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**BROOME COUNTY LEGISLATURE  
REGULAR SESSION  
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2002**

The Legislature convened at 4:05 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 prayer offered by Legislator Hudak.

**WRITTEN OR ORAL PRESENTATIONS OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE:**

Chairman Schofield introduced County Executive Jeffrey P. Kraham presenting the State of the County Address for 2002.

CHAIRMAN SCHOFIELD, MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATURE, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS;

In the year since I last stood before you to offer my perspective on the state of Broome County, our nation, New York State, and our community have been through a great deal.

The state of Broome County is strong, but the events of recent months have forced us to face new challenges, challenges that only a year ago would have been outside our collective comprehension.

As we approach the six month anniversary of the tragic events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, it is hard to overstate the impact this has had on our nation, on our state, and on our region. First and foremost, we are a nation at war. For several months, members of the armed services from our community have been in harm's way in Afghanistan, Pakistan and other parts of the world. Today we thank them for demonstrating courage and bravery in protecting freedom around the world.

As Governor Pataki reminded us when he came to Broome County two weeks ago, on 9/11 alone, tens of thousands of jobs were lost. The loss of business investment and profits, capital gains and consumer spending has affected every county in New York State.

What I want to do this afternoon is describe in some detail the impact of the events of the last year on our community and on the operation of County government.

While the next few years will be difficult, I believe that if we continue working together, we will be able to overcome our obstacles and build a community that is an even better place to live, work, and raise a family.

In the Spring of 2001, a sudden worldwide slowdown in the demand for electronic circuit boards and components sent our local manufacturing businesses into a tailspin. Many businesses that counted the previous year as among their most successful were suddenly forced to reduce their workforce.

By the end of last year, we had lost more than 2,500 manufacturing jobs. We all know people who have been affected by this most unfortunate turn of events.

Fourteen months ago, I announced we were going to enhance our commitment to workforce development in partnership with our friends in Tioga County. At that time, I talked about the need to continue attracting a highly skilled and diversified workforce to our community.

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When I asked Patrick Doyle to take on this new endeavor, we had no way to anticipate the economic upheaval we would be facing.

But Patrick has been up to the challenge. Working collaboratively with the Department of Labor, Broome Community College, BOCES, our Office for Aging, and Consumer Credit Counseling, we have been able to successfully co-locate career-related services at our three centers in Owego, Endicott and downtown Binghamton.

Our Binghamton center, directed by Dick Lindhorst, has been flooded with 2,500 new users who have come to obtain job listings, get assistance with resumes and cover letters, and learn how to transfer to a new field.

Grants from Governor Pataki have helped us invest more than \$2 million to help 20 local high-technology, manufacturing and health care firms provide cutting-edge training to more than 1,000 workers in our region. This comes at a time when workers and companies are most in need of support to create a new generation of business opportunities.

Our services to businesses include a unique On-the-Job training program that has provided more than \$130,000 in wage reimbursements to local companies to train new workers on the job.

We have little control over the decisions businesses must make to expand or reduce their workforces. However, when this most recent downturn hit last spring we were ready with a range of services for our workers. I'm very proud of our record in this short period.

When I first took office five years ago, we agreed that in order to get the local economy on track we needed to find innovative ways to maintain the high quality of county services our residents had come to expect, while controlling the property tax burden on these same residents.

I am very pleased with our record of achievement. Working together, the cumulative results of the property tax cuts we have enacted have resulted in a savings of more than \$18 million to taxpayers. Add to that \$7.4 million of sales tax savings to our shoppers, it totals nearly \$26 million of savings.

At the same time, we have made major improvements to the airport, built a new public library and courts building, and continue to do everything we can to promote efficiency in the general operations of county government.

We have reduced debt service to less than when my administration came into office, reduced our contractual expenses, and reduced the principal and interest expenses. Nearly every item of county expense is less than it was five years ago.

