

Westchester County, New York

The State of the County

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*Andrew J. Spano
Westchester County Executive
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**STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS
TO THE PEOPLE OF WESTCHESTER COUNTY**

APRIL 23, 2009

GOOD EVENING CHAIRMAN RYAN, MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF LEGISLATORS, DISTRICT ATTORNEY DiFIORE, COUNTY CLERK IDONI, ELECTED OFFICIALS, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, MY WIFE BRENDA AND THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE WATCHING THIS AT HOME.

LET'S CUT TO THE CHASE. DESPITE THE RECESSION, DESPITE THE LOSS OF REVENUE FROM ALBANY, AND DESPITE THE INCREASE IN MANDATED COSTS, THE STATE OF WESTCHESTER COUNTY GOVERNMENT IS STRONG.

MOREOVER, I SUBMIT TO YOU, THAT NO COUNTY IS IN A BETTER POSITION TO THE MEET THE CHALLENGES AHEAD THAN WESTCHESTER...

UNLIKE NEIGHBORING COUNTIES ON LONG ISLAND, UNLIKE OUR OWN STATE GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNMENTS AS FAR AWAY AS CALIFORNIA, WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FISCALLY CONSERVATIVE. WE ANTICIPATED A DECLINE IN SALES TAX AND MORTGAGE FEES SO WE BUDGETED ACCORDINGLY. WE CONTINUE TO TIGHTEN OUR BELTS, ACTUALLY SPENDING LESS IN 2009 THAN WE SPENT IN 2008, WITHOUT ELIMINATING NEEDED SERVICES AND PROGRAMS.

BACK IN FEBRUARY WHEN GOVERNMENT AFTER GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED DIRE NEWS – LAYOFFS, MASSIVE CUTS IN PROGRAMS AND SERVICES, HIGH TAX INCREASES--WE WERE NOT AMONG THEM. AND WE ARE NOT AMONG THEM NOW.

HOW DID WE DO THIS? BY CONTINUING TO CUT OUR COSTS IN EVERY AREA: OVERTIME, TRAVEL, SUPPLIES, HEALTH BENEFITS, AND EQUIPMENT. BY NOT FILLING VACANT POSITIONS. AND, MOST OF ALL, BY BEING CREATIVE IN DEVELOPING NEW WAYS TO PROVIDE SERVICES.

SO, AS WE WATCHED THIS NATION SLIDE DEEPER INTO THE RECESSION, WE ELIMINATED \$23 MILLION DOLLARS IN THE BUDGET OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS, AND WE ARE CUTTING ANOTHER \$7 MILLION THIS YEAR. BUT, WE'VE HAD NO LAYOFFS. WE'VE CUT NO SERVICES.

LATELY, WESTCHESTER COUNTY GOVERNMENT HAS COME UNDER ATTACK BY THOSE WHO SEEK TO ELIMINATE OR RETHINK ITS WORTH. THIS GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN BLAMED FOR HIGH TAXES WHEN, IN FACT, OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS, THE COUNTY PROPERTY TAX HAS HELD THE LINE AT AN AVERAGE OF 2.6%, FAR LESS THAN THE INCREASES IN THE CONSUMER PRICE INDEX.

AND AT THE SAME TIME, WE HAVE SERVED MORE PEOPLE THAN EVER. WE HAVE TAKEN OVER ALL ELECTION RESPONSIBILITIES FROM LOCAL GOVERNMENTS. WE CREATED THREE NEW VITAL DEPARTMENTS, SENIOR PROGRAMS AND SERVICES, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND EMERGENCY SERVICES. YET, WE HAVE 146 FEWER EMPLOYEES THAN WHEN I TOOK OFFICE.

BUT WHILE OUR GOVERNMENT CONTINUES ON THE RIGHT TRACK, TOO MANY OF OUR RESIDENTS ARE FACING THE BRUNT OF WHAT THIS RECESSION HAS WROUGHT.

UNEMPLOYMENT WAS 7.2% IN MARCH, SLIGHTLY LESS THAN THE 7.5 % IN FEBRUARY BUT A HUGE INCREASE FROM THE 4.6% A YEAR AGO. OUR OFFICE VACANCY RATE IS NOW 19%, THE HIGHEST IT HAS BEEN IN 10 YEARS. HOME FORECLOSURES REACHED 231 IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF THIS YEAR. CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS ARE ON HOLD. COLLEGE TUITION IS UP. AND, NON-PROFIT AGENCIES, THAT DO SO MUCH TO BENEFIT OUR LIVES, ARE TRYING TO HOLD ON. PEOPLE ARE UPSET AND ANGRY.

