

2017 State of the County Message Oneida County Executive Anthony J. Picente, Jr.

Thank you to Danielle's and its staff for the fine job they've done in hosting this event. I want to thank Father Paul Angelicchio for doing the invocation, President VanWagoner for emceeding the event and Steve Acquario for that wonderful introduction.

I would like to start by acknowledging my partners in government. First and foremost, I want to recognize the unbelievable commitment and dedication of all our county government workers. They carry out our mission with professionalism and skill every single day. They are the best government workforce in the state. I want to thank the members of the Oneida County Board of Legislators for their service and dialogue, especially the Chairman of the Board of Legislators Gerald Fiorini. I want to thank my department heads who implement the vision we outline through programs and services that meet the needs of our people. I want to thank Sheriff Robert Maciol, District Attorney Scott McNamara, County Clerk Sandy DePerno and Comptroller Joseph Timpano. I want to thank Mayor Robert Palmieri of Utica and Mayor Jaqueline Izzo of Rome for their continued partnerships.

I want to thank my wife Eleanor and my sisters and nieces who are here with me today, for their constant support and encouragement.

I stand before you now for the eleventh time. When I became County Executive I set out to rebuild county government so it would serve the people in the most efficient and effective way possible and we continue to do that each and every day. I also set out to move this community forward in ways many thought were not possible.

That is why I am proud to say today that the state of Oneida County is strong. Strong because our people are strong. Strong because our people are resilient. Strong because each day, each month, each year we strive to be better.

We are strong because we didn't fold last December when AMS was lost. We took the loss not from a point of weakness, but rather a signature of strength. Vowing to learn from any missteps, while moving forward to our goal.

We solidified New York State's commitment and let the industry know that we are standing tall. The Marcy site, better known as Nano Utica, continues to be the cornerstone of our economic development agenda. With Governor Cuomo, our state delegation and all of our partners committed, we will have a tenant on that site, and it will come sooner rather than later.

The other side of the road has Quad C, for which we have waited to be occupied. Just recently we've been told that it will be occupied very soon with a chip packaging partner of General Electric.

I continue to be a strong partner with Mohawk Valley Health System's plans to build a new hospital for our community. In the coming weeks and months, we will work with MVHS, the City of Utica and the State of New York to move this project forward.

This project is about health care, plain and simple. The quality of it and access to it for everyone in the region. Public discussion on the matter has improved, and while the community can debate over where it goes, let's not lose sight that our health care system needs improvement and a new facility is the best medicine.

So while we are strong, we should always strive to be better.

A year ago, I came before you and spoke of how many levels of government and taxing jurisdictions we have in Oneida County. The number is still astounding for a county of our size, as last year the county, cities, towns and villages spent \$624 million on government operations alone. I also said we needed to look at how sales tax is distributed and determine if a new formula, coupled with consolidation of services, would save our taxpayers money and still meet their needs.

At the end of 2016, just after the county budget was passed, I convened a committee to discuss possible alternatives to the sales tax formula. Immediately there was controversy. Who was on it? Who wasn't? Resolutions were passed by town and village boards stating they would not accept any recommendation from this committee. Village mayors met and said that taxes would have to be raised. Some county legislators even pledged not to vote for any change whatsoever. The committee had met only once and no plan had even been discussed yet. I was chastised by village mayors, criticized by some town supervisors and residents were told I was taking away their municipality's identity and services. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

My intentions were and always will be strictly for the betterment of our county. I love this county. I love the family of Oneida County. This exercise was and is to find ways to make things better, more affordable, more efficient and a place where more people will come to live, work and play.

So I ask you: is it wrong to look at practices and formulas that have been in place for over half of a century or more? Should we not have a public discussion on how to look at these issues and see if they still work in today's world? I do not apologize for doing what I have been elected to do: make this community better, safer and less expensive. I will not stop.

Property taxes will never go down in any real way if sales tax is not proportionate to the levels of government and the services they provide. This also cannot be accomplished unless we receive true state mandate relief and municipalities start working together through collaboration and partnerships to reduce the size, scope and cost of governments.

We have too much government doing too little for too much money. I'm confident we can do more for less. Our taxpayers deserve government leaders who will at least look for better ways and discuss them. If I had made this statement about leaders in Albany or Washington everyone would agree. Why don't we hold ourselves to the same standard?

