

Good morning, and welcome to everyone. Happy New Year, and best wishes for a successful and prosperous 2019.

Thanks especially to Kate Manley and everyone at the Rensselaer County Regional Chamber of Commerce for organizing this event, and for inviting me to speak again this year, and a special congratulations to Kate on her new arrival this past year.

When I spoke here last year, I was just days - actually just hours - into my term as County Executive. I laid out an optimistic and energetic plan for our county and my administration. We set our expectations high, and hopefully, we have met or exceeded those expectations and goals.

One year later, there have many developments and changes in our county, and in the state and national scene. We have been hard at work at the county, trying our best to make a

difference, but regardless of the changes, I remain very optimistic about the future of our county. I am even more optimistic about 2019, given some of the success we had as a county in 2018.

As I have said before, I believe our greatest days as a county are still ahead of us, and that our county is ready to fulfill the promise and legacy of the innovators and inventors who made Troy and Rensselaer County attain greatness more than 100 years ago. Every day, we work to ensure greatness in our county, to lay a foundation for prosperity and success in the future, and to provide the highest level of service possible at a cost our residents can afford.

I am proud to report, we have made significant accomplishments in that mission in 2018.

In fact, much of our work culminated in three significant accomplishments just last month.

On December 3, my first budget as County Executive was approved unanimously, with bi-partisan support. The 2019 budget includes no tax increase, maintains needed services, even strengthening and expanding important services in some areas, and ensures the strong ratings and reviews earned by the county are protected.

The 2019 budget also is the eighth consecutive county budget under the state tax cap. That means that every year the tax cap has been in place, Rensselaer County has succeeded in being under the cap. We are one of only a handful of counties across the state that can point to a record that includes staying under the tax cap every year.

We are proud of that record, as it shows Rensselaer County takes very seriously our mission of carefully managing every tax dollar entrusted to us. During 2018, my team went to work,

working to generate a savings in any and all areas possible. The 2019 budget was helped with these cost savings that totaled nearly \$2 million in personnel savings, purchasing modernizations, and revisions to retiree health care that generated a savings for both retirees and the county.

The budget highlights a strong partnership we were fortunate to forge with members of the County Legislature, including Chair of the Legislature Mike Stammel, Vice Chairwoman Kelly Hoffman, Vice Chair for Finance Bob Loveridge, and Majority Leader Ken Herrington, along with Minority Leader Peter Grimm. I genuinely appreciate the cooperation and partnership between my office and county lawmakers, and know, like all of you in your businesses, we are stronger working together than we are working apart. I also want to acknowledge how the Legislature benefits from having business owners like Leon Fiacco, Ken Herrington, Scott Bendett, Bob Loveridge, Jeff Wysocki and Chuck Peter serving and giving us the benefit of their experience in the various businesses they are in.

The unanimous adoption of the budget was followed by the county reaching a settlement with our largest labor union, UPSEU. The contract is notable in that it is the first contract approved before expiration in approximately two decades and is fair to both workers and the county taxpayer.

And on December 18, we were proud that our efforts and hard work during 2018 were recognized by Moody's Investors Service, which upgraded our county bond rating from A1 to Aa3. This is the first upgrade of our county bond ratings in several years.

The Moody's upgrade means Rensselaer County has now advanced to the high- grade ranking level for bonds. In the report on county finances and the bond rating upgrade, Moody's noted strong and positive financial management in county government. We are particularly proud that our efforts,

done every day throughout county government, to reduce costs, defray debt and ensure efficiency, were recognized by Moody's in the positive report and ratings upgrade.

So.... In December we had unanimous passage of our budget, a contract settled early with our largest union, and a bond rating upgrade. That.... Ladies and gentlemen, is a December to remember!..... And on top of that my Red Sox won the World Series in October!

All of our efforts are focused on creating an environment for investment and growth in our county. When I met with you last year, there were rumblings of something big on the horizon. By spring, the rumors intensified, and culminated with an historic night in Schodack when a speaker stood before the Town Board and announced "I represent Amazon."