IT'S HARD TO SEE A BRIGHT SIDE. BUT BY TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE STIMULUS MONEY FROM WASHINGTON AND ALBANY, WE ARE DOING AS MUCH AS WE CAN TO MAKE LIFE BETTER FOR THOSE IN NEED. AND, WE HAVE BEEN VERY SUCCESSFUL. THANKS TO OUR FEDERAL AND STATE DELEGATIONS, WE STAND TO RECEIVE APPROXIMATELY \$80 MILLION STIMULUS DOLLARS THAT WILL CREATE THOUSANDS OF JOBS IN INFRASTRUCTURE, ALTERNATIVE ENERGY, AND GREEN BUSINESSES.

FROM THE REBUILDING OF THE O'DELL AVENUE BRIDGE IN YONKERS TO UPGRADING SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANTS ALONG THE SOUND SHORE, THESE PROJECTS WILL NOT ONLY CREATE JOBS, BUT WILL ALSO SAVE TAX DOLLARS. AN ADDITIONAL 2.7 MILLION DOLLARS WILL BE USED BY OUR ONE-STOP EMPLOYMENT CENTER TO TRAIN THE UNEMPLOYED FOR JOBS IN NEW GROWTH AREAS SUCH AS ENERGY, GREEN BUSINESS AND HEALTH CARE. AND THEY WILL SUBSIDIZE SMALL BUSINESSES BY PAYING THE SALARIES OF SUMMER WORKERS AND ON-THE-JOB TRAINING FOR FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES.

WE ALSO EXPECT INCREASED MEDICAID ASSISTANCE THIS YEAR, WHICH WILL BE USED FOR PROPERTY TAX RELIEF, NOT FOR NEW PROGRAMS.

WE WILL ALSO RECEIVE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS TO KEEP RENTERS AND OWNERS FROM BECOMING HOMELESS AND ADDITIONAL FUNDS TO TURN PREVIOUSLY FORECLOSED HOMES INTO FAIR AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

THE WEIGHT OF THIS RECESSION IS GIVING US A RARE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE CHANGES THAT WILL AFFECT OUR LIVES FOR YEARS TO COME. WE HAVE TO RETHINK, NOT GOVERNMENT, BUT OUR VALUES.

HOW DO WE MEASURE SUCCESS? IT SHOULDN'T BE BY HOW MANY HOUSES WE OWN, ESPECIALLY WHEN THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO ARE LOSING THE ONLY ONE THEY HAVE. AND IT SHOULDN'T BE BY HOW MANY CARS WE DRIVE, WHEN MANY OF OUR RESIDENTS DON'T HAVE ANY. WE NEED TO ENRICH EACH OTHER'S LIVES—BY CARING FOR EACH OTHER AND GIVING SOMETHING BACK. AS WE WAKE UP FROM THIS HANGOVER OF EXCESS, WE MUST ENTER A NEW ERA OF RESPONSIBILITY. IN DEEDS, NOT JUST WORDS.

WE ARE SO FORTUNATE IN OUR COUNTY TO HAVE PEOPLE WHO VOLUNTEER TO MAKE LIVES BETTER FOR OTHERS. WE HAVE HUNDREDS OF RESIDENTS WHO SERVE ON OUR COUNTY BOARDS—FROM TRANSPORTATION TO PUBLIC SAFETY, FROM CONSUMER PROTECTION TO HUMAN RIGHTS. BECAUSE VOLUNTEERISM IS SUCH AN IMPORTANT PART OF OUR SOCIETY—AND IN KEEPING WITH PRESIDENT OBAMA'S CALL TO SERVICE—WE WILL SOON HOLD A VOLUNTEER CONFERENCE BRINGING TOGETHER NON-PROFITS AND GOVERNMENTS WHO NEED VOLUNTEERS AND OUR RESIDENTS WHO WANT TO GIVE BACK.

WE DON'T NEED TO RETHINK COUNTY GOVERNMENT...WE HAVE BEEN THINKING ALL ALONG.

BUT, MORE IMPORTANTLY, WE HAVE BEEN DOING.

DURING THE PAST 12 YEARS, WE'VE MOVED COUNTY GOVERNMENT FROM THE EQUIVALENT OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION TO THE DIGITAL EVOLUTION. WE HAVE REINVENTED COUNTY GOVERNMENT FOR A NEW ERA. WE'VE INCORPORATED TECHNOLOGY AND GREEN SOLUTIONS IN ALL OUR DEPARTMENTS. WE HAVE REDUCED, WE HAVE MODERNIZED, AND WE HAVE EXCELLED.