I have tried to incentivize good government through programs like Project ARGO which was funded with half a million dollars to bring real consolidations to completion. Why don't we have one civil service department covering every city, town and village? Why don't we have one countywide purchasing department? Why don't we have one IT department? Why don't we have consolidated policing? Why don't we have metro fire service? Why don't we have one central

planning and zoning department? Why not a centralized clerk's office? Why not district courts? Why don't we have governments looking to work with their neighbors to eliminate unnecessary layers of government? At \$624 million in operations alone, I think we owe it to the hard-working taxpayers of this county to talk about every option and to pursue every cost-cutting procedure.

A good example of this would be the multitude of parks, recreation and youth services we have in this county. There are 47 governments spending nearly \$7.3 million a year on parks, recreation and youth services. Twenty-six towns, 17 villages and three cities, and many are running their own parks system and their own youth services system. We could work together as partners, and run one system cheaper and more efficiently while providing residents with more options, not less. Consolidation isn't about cutting services, it's about removing waste from duplication. We would save on personnel, equipment, maintenance, overhead, programming and many other aspects. And that's not all. As one entity we could leverage state and federal funds that many smaller governments acting alone would not have the ability to pursue.

Don't tell me it can't be done. It can. It's being done in counties all across the country and their taxes are lower, their regulations are streamlined, their processes are more efficient and because of these things, they are growing while we have put a ceiling on our potential.

Governor Cuomo's budget includes a mechanism to allow the county executive to engage such discussions and let voters decide on the outcome. While I was originally skeptical of this because I believe as leaders we should be able to get in the room and make decisions that are best for taxpayers without force, I will use it. I will convene our governments and I hope they will join me to have these discussions.

I have held this office for just over ten years now and in that time we have made great progress. When I began, we looked at all that county government was doing and worked to make each area better. During the course of that process we scrapped some antiquated methods and implemented new ideas that led to a better way of doing things: we consolidated 9-1-1, upgraded to a medical examiner system, created a partnership with the Oneida Nation, received numerous credit rating upgrades, stabilized our finances, developed lead prevention programs, contracted to create an animal humane investigation unit and there are many more. As I stand here today, we have received the first delivery of 485 new public safety radios for the Utica, Rome and New Hartford Police Departments and the Sheriff's Office, costing \$1.6 million. This equipment is part of an essential \$7.5 million public safety upgrade we can only do together, because we consolidated. We consolidated county offices and functions while restructuring how county government looks to those who interact with it.

While we have moved forward in many areas, there is more work to be done. I constantly challenge my department heads to be better at what we do. Reboots are sometimes necessary components of moving any community forward.

The Department of Social Services is the largest department in county government. As I have said many times, and it bears repeating, we have the best social services workers in the State of New York and what they do every day is a true public service. However, in a department of this nature that is so heavily mandated by the state and federal regulations, it can be difficult to innovate the way we do business. This year we will evaluate certain DSS operations and see if the way we are doing business is the best it can be.

We will look to restructure four key areas: intake, employment, support and fraud.

We will assess our intake operations to assure we are utilizing the proper technology, tactics and techniques that are available to meet the needs of this community. We will examine and make any necessary changes to our employment division so that our focus is on helping people achieve the dignity and pride that comes from work. Last year we moved 982 people off of temporary assistance and into a job. Are they keeping those jobs? Are they succeeding? Are they on a path to self-reliance? That's why we must look at our support services to make sure the hurdles keeping people from working are being removed.

Finally, we will look at our fraud division and change the way we go after those who abuse the system internally and externally. If you abuse the social services system for your own personal gain that is a crime which shows an egregious moral bankruptcy. We do not tolerate those who steal while children go hungry and families struggle to make ends meet, and we will strengthen our efforts to hold those criminals accountable for their actions.

We have attacked the opiate addiction ravaging this entire nation head on, bringing everyone together: educators; health, services and criminal justice professionals; elected officials and parents. Recently a student approached me to be on the steering committee. Just as we have included parents, this year we will add that student and more from other school districts around the county to get another perspective from those who see this epidemic up close every day.

In 2016, we made progress. We created a partnership with the Center for Family and Life Recovery to fund an educational and prevention effort. Two new positions dealing with addiction have been created through grant funding awarded to the county: a peer engagement specialist and a family navigator. These positions help assist family members through the recovery system creating a link between agencies and people dealing with addiction.

