving.

Last year, Canon was reconsidering its decision to locate its North American headquarters to Melville. Facing the loss of 2,000 high-quality jobs, my administration, working with the Town of Riverhead, took immediate action to transfer additional Empire Zone credits to the property, and that ensured that Canon would indeed build right here in Suffolk County.

It was further good news in 2009 when I cut the ribbon for the opening of Leviton, which relocated from Queens and brought in 400 high-tech jobs.

We signed the lease for the revitalization of the Westhampton airport that will create another 600 to 700 careers at the high-tech economic hub.

At the Hampton Business and Technology Park we will seek to attract a film studio, where world-class films and television shows can be produced on the South Fork. In the past we have successfully lobbied for tax incentives of 30 percent on film production here in Suffolk. And in 2010, I will be inviting producers from the New York area to visit eastern Long Island to see all we have to offer.

On the North Fork, economic development occurs in the form of agri-tourism. We have worked in conjunction with the Long Island Farm Bureau to develop the popular Jazz on the Vine series which brings visitors to many of our vineyards in the winter months.

Additionally, we are beginning to reap the dividends from the investments we made in aqua-culture -- the farming of shellfish within our bays. Brown and red tides, over-harvesting and pollution decimated this once-thriving industry. But we have cleaned our bays and stocked the waterways with millions of clams and scallops, and our shellfish populations are beginning to show hopeful signs of sustainability.

And we're working to protect our coveted fishing industry. Over the last decade, federal quotas which were based on arbitrary and inaccurate data from the 1980s have been terribly unfair to our commercial fishermen. As a result, fishermen along the rest of the northeast coast are able to take far more fish than our Long Islanders. I have

commissioned a study that will detail this inequity to the federal government. Long Island's own Billy Joel has romanticized the allure of this marvelous trade which is deeply engrained in the history of this great county. We live on an Island, and it is vital to our economic wellbeing that we restore our commercial fishing industry to its former glory.

Another symbol of our rich history is the duck. As in the Long Island Duck. As in the Long Island Ducks baseball team. The great experiment of bringing a minor league baseball team to Long Island has been a phenomenal success, and provides one of the most affordable forms of family entertainment around. Hundreds of thousands of families each year enjoy the national past time in its purest form in Central Islip. In 2009, I proudly signed an extension to keep the Long Island Ducks right here in Suffolk County for another ten years.

This year we will continue our quest for an arena in Yaphank that can host a minor league hockey team, professional lacrosse and indoor soccer, and can be a venue for world class concerts. And who knows, if Nassau doesn't seal the deal for the Islanders, we will be happy to take them here in Suffolk.

And let us not forget our downtowns, and the vital role they play in our economy. Downtowns shape the image of an entire community. When a downtown is thriving, both surrounding property values and civic pride rise. But when a downtown is littered with abandoned buildings and struggling businesses, it can be devastating to a hamlet. The first question is: can downtowns come back? The answer is clear. You bet they can. We've got the evidence. Patchogue and Bay Shore are two prime examples. Over the upcoming year, we'll continue to partner with many of our towns to invest in the revitalization of downtown corridors.

While downtown Riverhead has had its challenges over the years, exciting plans have been laid out for a revitalized riverfront, including 52 units of workforce housing the County has helped fund that will improve the aesthetics and bring ready-made patrons back onto Main Street.

And an exciting new vision is emerging for the Ronkonkoma transit hub, as we work with Brookhaven Supervisor Lesko, Islip Supervisor Phil Nolan and state leaders to

plan a transit-oriented development that will include hundreds of residential units above street-level retail space – all within walking distance of the Ronkonkoma station.

The Long Island Index said this type of development is the vision of the future. Well here in Suffolk, the future is now.

Our county investments in our downtowns are contagious. When people see money being poured into a community they have a greater incentive to take root and invest their own money because they know that better days are ahead.

We are working with Supervisor Steve Bellone to reconfigure Straight Path, from a double lane highway into a single-lane, walkable retail corridor.

As part of this project, we are partnering with the town of Babylon and the federal government to put in place needed sewers for business growth in Wyandanch's main corridor.

But the development of Wyandanch can only occur if it is economically feasible. And it is simply not economically feasible with the millions of dollars in sewer hook up fees that would be required. We can't waive these fees for everyone – the sewer fund would be depleted.

But this is a unique opportunity where the sewer development is a part of an urban renewal program, with the local town paying to install the sewers.

So tonight I propose a new policy in Suffolk that will allow hook-up fee waivers where a sewer project is part of a transit-oriented redevelopment in a distressed area where the town is a partner.