OUR DEPARTMENTS HAVE RECEIVED MORE THAN 200 AWARDS FOR INNOVATION AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS FROM SOME OF THE MOST PRESTIGIOUS STATE AND NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS. WE WERE DESIGNATED ONE OF THE TOP SEVEN INTELLIGENT COMMUNITIES OF THE WORLD LAST YEAR BY AN INTERNATIONAL THINK TANK THAT FOCUSES ON TECHNOLOGY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

WHETHER YOU PAY TAXES TO THE COUNTY, YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT OR YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT, THEY SHOULD BE FAIR AND EQUITABLE. IN MOST OF OUR COMMUNITIES, PROPERTY HAS NOT BEEN RE-ASSESSED IN YEARS; SOME NOT FOR OVER 70 YEARS. THIS CANNOT CONTINUE. PEOPLE LIVING IN THE SAME KIND OF HOUSE WITH THE SAME AMOUNT OF PROPERTY IN THE SAME COMMUNITY, SHOULD BE ASSESSED EQUALLY. UNFORTUNATELY THAT IS NOT ALWAYS THE CASE, AND WHEN LEGAL CHALLENGES ARE MADE TO TRY TO RECTIFY THESE INEQUITIES, AN INCREASED BURDEN FALLS ON THE REST OF OUR TAXPAYERS.

LAST YEAR ALONE, THESE LEGAL CHALLENGES COST PROPERTY TAXPAYERS OVER \$70 MILLION DOLLARS. RECENTLY, I AUTHORIZED A STUDY ON HOW TO ACHIEVE EQUITABLE ASSESSMENTS. ONE WAY TO BEGIN IS BY COLLECTING DATA ON EVERY HOME IN THE COUNTY SO THAT THERE IS A BASIS FOR COMPARISON. THEREFORE, THIS FALL, WE WILL HIRE A FIRM TO TAKE SPECIAL AERIAL AND STREET LEVEL PHOTOGRAPHS OF OVER 200,000 PARCELS COUNTY WIDE. THESE PHOTOGRAPHS WILL ENABLE ASSESSORS TO UPDATE THEIR DATA, BE BETTER PREPARED TO DEFEND AGAINST LEGAL CHALLENGES, AND PLACE

THEIR MUNICIPALITY IN A POSITION TO MINIMIZE THE COSTS OF A REASSESSMENT.

OUR SCHOOLS, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND SPECIAL DISTRICTS MUST WORK TOGETHER WITH THE COUNTY FOR PROPERTY TAX RELIEF. THROUGH INTER-MUNICIPAL COOPERATION, THERE IS MONEY TO BE SAVED. IF THE COUNTY CAN DO IT BETTER, FASTER AND CHEAPER THAN A LOCAL GOVERNMENT, THEN THE COUNTY SHOULD DO IT. WHILE WE HAVE BEEN ADVOCATING AND OFFERING SHARED SERVICES FOR SOME TIME WE HAVE ADDED MORE TO THE MIX. OUR CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION IS ENTICING MORE COMMUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE.

EIGHTY-EIGHT SCHOOLS DISTRICTS, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND SPECIAL DISTRICTS ARE NOW PIGGYBACKING ON COUNTY CONTRACTS, SAVING MONEY. WE ARE HELPING OTHERS TO SELL UNWANTED GOODS ON E-BAY, SOMETHING WE HAVE BEEN DOING FOR YEARS, RAISING HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS IN REVENUE.

THROUGH OUR DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, WE OFFER WAYS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TO MANAGE THEIR PRINTING COSTS AND BLACKBERRY ACCOUNTS, AND WE ARE PROVIDING VARIOUS DATA AND GIS MAPPING SERVICES THAT ARE IMPORTANT RESOURCES TO LOCAL ASSESSORS, POLICE AND EMERGENCY RESPONDERS.

WESTCHESTER COUNTY'S TWO MOBILE SHREDDERS, ARE HELPING MUNICIPALITIES AND SCHOOLS REDUCE THE COSTS OF DESTROYING SENSITIVE DOCUMENTS WHILE PREVENTING IDENTITY THEFT.

ALL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS OWE IT TO THEIR CONSTITUENTS TO DO THINGS SMARTER. THAT'S WHY I'M CONVENING A SHARED SERVICES CONFERENCE ON JUNE 2 AT THE COUNTY CENTER, WHERE EACH OF OUR DEPARTMENTS WILL DEMONSTRATE ALL THE THINGS WE CAN DO FOR OUR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, SCHOOLS, AND SPECIAL DISTRICTS TO SAVE TAX DOLLARS.