We opened a methadone clinic in Rome which has the capacity to serve up to 150 patients. At law enforcement agencies throughout the county we have installed MedX return units for the safe disposal of unwanted and unused pharmaceuticals. When these drugs are left unattended they can become the first step to a person's opiate addiction.

We convened the first ever meeting of the Opiate Task Force Steering Committee with the mission to prioritize needs, offer advice and give direction to the membership of the task force. The goal of the task force is to increase prevention, promote recovery efforts, and create community links to end gaps in services for those with opiate addiction. The next meeting in this process will take place in 13 days.

In 2017, we will increase treatment by opening a second methadone clinic in Utica. In collaboration with five counties and the Hutchings Psychiatric Center, we are in the planning stages of opening a Regional Crisis Center for Addictions. This center would be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This center would address acute care and long-term treatment and planning. Also with these counties, we will create a crisis respite services model for children up to age 18 that will connect them with the services they need. Through a mobile crisis service team we will allow access to these services to all who need them by removing the barrier of transportation.

I, along with Sheriff Rob Maciol and District Attorney Scott McNamara continue to be proactive in combating this epidemic. The Oneida County Sheriff's Office continues to use Narcan to save people's lives in this community. The District Attorney has announced a plan to assist in this fight by asking all law enforcement agencies to treat every opiate overdose death as

an active homicide. I applaud both of them today as they join me as co-chairs of the Oneida County Opiate Task Force Steering Committee. This is a community problem and we are coming together to defeat this scourge that is devastating family after family.

Together we can accomplish so much more than when we go at things alone. That has always been my approach.

The Part County Sewer District has done an amazing job dealing with some of the most important projects in Oneida County over the past 10 years. Likewise, the Mohawk Valley Water Authority has been a model in successful regionalization and consolidation that has saved municipalities hundreds of millions of dollars since its inception. These two systems were created at different times but encompass nearly identical areas. Water and sewer systems are prime for the type of consolidation that you hear me constantly preach. Every municipality in the water authority has sewer pipes that are either in disrepair due to government in-action, or are being fixed at great cost to village or town taxpayers.

As one entity a Mohawk Valley Sewer and Water Authority would see an inherent savings that could reach millions of dollars. Water and sewer pipes could be fixed at the same time instead of dealing with disparate schedules that conflict with road maintenance and other infrastructure needs and repairs. There are over 500 miles of pipes and 11,000 manholes. The average cost to repair a foot of sewer pipe is \$150. Why would you dig into that ground at two different times? As the sewer infrastructure of our villages and towns and the City of Utica age, many of these municipalities will face crushing expenses and fines if they cannot repair their systems. To that end, I propose a meeting with the Commissioner of Water Pollution Control, the Executive Director of the Mohawk Valley Water Authority and the Authority's Chairman of the Board to begin a discussion of whether such a consolidation makes sense and achieves the efficiencies we seek.

Economic development is critical. When I started today, I touched on our economic development agenda. In the past month, I aggressively approached global technology company Foxconn about its public desire to locate a multi-billion dollar plant here in the United States. Since then, I have reached out to our federal representatives and I want to thank Senator Chuck Schumer for reaching out to me and engaging on this issue. Some say it's pie in the sky. Some say it will never happen. But many, many more appreciate the approach. I believe in being aggressive. I can tell you for certain that you can't get a hit if you don't swing.

Nanotechnology is a reality in this region. We are going to see the growth and jobs I spoke about earlier. I believe that. I also believe we need the kind of approach that highlights every asset and chases every lead.

The bottom line is I do not believe we are currently doing enough. As nano became closer to a reality, it became clear to me that economic development became too singular in focus. That left too many other opportunities on the table.

Our reboot in economic development starts today. We will look at downtown development, small business expansion and creation, innovation and incubation, tourism, education, cybersecurity, UAS, our airport and more. We will create a legislative agenda that helps us create an environment for our economy to grow. Most importantly, we are going to create the connectivity necessary for success.

Economic development is no longer going to be an approach that is myopic in view. It's not all dollars and cents, incentive packages and PILOTs. These are just some of the tools in the toolkit. We need to highlight everything we have to offer, but we also need to foster everything that is already here. Every child needs to have the opportunity to do more than just stay here; they need to be able to chase their dreams here. That's the approach to economic development we must have and will have going forward. Whether that dream is to develop new technologies, invent the next smartphone app, be a small business owner, an engineer, a farmer, a musician or America's next great chef, this county and our region has to be a place they can chase those dreams.