I firmly believe that 20 years from now, when we look back at the renaissance of Wyandanch, we will point to this county investment as the place where it all started.

Last year, I convened a consortium of Long Island's top business and academic minds, to help us build upon the many successes we have had in bringing companies here to Suffolk. My Economic Development Consortium will be issuing shortly a series of recommendations that will help us promote our county as business-friendly and encourage existing and emerging industries alike to grow here.

Our consortium will match local venture capitalists with growing Long Island companies. We will promote specific courses at our local colleges to match the needs of these identified industries. We will create a welcoming committee of government

officials and business leaders to meet visiting firms on the airport tarmac to show them what incentives are available. We'll provide a checklist of important milestones and appoint specific individuals in the government to mentor and to shepherd them through the process. The days of Long Island having an anti-business image must be a thing of the past.

There is one sector in which we know jobs will flourish in the upcoming decade -- technology. Our nation led the globe into the Industrial Age, and then into the Computer Age, and we must be poised to again lead the world -- into the Green Age. Green technologies can wean us off our dependence on foreign oil and provide cleaner and more affordable energy. And in this nation, it should be Suffolk County that leads the way. Why not? Suffolk County has the brain power between Brookhaven National Lab, Cold Spring Harbor and right here at my alma mater Stony Brook University.

It is not just at our professional institutions where we can find the best and the brightest. Our county produced three national Intel Scholarship finalists. Ward Melville High School produced two finalists in collaboration with sponsoring Stony Brook University professors. And a third finalist is here with us tonight. Please join me in acknowledging the achievements of Levent Alpoge of Half Hollow Hills West as a representative of the outstanding quality of our schools here in Suffolk.

Suffolk County will continue to partner with our academic and high-tech hubs to encourage my policy that I term Green Economics. We were the first in the state to waive sales taxes on the purchase of solar equipment. We installed solar panels on our police headquarters and the new Fourth Precinct. In April, I signed a landmark Executive Order that requires that any new county government building over 10,000 square feet must include solar panels to help generate the electricity for the building.

Additionally, as I announced recently, Suffolk County is partnering with a private company, enXco, to install more than 60,000 solar panels atop carports they will build, at their expense, in parking lots at county buildings and railroad stations. By turning parking lots into power lots, this public-private partnership will provide enough clean energy to power more than 1,800 homes.

This push toward green technology will be boosted by our proposed Legacy Village in Yaphank -- which would include in its high-tech vision, a solar generating

system able to provide enough clean electricity to run the entire Legacy Village site. It will be the largest net zero carbon footprint in the business sector in the entire United States of America.

How Suffolk County will look in the year 2035 will greatly depend on the decisions we make in the next few years. Where will people work? Where will people live? How will they get between the two? What will be the condition of our groundwater and our waterways? To help us identify our goals, and determine how we will achieve them, I have ordered an update of the county's Comprehensive Master Plan. The first step in this process will be a series of forums hosted throughout the county this year, and we welcome all residents to participate because ultimately, this is your plan.

We have shown time and time again that we can grow our economy and protect our environment. Our policy of Green Economics means preserving as much environmentally sensitive property as possible, while also identifying areas appropriate for economic development and redevelopment to provide our next generation with the opportunity to take root here on Long Island.

When it comes to preserving open space and farmland, no county in the United States can match Suffolk. Not one.

Over the last six years we've implemented a Save Our Open Space program, an Environmental Legacy Fund and an extension of the Water Quality Protection Act to 2030. All are designed to give us the money we need now, to protect our future supply of groundwater and preserve our suburban lifestyle. More investment has been made into open space in the last six years than in any similar period since the program was implemented back in the 1970s. We have preserved thousands of acres and almost 70 farms just in the last six years alone.

We are now heading into a critical stage for preserving what's left. Over this upcoming year I will engage with not-for-profit environmental organizations to identify as many environmentally pristine properties as possible, and ask these agencies to work with property owners to get us to contract.

In the meantime, we will continue with our pesticide reduction program, which is on target to reduce the county use of pesticides significantly throughout this decade. This comes on the heels of the legislation we passed in 2007 to reduce fertilizer use in both the

public and private sectors. And, just this past year, our Cancer Awareness Task Force completed a brochure and web site to educate families on what they can do to make their homes free from cancer-causing agents.

We also saw great success in our e-waste recycling program that has removed more than 34 tons of old computers, printers, monitors, televisions, fax machines and other gadgets from the waste stream.

In health care, we became one of the first counties in the state to embark upon an electronic medical records program. We have enhanced delivery of care through a new state of the art digital mammography system.