The selection of Rensselaer County and the Town of Schodack for the location of the Amazon distribution facility is historic and possibly unprecedented as an opportunity for our county. We have worked carefully on the county and town levels to maximize this avenue for growth, with approval for the project

granted this past summer. There has been a lawsuit by residents, but we are very optimistic the lawsuit will be decided soon and allow the Amazon project to proceed.

We are equally confident the Amazon project will spur considerable growth and investment in the Route 9 corridor in Schodack and surrounding areas. And Amazon will be added to a growing list of accomplishments in our county, including the job expansions at Regeneron. Add that to retail expansions in North Greenbush, Brunswick, Troy and East Greenbush, revitalization of the Columbia Turnpike corridor in East Greenbush, small business growth in Troy, and you have real cause to look forward to a stronger, more vibrant and diverse business climate in Rensselaer County during 2019 and beyond.

Let's look at some other accomplishments in Rensselaer County during 2018:

- At MetLife, we helped with a software and equipment purchase, helping to retain 318 jobs at this important company in our county;
- At 255 River Street, we supported renovation of existing building in downtown Troy to help create 13 new jobs;
- We supported Finelli Development with construction of a 3 story, 21-unit student housing building, with 57 bedrooms, creating new opportunities for housing and several new jobs;
- We also supported Greenbush Associates with construction of an office and light assembly building, helping retain 295 job, creation of 100 new jobs, and 49 temporary construction jobs.

More and more people and companies are looking to Rensselaer County as a place to invest and visit and shop. Our sales tax revenues are strong and a factor in how we were able to hold the line on taxes for 2018. And the strong sales tax

numbers were also a factor cited by Moody's in a report leading to the county's bond rating upgrade.

This good news is accompanied by still impressive momentum from the national economy in terms of job creation and expansion. Just last month for example, 312,000 jobs were created. Many say there are more jobs than workers, which is true in some employment sectors in the county.

To help meet this need, we are participating in the GAME soft skills training program offered through our Social Services and Employment & Training departments. GAME stands for: Gaining And Maintaining Employment, and is a 2 week soft-skills program focusing on job and employ-ability readiness training for Social Service clients takes place each month at the HVCC Educational Opportunity Center in Troy. Participants are trained in the employer identified skills of communication, professionalism, responsibility, and flexibility in the workplace

Guest speakers from the business community come in to speak to participants about the application and interview processes along with providing assistance for mock interviews, with targeted recruitment at the end of the 2-weeks with businesses interviewing participants for employment. This program is a direct result of feedback my administration received from you, the local business community.

The positive economic and job growth numbers are framed by some dramatic changes in the state political scene.

In fact, we are probably seeing the most dramatic changes in state government in generations. The change may be enough to be termed unprecedented.

The question is, as we head into 2019 and a new legislative session, what does this mean for upstate?

Sadly, it is historic how little attention has been given at times to upstate. And given the switch in leadership in the Senate, there is ample reason to be concerned about the future and whether resources will be allocated in a way that helps revitalize our county.

With the new Democratic majority in the State Senate, we can likely expect expansion of benefits including health care and leave benefits, a relaxation of many important public safety laws, and a host of new regulations on businesses and sadly, farms that are already struggling. We can also expect a climate of heavy regulation and government involvement that may sound good in theory but is impossible to put into practice.

Ask yourselves – does upstate New York need a new round of regulations and encumbrances as it works for a better future? Have we ever been able to legislate our way to prosperity?

I think the answer is clear. The past ten years have shown us that too much government yields too little in the way of results. This is particularly true when overregulation is coupled by a lack of attention and resources when problems arise – namely, the water crisis in Hoosick Falls, and the many failures of water and sewer infrastructure in many small communities.

And it is well known that state economic development initiatives, despite millions upon millions spent in television advertising, have produced little in the way of jobs, especially upstate.

The new Senate majority will have a clear choice when leading. Do they choose political rhetoric that may be popular at the polls or realistic policies that will renew prosperity and improve quality of life for those living beyond New York City?

I do want to recognize members of our state leadership team, where there have also been changes. Congratulations to State Senator Daphne Jordan, who succeeds Kathy Marchione as the representative for the majority of Rensselaer County along with Saratoga and Columbia counties.