Unlike other counties across the state that accumulated millions in surpluses, we adhered to state law requiring us to return any budget surpluses to taxpayers. Our pay-as-you-go philosophy has helped keep the costs of government under control for our residents and businesses and contributed to the creation of more than 7,500 new jobs in our region in the last 5 years.

In 2001 we saw the most significant annual increase in the average selling price of homes on record.

The Members of this Legislature deserve much credit for this success, and I want to take this opportunity to recognize you for it.

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One September morning changed everything. On that day the very essence of who we are as a nation and a people was challenged.

And I have been moved by the tens of thousands of dollars donated, by the hundreds who dropped everything and went to lower Manhattan to help, by the scores of people who have kept the victims and their families in their prayers.

In October, when we presented our budget for this fiscal year, it was still hard to measure the incredible impact one tragic day would have in our region. We now know that 9/11 has prolonged the global recession, making it harder for many local businesses to come back.

Many firms that thought they would be in better shape by the first quarter of 2002 were forced to cut back production and in a number of cases reduce their local workforce.

This uncertainty, a result of the events of 9/11 and the national recession, has had a direct impact on county sales tax revenue. Sales tax receipts for 2001, our largest source of local revenue, were one million dollars less than in 2000, and about 2.5 million dollars less than our growth the prior year.

This recession, like all recessions, has placed extra pressure on human service programs. Nationally Medicaid is facing an unprecedented fiscal crisis that has important implications for our region. Medicaid pays for one-third of all births and nearly two-thirds of all nursing home patients.

Overall Medicaid spending last year grew by 11 percent; expenditures on prescription drugs, which are covered through the program, are growing at an annual rate of more than 20 percent.

The costs for Medicaid are shared among federal, state, and county governments. Broome County's Medicaid costs have risen \$5.6 million since 1998, \$2 million in 2001 alone. We project these costs will increase at least another \$5 million over the next 2-3 years.

While we hope for relief from the federal and state governments, we can't count on it. We all recognize the importance of the Medicaid program and the services provided through it. I look forward to working with you over the remainder of the year to develop a plan for controlling these costs.

In a similar vein, health care costs are spiraling upward. Nationally last year, health spending increased by a whopping 10 percent. In 1997, the county budgeted \$2.1 million for employee prescription drug costs. Our 2002 budget projects that we will spend \$5.2 million on prescriptions. In addition, the county's payments to hospitals are soaring. In 1997, we budgeted \$4.7 million; this year we anticipate spending \$7.3 million.

We have also absorbed increasing costs related to the consolidation of programs and services in to the county. Take 911 for example. In 1997, our Emergency 911 center employed 15 staff at a total cost of a little more than \$700,000. As we've added municipalities to our county-wide system, the overall costs have naturally risen. For 2002, 911 operations will require 42 dispatchers at a total cost of nearly \$2.3 million to county government.

And as you know, there are added county costs associated with expanded state mandated programs such as PINS and Family Health Plus. Family Health Plus, a new health insurance program for the uninsured, has already enrolled nearly 1,000 Broome County residents. This year the Broome County share of the program will be \$339,000.

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State law requires the county to pay for attorneys assigned by the courts to represent the indigent. The State Legislature fixed the rates of compensation and has not changed them for more than a decade. Attorneys are refusing to accept court assignments because of the hourly rates.

Recently, our County Court judges and one of our Family Court judges have interpreted the statute to allow judges to exceed the maximum hourly rates. This has the potential for increasing the budgeted amount for assigned counsel from approximately \$800,000 to close to \$2 million.

While we pursue resolution to this situation in the courts, I have asked the County Attorney to work with the Public Defender, the judges and members of the bar to explore the possibility of establishing a conflicts section of the Public Defender's office to handle criminal cases that are now assigned an outside counsel. A Family Court section to represent indigent clients in Family Court is also under consideration.