To spearhead this effort I will ask the Board of Legislators to create a Director of Economic Development. This position will be the lead on all things economic development for the County of Oneida. The director will work with all of our partners in government and the community to implement a universal approach.

This new director will also work with another county-led collaborative effort, an initiative I created in this very speech in 2013. Vision 2020 has been a success and it continues to prepare us for an economy immersed in advanced technologies, while creating a community that meets the needs of a growing population. Vision 2020 set out to make this region workforce-ready, and it continues to do just that.

We looked at three areas at first: education, access and housing. The strides that have been made through this partnership are unprecedented. The examples are many, and in the coming weeks we will release our 2017 progress report, but I wanted to mention some highlights here today.

First, we set out to give youth the hands-on experience necessary for success. In 2013, there were only 422 internships countywide. In 2016, there were 1,222. Last year, we held a job opportunity and career day for ninth graders-the first ever in this community-to inform students of the opportunities in this area and the skills needed to actually seize them. More than 1,200 students and 50 businesses participated. This partnership was a joint effort between Mohawk Valley Community College, the Genesis Group and the School and Business Alliance.

In 2016, we also created the Pathways to Technology and Early College High School Program that will offer high school students the opportunity to receive both their Regents Diploma and a degree from MVCC in Semi-Conductor Manufacturing Technology. We created programs through MVCC for unmanned aircraft systems and mechatronics focused on the emerging job market and expanded engineering programs at SUNY Polytechnic Institute to offer high school students undergraduate programs in technology. Last year MVCC and Utica College's cybersecurity programs were also both designated as Centers of Academic Excellence by the National Security Agency, and as one of six regional cyber resource centers nationwide.

Let me be clear, the region's refugees are essential and vital to any of our future success. They are an asset beyond measure. Vision 2020 looks for ways to connect minority and underserved populations, especially immigrants, to economic opportunities. We have streamlined all of our English as a Second Language Programs to increase access for our vital refugee and immigrant population. We identified a gap in ESL programming for people ages 18-21, and now that programming exists. We are better community for it.

In 2016, we expanded Vision 2020 to include transportation including connectivity, alternatives and accessibility. The work they have completed in a short period of time has been an impressive effort. We have submitted an application to the New York State Energy Research Development Authority to commission a study to connect all roadways in Oneida County focusing on smart technologies. We surveyed the top 25 employers in Oneida County regarding transportation use and needs. The committees identified opportunities to expand and complete bike trails within the county while digitizing bike and pedestrian maps.

Griffiss International Airport continues to be the anchor tenant of the Griffiss Business and Technology Park. This year, we have developed a list of priority projects that we believe will position our airport as a cornerstone of development for the entire region. Together with the state of New York and CenterState CEO, we will embark on creating the future of aviation in Rome.

We will create the Griffiss UAS Innovation Center. This project includes the renovation of Building 100 to create a space for research, development, testing and manufacturing of UAS systems. Along with MVCC, we will develop a UAS Technology Business Incubator inside the center that will be on the frontline of creating high tech businesses in the unmanned aviation industry. In addition, this center will expand current offerings to create a two-year UAS degree program at MVCC.

Our airport will embark on becoming a commercial hub for regional travel to support new business and tourism travelers. We will seek the assistance of the state in constructing a 20,000 square-foot passenger terminal building addition that will provide increased economic development opportunities to the region's businesses.

We will also expand the operation space accommodating our maintenance, repair and operations tenant as they create over 200 new jobs in the area. We will expand our MRO career education pipeline by expanding MVCC's airframe and power certificate training program allowing more students to complete the program and be hired right here in Oneida County.

Agriculture and tourism continue to be key economic drivers in our region. Oneida County has 1,066 farms covering 26.5 percent of our total acreage. We do \$133 million in total farm sales per year. Oneida County's tourism sector supports 19,000 direct and indirect jobs and is a \$1.3 billion a year industry. We must look for ways to bolster these industries and continue to create the inherent synergies between them.

Our agricultural-tourism committee has been developing a plan that continues to move us in the right direction. We have created a new inventory of all ag-tourism assets in Oneida County and will create new marketing materials to highlight that effort. This year, we will launch a paid advertising campaign showcasing all of our agricultural offerings and will finalize the creation of an ag-incubator.

