

Good afternoon, Chairman Reynolds, Majority Leader Flagg, Minority Leader Whalen, Legislators, Broome County Employees, and members of the public and media. Thank you for this opportunity to update you on the State of our County.

I want to get right to the point because you have a business meeting after this and my 10-year-old son Nolan has a basketball game in Whitney Point that starts at 7PM. Nolan-set the timer!

When I took my oath of office 46 days ago, I made a promise to meet, listen, and openly discuss both the successes and difficulties facing Broome County.

So tonight, I want to speak with you frankly. There are a lot of challenges in front of us, but every day I come into the office excited by the opportunity to roll up my sleeves and get to work. I have a dedicated team in place and I want to thank all of the legislators in this room who approved all of our appointments.

Tonight I want to discuss the challenges we face and the work we have done to address them.

One of our most important issues is the health of our county finances.

In 2013 New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli listed Broome County as having “moderate fiscal stress”. In 2014 and 2015 Broome County was listed as having “significant fiscal stress”. The Comptroller's office reviews nearly 2300 local governments in New York each year. We are one of only nine to receive this designation three years in a row.

Having a healthy fund balance is fiscally prudent. It acts as a safety net in the event of unexpected circumstances or hardships.

At the end of 2015 Broome County had a fund balance of \$5.5 million. As we close out 2016, we are expecting to have a fund balance of about \$4.5 million due to several budgeting shortfalls last year.

Based on additional drawdowns from the fund balance, it is projected that we close out 2017 with a fund balance of \$1.5 million dollars -- on a budget of roughly \$370 million.

This puts the county in a precarious financial situation.

I want to be clear: if sales tax falls short of the projections or if the ACA is repealed, or if any number of things out of our control happen, we will not be able to pay our bills.

The county cannot continue to operate like this and we can't wait until budget time to act.

A few weeks ago, we instituted an immediate hiring freeze.

I'm proud to announce that our hiring freeze has already saved ninety thousand dollars in salary and benefits.

Additionally, all non-mandated travel is on hold. Earlier this month my Deputy and I traveled to Albany for the New York State Association of Counties conference. We drove our own cars, bought our own food, and paid for our own hotel. These are the types of sacrifices that I am making and that I am asking my department heads to make.

We have also temporarily consolidated certain positions. Some of our department heads are even doing 2 or 3 jobs while getting paid for one.

We can't permanently keep these employees doing 2 or 3 jobs at once, but their hard work and sacrifice is currently saving the county thousands of dollars each month and we appreciate everything they do for Broome County.

We are also looking at ways to transfer positions within the county to save money whenever possible. For example, instead of filling two vacancies in

Buildings & Grounds, we are transferring an airport custodian over to that department. These are the type of common sense business decisions that are made all the time by our local businesses that we need to do as well to run government more efficiently and effectively.

I just want to say that from the bottom of my heart I appreciate all our employees who are doing more with less in these challenging times. I have visited many county departments and have met many dedicated public servants who work hard each and every day. I'm honored to work with all of you.

I also teamed up with Chairman Reynolds to call for the NY State Comptroller to do a full audit of county finances, which their office has agreed to do. For 10 years Comptroller DiNapoli has drawn bipartisan respect throughout the state and we look forward to an independent study of our financial situation and are eager to work and learn from them on how we can develop more fiscally sound budgets in the future.

We are scrutinizing every expense request and have asked our new purchasing director Tyler West to develop stricter purchasing controls. He is developing a new training system for purchasing

procedures that will simplify and streamline the purchasing process and will lead to cost savings.

Several weeks ago, I announced the formation of a shared services task force that will work to find efficiencies in government and ways to share services.

This is a bipartisan group of current and former elected officials, business, labor, and educational leaders. I'm looking forward to seeing them expand on the already impressive number of existing shared service agreements. We owe it to the taxpayers of Broome County to work closely with our towns and villages to provide quality services as efficiently as possible.

We also owe it to the residents of Broome County to fight the worst public health crisis in recent memory - the heroin and opioid epidemic.

In 2016, 76 souls in Broome County lost their battle to addiction. 76 families were shattered.