Our concern is focused on what statute does or does not provide. I have the utmost respect for members of the bar who take on assigned counsel responsibilities, and hope for a resolution to this conflict as soon as possible.

In these challenging times, we need to do everything we can to minimize the burden of these increasing costs on taxpayers. We are working with Chairman Schofield, Comptroller McLaughlin, Budget Director Badger and Finance Commissioner Knebel to develop a strategy for reducing costs and improving efficiency within county government.

As Broome County approaches its Bicentennial in 2006, it seems appropriate for us to seriously consider how we can improve our local government structure.

Today, I propose that Broome County government take a leadership role by providing funds to any of our towns, villages, libraries, fire districts and school districts that wish to explore consolidation or collaboration of services. Whether it be intergovernmental agreements, technological links that provide information services, or actual merger of departments or taxing entities, increasing efficiency of services to the public and savings to the taxpayers should always be our goal.

I pledge every resource of the County to this important effort. We can't continue to operate as we are. There has never ever been a better time than now.

It was a bittersweet moment in November when we moved the Probation Department to its state-of-the-art facility at One Wall Street. Hearts were heavy with the memory of Ed Swart, who campaigned long and hard for a new space but was never able to enjoy it. Ed's long career in county government and his commitment to helping people is an enduring legacy for all of us.

Earlier this month we lost George Harvey who had served Broome County for 56 years including nearly 30 years as head custodian. George was known for years as "Keeper of the Square," and spent countless hours maintaining the lovely grounds around our courthouse. George will be missed by all of us.

Well before September 11<sup>th</sup>, we had been working on developing a coordinated plan in the event we were faced with an incidence of terrorism in our community. Today, I want to commend Sheriff Dave Harder, our new Director of Public Health Claudia Edwards, and Director of Emergency Services Mike Aswad for all of their hard work putting this plan together.

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This effort involves pulling together hundreds of fire fighters, police officers, hospital workers, and volunteers. We are blessed with a very fine emergency response team in this community. Would you please join me in recognizing Sheriff Dave Harder, Claudia Edwards and Mike Aswad for their fine service to our community.

In recent years Michelle Berry noticed an increase in the number of people CASA was serving with mental health issues. In an attempt to keep these individuals from falling through the cracks, Michelle created a program in partnership with Family and Children's Society. Family and Children's has dedicated a nurse to help people develop the life skills necessary for independent living in the community. Would you please join me in recognizing Michelle Berry for her hard work and for all the positive things she does for Broome County and our community.

Some people thought we were crazy last year when we announced our desire to help create 10,000 high quality jobs in ten years. I believe that despite the significant setbacks we've had in our local economy over the past year, it is very important to keep our eyes on this goal.

Last year, using a grant we received from Governor Pataki's Quality Communities Program, we created an unprecedented public-private partnership to develop an economic development plan for our region.

Over the past year, we have begun putting pieces of that plan in place. At this time, I'd like to recognize just a few people who have been instrumental in this process: Chris Burger, Chair of the Legislature's Economic Development Committee, Alex DePersis, CEO of the Broome Chamber, Dick D'Attilio, Director of the Broome County Industrial Development Agency, Marc Newman, Chairman of the Southern Tier Economic Development Council, and our own Planning Commissioner Julie Sweet.

This is a very committed and talented team of individuals. Would you please join me in recognizing them for all of their hard work and dedication to this important initiative.

None of this would have been possible without the support and commitment of this Legislature. Recognizing our need to do a better job telling our story regionally and nationally, you made significant enhancements to our ability to market this community. Your support helped the IDA launch a new website and initiate a targeted marketing effort that will help us attract new businesses to the community.

As part of this effort we are in the process of identifying properties that will support our economic development strategy. This work will become the foundation of the park system I announced last year. This is a major undertaking, critical to the future of our economy, and will require substantial investments from all levels of government.

We are working closely with Binghamton University to help us focus on technology sectors most appropriate for the park system.