And in 2010, we can again pursue a path that simultaneously saves money and enhances health services. Here's how. Federal law allows for local governments to establish Federally Qualified Health Centers in diverse and economically challenged areas. These centers are eligible for additional aid; money that will allow us to enhance service. We convened a task force that will shortly be reporting its analysis of this system. Let this be the year that this well-proven system of enhancing health care, improving quality of services and including members of the community comes to Suffolk County.

Perhaps nothing has been a greater threat to the health of our public over the last few years than the alarming increase in heroin use. Heroin is right here in the suburbs. It's accessible. It's cheap. It's addictive. And it's deadly. The problem must be attacked from three sides. Education. Treatment. And law enforcement.

Parents must know that heroin is available for as little as 5 dollars a bag. Our youth do not have to shoot it up with a needle, they can now snort it, or inhale it. Youngsters must know that it can get you hooked immediately and it can kill you. Even on the first try. Our Police Smart program in the schools has incorporated a special curriculum dealing with the dangers of heroin to give our children the facts they need to make intelligent choices. I have provided the Prevention Resource Center at South Oaks with 175,000 dollars to help in its mission to promote prevention. We have developed our own resource guide to help parents identify signs of drug abuse and find vital resources in their communities. And the first of our regional HELP Forums will be held in mid-April in East Islip.

But when our youth are gripped by addiction, they need our help more than ever. Improvements in the medical field now allow some addicted patients to receive treatment from their own family doctor. A drug called Suboxone has been shown in some cases to be more effective than methadone, and it is available through a simple prescription. This medication blocks the high of heroin and opiates, and helps suppress the craving. We will be embarking on a groundbreaking initiative to make Suboxone available through our health centers, coupled with support and counseling. When it comes to getting our youth off of heroin, we will not raise the white flag. We will be victorious.

Parents have also been frustrated by the inability to get in-patient treatment for their children. Let's commit together right here and now as a top priority to insist that the State Legislature change the insurance law and help more of our addicted sons and daughters have immediate access to the treatment they desperately need.

The law enforcement battle against heroin does not stop at the county borders. That is why at the first meeting I had with Nassau County Executive Ed Mangano, we vowed to share information, resources and personnel to beat this scourge once and for all. The importance of our aggressive law enforcement component cannot be understated. The drug king-pins and two-bit dealers who prey on our children at the local schools must know that they will be caught. That is why last fall Police Commissioner Richard Dormer established a centralized Heroin Special Unit within the Narcotics section, bringing in detectives and officers from all precincts to focus on all facets of the heroin distribution networks. In just the first three weeks of this year alone, our task force has made more than 60 undercover buys, and arrested more than 100 individuals. This is a 120 percent increase in heroin arrests over the same period last year.

While we are fighting so hard to keep drug dealers off the street, be forewarned that problems lurk ahead if the new Rockefeller drug law reforms are left unchecked. Those reforms that eliminated draconian twenty-five year sentences for simple drug possession were indeed justified. But these changes went too far, so that now a violent drug dealer can often avoid jail time by simply declaring that he is an addict. And get this, he can even have three previous criminal convictions expunged from his record. Both District Attorney Tom Spota and I want to promote rehabilitation. We want to give people a second chance. But what we don't want to do is give a violent drug dealer a get

out of jail free card. Without the threat of serious jail time, a hardened drug dealer has no incentive to give up information on his network. Some parts of the Rockefeller drug law reforms were well intentioned and laudable. Nevertheless it is time to reform the reforms and give back to the district attorneys the discretion that they need to keep us safe.

Let's also give our prosecutors the greatest ability possible to crack down on violent gangs. Gangs today are not like those depicted in Happy Days or Grease. They are in many ways organized crime operations. They are big-money enterprises, and they are downright ruthless. These gangs seek to take over entire neighborhoods. We can not and will not allow this to happen.

Gangs must be treated like organized crime under the law. We loosened the grip of organized crime through federal racketeering statutes. We should do the same when it comes to combating gangs. Harsher penalties should be put in place for any crimes that are committed in furtherance of gang activity. The best way to keep our streets safe from gangs is to get gang members off of our streets.

To further combat this problem, last summer we centralized our police department gang unit – taking officers that were spread out over seven precincts and consolidating them into a single working group that could be deployed to the major hot spots of gang activity. The results? An astonishing 365 percent increase in the number of gang members arrested.

We are fortunate in Suffolk to have one of the best police departments in the world. How effective are they? Suffolk County is continually cited as among the safest suburban communities in America. Over the past six years, total Part I and Part II crimes have been reduced by 20 percent. And this past year, according to New York State Department of Criminal Justice statistics, Commissioner Dormer and the police department lowered major crime another 8.3 percent.