I've seen members of my own family addicted to heroin and I've seen way too many former students lose their battle to addiction.

This epidemic has resulted in Broome County having one of the highest property theft crime rates in the state. It is overwhelming our public safety and

emergency services personnel. It's costing us millions of dollars every year in health care, treatment, and criminal justice services.

Our state senator Fred Akshar, a former police officer, said recently that we cannot "arrest our way" out of this epidemic any longer, and I agree.

We must provide law enforcement all the resources they need to go after major drug dealers, but we can't keep arresting people who are addicted and throwing them in jail.

Benjamin Franklin said, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". We need to invest in more prevention, education, and treatment.

So, here's what we have done so far in our first 46 days.

We appointed our Public Health Director Rebecca Kauffman to lead our drug task force because we need the public health director to lead Broome County during this public health crisis.

We wanted this task force to be more inclusive, so we brought our state representatives Assemblywoman Lupardo and State Senator Akshar to the table. We also added local municipal leaders like District Attorney Cornwell, Mayor David and Scott Baker from the Broome County Legislature.

And we added representatives from local community grassroots organizations, who have been on the front lines fighting this epidemic for years.

We filed an historic lawsuit against pharmaceutical companies and doctors who we believe misled millions of people, including thousands of Broome County residents, about the dangers of opioids. They need to be held accountable for the destruction they have caused in Broome County.

We are working with our Emergency Services Coordinator Mike Ponticello to develop a database on the use of Narcan. This will allow us to track spikes in drug overdoses.

Our probation director Lorraine Wilmot and District Attorney Steve Cornwell have agreed to significantly increase the use of electronic monitoring devices for people on probation. That means fewer people in jail and more people who will be able to restart their lives, get the treatment and support they need to become productive members of society.

We coordinated a major conference at Binghamton University that brought together over 60 treatment professionals and local leaders to hear recommendations from the national drug task force for municipalities that we are working to implement.

We have a new full-time drug free school's coordinator who is working to implement community outreach events and partner with school districts and other organizations to provide drug awareness and prevention programs to youth across Broome County.

It is crucial that people who live in rural areas across Broome County get connected to recovery services, which is why within the next several weeks, I will be announcing a multi-agency navigator program that will connect people in rural areas to much needed education and treatment resources.

I'm also happy to announce that Fairview Recovery Services was awarded a major grant to develop a local Recovery and Community Outreach Center that will provide support for individuals and their families who are seeking recovery from substance abuse disorders. Broome County is partnering with them and assisting in selecting a site so that we can quickly get this very important project up and running.

We are also lobbying New York State to put a new 24/7 crisis center in Broome County. The state budget calls for 10 of these to be placed throughout NY State and Broome County needs to have one of them.

Governor Cuomo is also proposing the creation of one recovery high school in upstate NY. So, we are also lobbying the state to get that recovery school here in Broome County.

One of my top priorities is to bring a long-term treatment center for Broome County. I have been in negotiations with a local group that is ready to commit tens of millions of dollars to build a treatment center here. However, they need financing that Broome County alone can't afford.

So, we are advocating with the state to get the funding by applying for URI, CFA, ESD, and other funding sources. These treatment centers could employ hundreds of people with average salaries of \$60,000 per year. Not only will they fulfill a critical need but they will also provide good paying jobs to our community.

This epidemic is evil and insidious and we need to take an all hands-on deck approach.

Until the Fall of last year never in my wildest dreams did I think as County Executive I would be spending so much time talking about the Broome County Airport.

But this is the reality we inherited. Three months before I took office two of our three major airlines

made the decision to pull out, putting the future of our airport in jeopardy.

Much of what has happened at the Airport is out of our control.

Airlines are moving from 50 seat planes to 70+ seat jets and they are finding it difficult to make money at many regional airports like ours.

It is critical we not only maintain our current service but that we look for new service routes. The airport is essential to keeping and attracting businesses to our community, improving our economy, and making it convenient for residents to travel.

I'm going to do everything I can to keep jets flying in and out of our airport. But we just can't close our eyes and wish for something to happen.