Through all of this, we need to continue to see ourselves as part of a regional economy that includes Tioga, Chenango, Cortland, and Delaware counties and even the northern tier of Pennsylvania.

If we are going to attract business investment to this region, we must, once and for all, do something about wastewater management. Last year, you took the first step by entering into agreement with the Hudson Group, an experienced Albany-based firm, to help us develop a comprehensive program to address wastewater needs.

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They have spent the better part of a year collecting data, interviewing plant operators and local leaders, and preparing a wastewater management strategy. This will help us ensure adequate capacity to support future growth and development in the region. We look forward to having a final report from the Hudson Group sometime this spring.

2000 Census figures show that over the last decade the median age in Broome County has risen from 34 to 38.2. This trend mirrors what's happening nationally. More than 70 percent of people now live to the traditional retirement age of 65, nearly three times as many as a century ago.

We are fortunate to have in Kathy Bunnell and our Office for Aging a first-rate team that fully understands the needs of our older population. Our OFA is a model of a public agency working with other public and private entities to offer quality services to a growing constituency.

It's unbelievable to me that more than 30% of the senior population in Broome County has taken advantage of services available through the Office for Aging. More than 13,000 people are active in senior centers and social day care, receive home delivered meals and personal care services, make OFA the first contact for information and assistance, ride our transit buses, volunteer as Foster Grandparents, or learn job skills through one of our employment programs.

As a report in the Press & Sun Bulletin last spring pointed out, the number of seniors living alone is growing, more than 10,000 in Broome County. This is one of the reasons I believe our support for Senior Centers is so important. In Harpursville, participation in our sparkling new center has more than doubled since opening a little more than a year ago.

One of my goals for this year is to ensure that construction on the Whitney Point Center continues on schedule. I'm also confident that we will be able to make an announcement on the long-awaited Endicott center very soon.

We know from experience with our parents and friends that seniors who maintain relationships with others have a better chance for a longer, healthier, and more active life. Our senior centers help make this possible for hundreds of residents, and indeed provide a unique opportunity for us to be near family and friends as they grow older.

The Willow Point Nursing home has served our community well for nearly 35 years. Members of the Legislature's Health Services committee, chaired by Arlene Nannery and including Brian Brunza, Jim Holley, Wanda Hudak, and George Kolba, have in recent months been working tirelessly on a study of what it would take to improve upon or replace Willow Point.

Willow Point currently provides 31%, no small number, of the nursing home beds in the community. We are one of the only facilities in the area that is open to everyone; we have programs for people with dementia and others who may be hard to place.

The need is obvious. I look forward to working with you in the coming months on finalizing a plan for the future of Willow Point.

For a community our size, we are fortunate to have such a strong public transportation system. Today I'm pleased to announce that a \$1.2 million grant in federal funds, obtained in part through the hard work of Lori Baniak and George Bagnetto, will enable us to jump-start the first phase of a revamped transit program.

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This exciting initiative will include a new BC Lift Bus to meet greater demand, simplification of the fare system, new late night service, and much anticipated Sunday service. We are hopeful that this new experimental service will be a success and result in even more enhancements in the future.

In the summer of 1973, our local paper ran this headline, "The Arena: The New Spirit of Broome County." Two weeks ago, we renewed that spirit with the announcement that the AHL would make a return to the Veterans Memorial Arena as the Binghamton Senators.

This is terrific news not only for our loyal hockey fans, but also for those of us working hard to attract individuals and businesses to this community. As I told the Press & Sun Bulletin, we are to AHL hockey what the Green Bay Packer fans are to NFL football.

The AHL is the premier minor hockey league in the United States. We will again be competing on the same ice with teams from Albany, Syracuse, and Rochester. Remember those games against the Amerks only a few years ago?