DESPITE ALL THIS, MANY PEOPLE ARE STILL NOT AWARE OF WHAT COUNTY GOVERNMENT DOES. THIS WAS CRYSTALLIZED FOR ME MOST RECENTLY, WHEN I SAW A WOMAN WHO WAS WAITING FOR A BEE-LINE BUS BEING INTERVIEWED

ON THE TV NEWS. THE REPORTER ASKED HER, “WHAT DOES COUNTY GOVERNMENT DO?” THE WOMAN HAD NO IDEA. SHE WAS REALLY STUNNED TO LEARN THAT COUNTY GOVERNMENT WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE VERY BUS SHE WAS RIDING ON.

COUNTY GOVERNMENT IS LIKE THE STEEL FRAMEWORK THAT SUPPORTS THE SKYSCRAPER – YOU DON’T SEE IT, BUT WITHOUT IT, THE BUILDING WOULD COLLAPSE.

SO TONIGHT I’M NOT GOING TO TELL YOU ABOUT WESTCHESTER COUNTY’S AAA BOND RATING AND HOW WE ARE THE ONLY COUNTY IN THE STATE TO HOLD THAT DISTINCTION, OR HOW THROUGH PRUDENT PLANNING WESTCHESTER HAS BEEN ABLE TO AVOID THE PITFALLS FACED BY OTHER COUNTIES IN THESE TURBULENT TIMES, OR EVEN HOW IN THE FACE OF ALL THIS, WE HAVE MANAGED TO KEEP COUNTY GOVERNMENT TAXES LOW WHILE OFFERING A HELPLINE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND SCHOOLS.

NO, TONIGHT, I’M NOT GOING TO TELL YOU, I’M GOING TO SHOW YOU.

TONIGHT, I GIVE YOU THE FACES BEHIND GOVERNMENT AND THROUGH THESE FACES, MORE WILL BE KNOWN ABOUT THE STATE OF OUR COUNTY THAN A THOUSAND MORE WORDS CAN TELL YOU.

- THE FOSTER CARE WORKER WHO ADOPTS A CHILD HERSELF RATHER THAN SEE THAT CHILD ABANDONED;
- THE PUBLIC HEALTH NURSE WHO TRAVELS INTO UNSAFE NEIGHBORHOODS DAY AND NIGHT TO CARE FOR A SICK ADULT.
- THE HEALTH INSPECTORS WHO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF OUR FOOD.
- THE LIFEGUARDS WHO KEEP SWIMMERS SAFE AT COUNTY POOLS.
- THE POLICE OFFICERS WHO GET DRUNK DRIVERS OFF OUR PARKWAYS.

- THE EMERGENCY DISPATCHERS WHO PROVIDE IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE.
- THE PROBATION OFFICERS WHO MONITOR THE WHEREABOUTS OF SEX OFFENDERS.
- EVEN THE BUDGET ANALYST WHO WATCHES THE BOTTOM LINE.

WHEN YOU SEE A POLICE CAR PATROLLING THE PARKWAYS, DO YOU KNOW THAT IT IS COUNTY GOVERNMENT AT WORK?

IN 2008, THE COUNTY POLICE ARRESTED A RECORD 588 PEOPLE DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF DRUGS OR ALCOHOL ON THE HUTCH, CROSS COUNTY, SAW MILL AND BRONX RIVER PARKWAYS. AS A RESULT OF INCREASED PATROLS, ACCIDENTS ON THE PARKWAYS HAVE DROPPED MORE THAN 8%, ACCIDENTS WITH INJURIES DECLINED MORE THAN 9%.

THE COUNTY'S DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY WORKS BEHIND THE SCENES, PROVIDING THOUSANDS OF HOURS HELPING OR SUPPORTING YOUR LOCAL POLICE. COLD CASE DETECTIVES, UNDERCOVER NARCOTICS OFFICERS, BALLISTICS EXPERTS, AND THE BOMB SQUAD HELP KEEP YOUR COMMUNITIES SAFE. OUR FORENSIC INVESTIGATORS AND LAB TECHNICIANS HELP SOLVE LOCAL CRIMES. WHEN A SUSPECT IS ON THE RUN, A CHILD IS MISSING OR A FIRE NEEDS DOUSING FROM THE AIR, IT'S THE COUNTY'S HELICOPTER UNIT THAT'S CALLED TO SCENE. THE COUNTY POLICE PROVIDES MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN SERVICES EVERY YEAR TO LOCAL POLICE DEPARTMENTS ACROSS WESTCHESTER.