We need action. I want everyone to know that just about every day we are working on ways to improve our airport.

Here is what we are doing.

Even before I took office I met with airport officials, Assemblywoman Lupardo, Assemblyman Crouch, and State Senator Fred Akshar to coordinate our efforts to bring more air service to Binghamton.

We are working with our airport officials to develop a new strategic plan that will provide direction on how to grow the airport and its services.

We are also working with our marketing company to develop a new marketing plan for the airport to attract more passengers.

We are partnering with the Chamber of Commerce and local businesses to help promote the airport. When negotiating with airlines in the future, we will have members of local businesses involved to help close the deal.

Potential airlines need local passenger data. So, we are using two Binghamton University interns to reach out to the thousands of business in Broome and its surrounding counties to collect data on how often and to where they travel. We expect to have this data mining operation complete by May and we can then use that information as we negotiate with airlines for more service.

With the loss of two airlines, the taxpayers of Broome County are now being asked to support the airport more than ever before. We cannot rely on the taxpayers or passenger revenue alone to fund the airport.

So, we will be working to grow the airport in other ways to increase revenue and decrease local taxpayer support.

I'll be working with SUNY Broome Community College to start a FAA approved aircraft maintenance Associate's Degree program. This program will attract new students to the area, fill a need for more trained mechanics in our region, and generate interest in the airport.

As our Airport Corridor project nears completion, it is essential that we begin to market the three hundred acres of land that surrounds the airport.

The first step in marketing this property is to get it on the NY State approved list of shovel ready sites. We are filling out that application and expect to be included on that list soon. I look forward to working with Legislator Kiebel, our airport advisory board representative, and Legislator Sopchak, our resident real estate expert, along with the IDA and others to aggressively market this site to companies.

Bringing more businesses to the airport corridor will reduce our tax burden to the airport and create much needed jobs.

And on the subject of jobs...

We have all heard the stats. Over the last five years Broome County lost 6000 jobs. This is a staggering number considering that right now we have about 1500 jobs that can't be filled because our workforce lacks the training.

I met with Greater Binghamton Chamber of Commerce CEO Jennifer Conway within hours of taking office because we need to get people back to work. I have been working closely with her and Kevin Mclaughlin of the IDA to engage our local businesses and to recruit more to the area.

The new one stop shop for business development will open on SUNY Broome's campus later this year. This is a great resource that will bring just about all our economic development organizations under one roof to make it easier for businesses to access the resources they need.

Across the street, the Regional Farmers Market has quickly become a jewel of our community. Local farmers sold over \$300,000 in local products from June - December 2016.

Both of these great projects got done with bipartisan support and it is a great example of how together, we can accomplish more.

We must move quickly to help our small businesses grow. Just a few weeks ago, we received an offer from Rogers Service Group to buy the old DMV building on Clinton Street that has been vacant for more than three years. After discussing this issue with people who live and represent this area such as Legislator Weslar, I can announce tonight that I will be putting in a resolution to sell this property. It will go back on the tax rolls and will pave the way to build a 65,000-square foot addition and add new jobs within the next year.

Once a week I am meeting with a local business. This has been a great learning experience. They have shared with me all their frustrations but also all their successes and in those conversations, we are finding ways to help them.

One thing that comes up a lot is the fact that local businesses want communication of when county Request for Proposals or contracts are out for bid. This is why, in addition to posting the RFP's in the paper, I am working with my team to come up with other ways to engage our local companies in the process. It is crucial that we do everything possible so that taxpayer money stays in Broome County.

Businesses will also soon be able to benefit from our new Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy

Program that with the big help of Legislator Shaw was signed into law last year. Our projected launch date for this program is in late March and it will help our local businesses save a tremendous amount of money on their energy bills - one of the biggest costs of doing business in NY State. This is just the beginning of many clean energy initiatives planned that will save the county and its residents money in the coming years.

Developing our workforce is important. That's why I hired a new Director of Employment and Training, Sara Liu. She has been on the job for 19 days and has already hit the ground running.

Sara has been attending community events, meeting with business and education leaders, and working with other departments within the county to greatly expand the Office of Employment and Training's services and outreach.