Congratulations also to my former colleagues in the Assembly and Senate, John McDonald and Neil Breslin, on their reelections.

And congratulations are also in order to Assemblyman Jake Ashby, who won election not once but twice in 2018. Jake ran in a special election for my former seat in April and was elected again in November.

My best wishes to Neil, Daphne, John and Jake, and others who represent this region and state in the State Legislature. To our representatives - we need your best efforts during 2019.

Some of those best efforts will hopefully include realistic funding for upstate infrastructure needs. The need for improvement of existing water and sewer lines in upstate, including communities throughout Rensselaer County, is significant. Existing water and sewer lines in many communities date back to pre-World War II and even older. Unexpected repairs and patches are very expensive and disruptive to daily life and business in places like Troy, Rensselaer, and the villages of Nassau and Castleton.

The problem of a declining existing infrastructure base is compounded by the lack of resources for expansion of new water and sewer lines in our county and region. Places like Schodack, Sand Lake, Schaghticoke, East Greenbush and Brunswick would be helped significantly by funding and support for expansion of new water and sewer lines.

In the strongest possible terms I urge all leaders, on the state and federal levels, to join us in providing a consistent, safe and healthy source of public water to our neighbors in Hoosick and Petersburg. Residents in those communities have struggled for too long with the PFOA situation, and a resolution is needed. Extending water lines from the Tomhannock, or other suitable water source, would open up that area of the county while also ensuring a clean and safe source of water that all residents need and deserve. This is an area where federal leadership can particularly make a difference.

And for too long, over six decades in fact, residents of Nassau have been in the toxic shadow of a landfill with more waste than Love Canal. Rensselaer County was proud to recently join with residents to map a comprehensive clean-up solution to the Loeffel landfill. We ask our state and federal leaders to provide the support and guidance needed to make such a clean-up a reality.

We also need a halt on new regulations in our state. We are seeing major legislative initiatives, including Raise the Age legislation, adopted before the exact method of implementation or cost is determined. We have heard of new and potentially costly gun legislation. There are also rumors of tough new regulations on farms, including labor requirements that would essentially unionize workers, create different tiers of regulation, higher environmental standards and production rules. Our farmers are struggling with enough and simply cannot afford any more. Farming is central to the heritage of our county and remains a large, possibly our largest, employer. I look forward to working with members of the farm and agriculture community to keep farming a central part of life and business in our great county.

As always, as every county leader must, I need to call again on state and federal leaders to begin working on reform of costly mandates. As is well known here in Rensselaer County, over 90 cents of every tax dollar in our county is used for mandates.

That is too expensive, and quite frankly insane, and sadly, our fiscal success with a unanimous, bi-partisan zero tax increase budget for 2019 and an upgrade of our bond rating by Moody's is all done despite the massive burden placed on our county by mandates. Imagine what we could be doing if reasonable measures were employed to allow for reform of mandated costs in this county.

I want to underline for you all the word reasonable. There are very reasonable ways to reform mandates without affecting the safety net that is needed by many of those who are less fortunate. As I noted during my State of the County last year, New York State is one of the few states to require counties to fund, at a rate of 25 percent, mandated costs. New York is also one of the only, if not the only, to provide all federally mandated programs and all optional mandated programs. Essentially, New York State is not just providing 100 percent of mandated costs to residents but in reality 125 percent, and counties must pay 25 percent of these very expensive costs.

The opportunity this creates is significant. New York could simply continue to require that core mandated programs are provided and allow counties to determine which of the optional mandated programs are to be provided. This would create by our estimate the opportunity for several million dollars in savings which could be used for property tax relief and infrastructure investment. It is a simple, common-sense idea that deserves a fair hearing in Albany and I hope such a hearing is given during the coming legislative session.

Along with economic development, there are some interesting areas we will be tackling in our county.

The first is respite care. Our seniors have given so much to build our county and protect our country. The Van Rensselaer Manor facility operated by the county is one of the top nursing facilities in the region. We are fortunate to have a dedicated

and focused team at the Manor who work every day to provide a high level of care for residents. But more and more seniors want to remain at home, staying independent well into their 70s and 80s and in many cases into their 90's.