Lastly, we will embark on the Agriculture-Friendly Oneida County Initiative. When completed, this will be a guide to assist municipalities and businesses in navigating zoning, regulations, planning and laws to foster a governmental environment that will allow ag-business to be created and expanded.

With our partners at Cornell Cooperative Extension, we have completed our farmland protection plan that lays out five goals with 37 distinct action items for implementation. The goals are: supporting ag-business while creating new businesses; connecting local farmers with

consumers; bringing new individuals to agriculture through education initiatives; increasing public awareness and protecting important farmland resources.

Oneida County is a worldwide tourism destination. And we should reinforce that fact by strengthening what we have and creating new and exciting reasons for people to come to Oneida County. Today I present the makings of a true sports and entertainment district in downtown Utica with three anchor tenants.

First, the Utica Memorial Auditorium, backed by Oneida County bonding and New York State financing, will undergo an expansion that will transform the Aud into the American Hockey League's premier arena for hockey and entertainment. The expansion will include the creation of new box suites and conference room and office space that will result in the ability to book more shows and entertainment options.

Second, in conjunction with our great partnership with the Oneida Nation, I propose an area in the vicinity of the Aud to expand gaming operations in the City of Utica. I could think of no greater partner to invest its time and effort in downtown Utica, and I'm certain the result would be a tourist destination of unparalleled quality. I look forward to the nation joining me in this endeavor. Ray Halbritter and the Oneida Nation have created unique gaming and entertainment venues that have continuously been positive for this region. Whether it is the Turning Stone Resort Casino, their inventive and distinct SavOn convenience stores or the Yellow Brick Road Casino, they have an amazing track record of success.

The revenue from this endeavor would benefit the county and city and reinvigorate downtown.

For the third tenant, I propose a partnership with the State of New York to create a first of its kind American Craft Beer Museum and Innovation Center. This would need to be done right with a significant investment from the State of New York. We have a rich history in American brewing, with the first beer after prohibition being served right here in Utica by the West End Brewing Company, founded by F.X. Matt. The Matts were again on the cutting edge of the craft brewery revolution when they created their Saranac line.

The American Craft Beer Museum and Innovation Center will tell the distinct story of American Beer: A cornerstone of culture, craft and commerce. This will be a world class center of national and international stature. This will include a global home for events, hands-on activities, an artisan marketplace, garden space featuring harvest items used in production and a dynamic beer garden.

Lastly, the museum will include the Beer and Spirits Innovation Center and Incubator. This will include a lab, demonstration kitchen and local partnerships for educational programs, incubator and accelerator space as well as a venture and revolving loan fund for businesses.

Together, with the three anchor tenants and partners like the Utica Comets, the Oneida Nation and the State of New York, we will have created a one-of-a kind worldwide experience.

Now that's an entertainment district. We are a tourism destination by fact not fiction. People come to this region for so many different reasons. Let's build upon that. Am I a dreamer? You bet I am. My grandfather came to this country unable to speak the language. My father was a first generation American and he defended this nation in World War II. In two generations, I stand before you as the Oneida County Executive. Because dreamers are what make this country great. Dreams are what we were told to pursue throughout our lives. We tell our children,

grandchildren and our students to dream. And we tell everyone who starts a sentence with the words: “why not?” to go after that dream with everything they’ve got.

You see, I don’t like settling for second best, and I don’t believe any of you do either. Why not build the best chip plant the U.S. has ever seen? Why build just a hospital when you can build a state-of-the-art health care delivery and research facility that is the envy of everyone in the state? Why can’t unmanned aircraft be developed and produced in Rome? Why can’t Utica be what it was in the 1900s: a transformative city surrounded by growth? Why can’t Oneida County lead the way with less government, more people and more growth than any other part of Upstate New York?

There is no better time than now. We have the investors. We have the political capital. We have people working in partnership reaching across the aisle who are not concerned with credit, only results. And most importantly, we have the people of this county who believe that our best days are right in front of us. From Bridgewater to Boonville. From Camden to Utica and all points in-between. We are the family of Oneida County, and we are strong, we are united, we are committed and we are not stopping.

Thank you for being here today. God bless you and Oneida County and God bless the United States of America.