On March 22nd at the Broome County Library, OET is partnering with Broome-Tioga NAACP and Binghamton University for a two-hour job training session, which will be followed up with a job fair a few weeks later for all the participants. We will be announcing many more training programs and forums like this that are in the works over the next couple of months.

Working closely with her staff, Sara has developed an Action Plan for the department and is in the process of working on a Strategic Development Plan to set the course for the department over the next few years.

Sara is also, for the first time ever, creating a data driven approach to the department. The only way to understand and measure effectiveness is by recording data and using it to monitor progress. Thank you to Legislator Cindy O'Brien whose valuable input in committee has helped us develop a new and improved approach to workforce training.

We are continually looking for new and innovative ways to train our workforce. One new training program is happening at Willow Point Nursing Home.

Students that are accepted into this program spend time working in the nursing home to learn the skills to become Certified Nursing Assistants. The goal of this program is two-fold: To train the workforce and to address a shortage of CNA's at Willow Point.

I am really excited to work with all the young startups and entrepreneurs who will be the leaders of tomorrow. They bring fresh ideas, new businesses, and a different outlook to the area.

Broome County has three excellent colleges in Binghamton University, SUNY Broome, and Davis College. We need to engage our college students and encourage them to stay here after they graduate.

That is why I have been working closely with students to create a Student Advisory Board that will include representatives from all colleges and local high schools. This board will meet with me monthly to discuss issues important to young people.

In addition, I am launching the most robust internship program the county has ever had. Working with Chairman Reynolds, we want to put an intern in every department in the county. And not just MPA students in the executive office. Let's put engineering students at the arena, let's put students from the new public health school in the Health Department. Let's get interns helping to promote our parks.

These students in Broome County are some of the best and brightest in the state. Creating an internship program that crosses a broad spectrum of disciplines benefits both the students and the county.

Broome County has vibrant downtowns, thriving schools, and beautiful rural areas. Broome County

also has great locations for recreation and fitness. Our Broome County Parks are some of my favorite places to spend a day with my family.

Make sure you check out our new Go All Out campaign that is launching soon. It includes GPS mapping of every trail in Broome County. Whether you want to run, hike, or ski, this new resource makes finding your way easier.

Our new Parks and Recreation Director Matt Gawors has been a nonstop source of energy since day one. He is constantly pitching new ideas and rethinking the way the Parks department can be improved and better utilized.

And, like me, he wants to see a healthier Broome County. That is why I am making a commitment to lead by example. This year I plan to compete in the Broome County triathlon and participate in as many races in the area as possible.

This is a great way to get out, enjoy the community, and meet new people. I encourage you all to join me.

Those of us living and raising a family in Broome County know that it is a great place to live. Our website should reflect that. We need an online portal

to Broome County. It should be easily accessible, informative, responsive, and transparent.

Over the next few weeks, I am asking the public to submit suggestions for what they want to see on Broome County's website. An RFP, based on the suggestions we receive plus those from all the Broome County departments, will be put out in March. I hope to see all the talented local marketing and website firms in Broome County submit a proposal.

And, last but not least, I want to talk about our Veterans. I have been having conversations with Veterans Services Director Brian Vojtisek over the last few weeks. Brian has done an amazing job with and advocating for veterans in our area. But it is clear that he needs more resources and a better location to help our veterans.

That is why I am exploring the creation of a one stop shop for veterans that will bring all our local veteran's services and agencies together. I am working with Legislator Kaminisky and others on identifying a site within walking distance of the new Veterans Clinic. This is still in the early stages but I think that we can have a project ready to go within the next year.

Our veterans sacrificed so much for us. We owe them all the support we can give.

Tonight, I talked about several challenges facing our community.

But I see these challenges as an opportunity.

An opportunity to work hard.

An opportunity to make Broome County a better place for our children.

An opportunity to join together.

And when I say together, I mean it.

We MUST work to put aside our political and ideological differences and learn to compromise and to trust each other.

It will take time and it will not always be easy.

But I know that everyone is in this room for the same reason - to work to leave Broome County a better place for our children and our families.

Thank you and God Bless Broome County.