I want to thank Senator Tom Libous for his commitment of more than a million and one half dollars for renovations to the Arena, including boxes, remodeled locker rooms, and enhancements to the Arena Club. This is in addition to the \$800,000 the Senator previously secured for arena improvements. We are fortunate indeed to have in Senator Libous a very strong advocate for Broome County and the southern tier.

The return of AHL hockey to Binghamton would not have been possible without the dogged determination of Terry Kane. Terry recognized the immediate impact this would have on the quality of life of this region. He always found creative ways to keep the negotiations moving forward even when there were bumps along the road. Would you please join me in recognizing Terry for his work on this exciting project.

As we look out across our community, there are many other signs of renewed strength and spirit. Last week Site Selection, a national economic development magazine, pointed to Best Buy's new 650,000 square foot distribution center in Tioga County as one example of New York's growing reputation for being business friendly. Officials from Best Buy have told me that one of the biggest reasons they decided to come here was the quality of our workforce, and the outstanding quality of life we enjoy here.

Driving up Airport Road, it's hard to miss the glistening new NLX facility. In a few weeks this plant will be on-line; we're thrilled to welcome NLX to our community of simulation companies including L3 Communications, Link Simulation & Training, Binghamton Simulator Company, Diamond Visionics, and Doron Precision Systems, and Advanced Medical Simulations. Our region's long tradition of being a leader in simulation continues.

We are already seeing dividends from our investment in the arena. Next month country music sensation Toby Keith will take the stage at the Veterans Memorial Arena. I'm not a real big country music fan, but I know that Keith's hit, "How Do You Like Me Now," spent a lot of weeks on top of the country music chart. I understand tickets are moving briskly.

In addition to Toby Keith, the Harlem Globetrotters will be here March 7<sup>th</sup>, the All-American Stampede Rodeo will be here in the fall, and this summer the Arena will host an AAU Basketball tournament featuring 42 teams from throughout the northeast.

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On any given night of the week there are opportunities to take in a lecture at the University, watch your son or daughter perform in a play, attend a performance by the Binghamton Philharmonic, spend an evening with the Mets, or even take a class at Broome Community College.

It goes without saying that our nation, our state, and our community are in a very different place than we were a year ago. This afternoon, I've attempted to outline a few of the challenges that we face, and suggested a few strategies to address them. I'm confident that working together we can see these challenges as opportunities and develop innovative ways to address them.

Thank you.

Mr. Shafer made a motion to go into Executive Session to discuss confidentiality issues relating to Resolution #38 which was held over at the February 21, 2002 Regular session. Ms. Hudak seconded the motion. **Motion to go into Executive Session carried.**

Chair Schofield requested a fifteen minute recess.

Mr. Wike, following discussion in which no action was taken, made a motion to return from Executive Session. Mr. Shafer seconded the motion. **Motion to return from Executive Session carried.**

Mr. Howard made a motion to bring Resolution 38 off the table, seconded by Mr. Wike. **Motion carried, Ayes-18, Nays-0, Absent-1 (Sweet).**

### **RESOLUTION NO. 38**

(tabled at the February 21, 2002 Regular Session)

By Public Works and Finance Committees

Seconded by Mr. Kolba

#### **RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING AMENDMENT TO AGREEMENTS WITH MERIDIAN RESOURCES, LLC D/B/A BROOME ENERGY RESOURCES, LLC FOR THE COLLECTOIN AND USE OF LANDFILL GAS**

Mr. Pasquale made a motion, seconded by Mr. Kavulich, to reword Item 5 to read "In the event NYSEG should default in the performance of their power purchase during the first 15 years of this agreement..." **Amendment carried, Ayes-16, Nays-0, Absent-3 (Burger, Lindsey, Sweet).** **Resolution as amended carried, Ayes-14, Nays-2 (Brunza, Whalen), Absent-3 (Burger, Lindsey, Sweet).**

Mr. Howard made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Pasquale. **Motion to adjourn carried.** The meeting was adjourned at 5:59 p.m.