We want to create some options for seniors, and will be researching the establishment of respite care, which is a level of service where seniors could be brought for several hours a day while remaining at home. That would mean a break for family members, even the senior, and also mean reduced costs for taxpayers, who do not have to pay for more expensive round the clock care at senior facilities. We look forward to making progress on this front.

Internally, we will also be looking to improve the county's technological capabilities. We believe we can do more to expand our county's technology infrastructure, and to modernize and broaden our service. We plan to name a new head of our county tech department, following a retirement,

and will be making other steps to streamline, update and modernize service. The county will continue with maintaining what we believe is a high standard for maintaining proprietary data, including tax, financial and voter information, and expanding our connection with the community.

In some ways, this work started earlier this year when my administration took the basic but needed steps to establish a Facebook and Twitter page. This work has enabled the county to effectively reach tens of thousands of residents in our county and we look forward to expanding this work in 2019. These new communication avenues help us ensure county government is open, accountable and efficient.

We also have work to do improving our network of county roads. Our roads are in many ways the backbone of our service to the majority of residents, and we made road work a priority during 2018. We want to do more to maintain and improve the over 300 miles of county roads in our county. And many of our

bridges deserve and need attention. This past year saw a number of successful county bridge improvement projects. More assistance from the state and federal levels will mean more miles of roads paved and more bridges replaced.

Lastly, the war against heroin and opioid addiction continues. We are continuing to see tragedies, including recent deaths from overdoses just last month. Too many have been lost or damaged by this epidemic, and too many families live in fear and uncertainty. I thank our Opioid Recovery Coordinator Neil Kelleher for his work, and the many volunteers and team members working in the community to lend hope and help to those struggling. Rensselaer County is proud to have established a hotline that is in operation seven days a week, twelve hours a day, staffed by volunteers who can guide those willing to avenues of recovery.

I also want to sound a warning to our state leaders if they opt to legalize recreational marijuana. We are already in the grips

of a generation-scarring opioid epidemic. Legalizing marijuana will send a confusing message to our young people and those struggling with addiction. It will likely lead to more drug casualties and more disruption to family and communities. I would especially urge state leaders to very carefully weigh the potential costs to society and family before approving recreational marijuana. We have now, inexplicably, gone from “Say no to drugs to Say yes to Government taxed drugs.”

There has been much in the way of progress in our county in terms of economic development and job creation. And there are still areas that need attention, including former industrial sites in Hoosick Falls and the long dormant Fort Orange Paper Company in Castleton. These are sites that were important parts of our economic heritage and we want them revitalized and part of our future.

I also want to thank members of the Chamber for their support and partnership this year. At important junctures, including the

Amazon project, you have shown leadership and strength. You have helped give many new and small businesses a proper launch into the public and kept institutions like the Victorian Stroll a major part of county life. Your work is appreciated and needed. Thank you.

I feel energized and ready to take on the challenges and opportunities that await Rensselaer County. I believe greatness is around the corner and have worked to set a tone that is focused on moving forward, doing more, and leading with energy, optimism and vision. We have been able to accomplish great things in 2018, a unanimously adopted budget with no tax increase and the eighth consecutive budget under the tax cap; a union contract that will produce a savings and ensures continued service and efficiency; millions of dollars saved, and an upgrade in the county bond rating.

These positive actions mean we have laid a foundation for the future and set a course for a more prosperous tomorrow. It is

up to us to recognize our opportunity and our place in history. Great things await us, and I look forward to 2019 with real optimism and excitement. Rensselaer County is on the move and becoming a destination for investment by businesses big and small, new residents and those looking for better quality of life. I hope you join me in sharing this sense of optimism and excitement, as we work to build a stronger and better county for all.

We have had past achievements that are historic and important. But I truly believe Rensselaer County's best days are ahead. I look forward to working cooperatively with everyone interested in building a better, stronger Rensselaer County, that we can continue to take pride in as our future and our home.