I have long stated that our police department needs to mirror the community it serves, in order to be most effective. That is why it is truly disconcerting that here in 2010, African Americans comprise a mere 2.5 percent of our police force. Hispanics, only 8 percent. We set out several years ago to correct this inequity, not by imposing quotas but by working with our community churches and advocates to encourage more minorities to take the police exam. Well, we doubled our outreach and the result is that

we doubled the number of minority applicants who scored in the three top levels. As we hire more officers in the coming year it is our hope that we will start to see the department becoming more diverse.

Our diversity is a wonderful thing. This is a message that could never be overstated to our younger generation. It is what makes this nation so special; it's what makes this county so great.

We celebrate our diversity in Suffolk County and we must continue to speak loudly and strongly against those who promote hatred or intolerance. This is why last year I established a Student Congress for Justice. This organization, with representatives from 35 school districts, is meeting regularly to share ideas on how our youth can work to foster acceptance in their schools and communities. We have six student board members here with us this evening, please join me in acknowledging their efforts.

We created a Stop the Hate public service announcement airing on cable television. We commissioned and distributed the Broken Identities video – the story of a young Hispanic girl and the challenges she faced in assimilating with her new friends. It is a touching and profound piece that is sure to inspire dialogue in any classroom, and I invite every one of our school districts in Suffolk to obtain this video.

Certainly we face our challenges. But we have cause for celebration as well. On any particular day, we can marvel at the bravery of our servicemen and women protecting our freedoms abroad, or the valiant efforts of our volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers protecting our families here at home. Too often the term hero is used in our culture to describe athletes or rock stars. True heroes are those who put their health and their lives on the line. Out in front of the Dennison Building in Hauppauge we dedicated two memorials last fall – one to the victims of September 11, and one to our Gold Star families who lost a family member in service. I ask you all to join me in recognizing the extraordinary sacrifice of all our Gold Star families.

As one way to say thank you to our heroes, we in Suffolk passed a law to give priority in our affordable housing program to returning veterans. In the fall of this year, we will proudly cut the ribbon on the VA satellite center in Riverhead, to better serve our East End veterans. And I will be asking the federal government to provide VA counseling for family members who have lost a loved one.

For our brave volunteers, the men and women who answer fire and ambulance calls at all hours of the day and night, we developed a program to provide tuition assistance at Suffolk Community College. These programs are not enough in and of themselves to bestow our full appreciation; but they are a way for us to at least say that we will never take their selfless sacrifices for granted.

A great deal was accomplished last year. Even though we faced a horrendous recession and lost 100 million dollars in revenues, we pulled together as Democrat and Republican, executive and legislator, management and union, to make the tough decisions. I submitted yet another tax freeze budget. But while we fared better than most in 2009 due to our strong fiscal management, no one really knows yet how quickly the national economy will recover. And in 2011, we face an unstable state budget, a huge increase in pension costs mandated by the state and a loss of over 40 million dollars in federal stimulus money. We must again work like the ant and prepare for the worst, even as we hope for the best.

We have cut new spending from the previous year's totals for the last two years – something that is unprecedented in Suffolk government. We must continue on this path, because if we do not start preparing right now for what is to come in 2011 we will be doing a great disservice to our taxpayers. To the many organizations that are funded by the county, I ask you to remember this plight that we face. To the county workers who helped us weather the storm in the past year, we ask your continued cooperation in understanding why we must remain vigilant with tight position control. And to my legislative colleagues, I ask that you continue to work with me in the most cooperative form possible to recognize that everything must be on the table for cost containment. Where you seek more spending, be prepared to show revenue to cover that spending. And where you seek the easy glory of eliminating a revenue, you must have the guts to show what services you will cut to offset that lost revenue.

Given the many unknowns in the year ahead, I have again ordered departments to set aside up to ten percent of their expenditures in reserve. Innovations such as private-public partnerships and consolidations must all be discussed. None of us have all of the answers. But collectively we all must have enough answers to save this county from

going the same route as New York State, California and municipalities around the nation that have dramatically increased taxes or imposed severe service cuts.

For the past several years our management style has served as a model for others around the country. Six straight years without a general fund tax increase. The highest bond rating in our county's history. 20 percent lower total crime rate. More affordable housing starts than ever before. A record investment in open space preservation. Leading the state in alternative energy development. Bringing in thousands of jobs from companies such as Canon and Leviton. And most importantly showing the people we were elected to serve that we too are proud residents of this great county who will put aside our partisan differences to help make Suffolk County the greatest county in the greatest nation on God's green earth.

Thank you presiding officer, ladies and gentlemen, and God bless you all.