COUNTY POLICE ALSO ADD ABOUT \$2 MILLION DOLLARS IN REVENUE TO OUR CITIES, TOWNS AND VILLAGES, BY ISSUING 20,000 TICKETS ON OUR PARKWAYS. THE MONEY FROM THESE SUMMONSES GOES TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS...COUNTY GOVERNMENT GETS NOTHING. MOUNT PLEASANT, FOR EXAMPLE, GOT \$134,000 LAST YEAR; HARRISON \$183,000, AND GREENBURGH \$122,000.

KEEPING OUR RESIDENTS SAFE AND PROTECTED IS THE FIRST PRIORITY OF COUNTY GOVERNMENT. THAT MEANS REQUIRING SEX OFFENDERS TO WEAR

GPS TRACKING BRACELETS TO MONITOR THEIR WHEREABOUTS, PROTECTING WOMEN FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TO HELP THEM START A NEW LIFE AND COMBATING GANG VIOLENCE BY GETTING ILLEGAL GUNS OFF THE STREETS.

I DON'T WANT TO SEE ONE MORE CHILD OR YOUNG ADULT FALL VICTIM TO GUN VIOLENCE. AND, I AM COMMITTED TO PUTTING INITIATIVES IN PLACE THAT WILL MAKE OUR NEIGHBORHOODS SAFER. THIS YEAR, WE WILL INSTALL STATE OF THE ART GUNSHOT DETECTION SYSTEMS IN YONKERS AND MOUNT VERNON WHICH WILL ENABLE LOCAL POLICE TO PINPOINT THE EXACT LOCATION AND GET THERE EVEN BEFORE A 9-1-1 CALL COMES IN. THIS QUICKER RESPONSE WILL NOT ONLY HELP THEM CATCH THE SHOOTER, BUT ALSO HELP THE VICTIM. WITHOUT COUNTY FUNDS, THIS PROGRAM WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE.

I WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR BOARD FOR PASSING THIS BOND ACT SO QUICKLY. I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I APPRECIATE WORKING WITH A BOARD—BOTH DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS—THAT IS SO FOCUSED ON HELPING OUR COMMUNITY. WE MAY AGREE TO DISAGREE, BUT THERE IS NO ACRIMONY. EVEN THOUGH OUR IDEAS AND PHILOSOPHY MAY DIFFER AT TIMES, I KNOW THAT WE ARE ALL THINKING ABOUT WHAT IS BEST FOR THE PEOPLE WE SERVE. THANK YOU.

AT THE SAME TIME, I WANT TO THANK OUR STATE DELEGATION FOR ALL THE COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE THEY GIVE US YEAR AFTER YEAR.

LAST SUMMER, COUNTY POLICE AND THE DEPARTMENTS OF SENIOR PROGRAMS AND SERVICES AND COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH JOINED FORCES TO PROTECT YOUNGSTERS WITH AUTISM AND SENIORS WITH ALZHEIMERS. PROJECT LIFESAVER IS A PROGRAM WHICH TRACKS THOSE WHO GO MISSING BY MEANS OF AN ELECTRONIC BRACELET. MORE THAN 45 PEOPLE ARE WEARING THESE BRACELETS TODAY, AND I ENCOURAGE MORE TO PARTICIPATE. TWO MONTHS AFTER THE PROGRAM BEGAN, OFFICERS WERE ABLE TO RETURN AN 81-YEAR-OLD YONKERS WOMAN TO HER FAMILY SAFE AND SOUND IN LESS THAN TWO HOURS.

ARE YOU AWARE THAT WHEN YOU CALL 9-1-1 FOR A MEDICAL EMERGENCY, IN MOST CASES, THAT CALL IS TAKEN BY COUNTY GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES WHO ARE SPECIALLY TRAINED IN EMERGENCY MEDICAL DISPATCH. OUR ROUND-

THE-CLOCK DISPATCHERS RECEIVED AND HANDLED MORE THAN 90,000 CALLS FOR HELP IN 2008.

THE COUNTY HAS ALSO TRAINED 22,000 FIRST RESPONDERS, INCLUDING THE FIREFIGHTERS IN MOST OF OUR COMMUNITIES AND HAS MARSHALED A VOLUNTEER ARMY OF 200 HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS AND ANOTHER 200 EMERGENCY VOLUNTEERS TO RESPOND IN A NATURAL OR MANMADE DISASTER.

WESTCHESTER COUNTY IS ONE OF THE ONLY PLACES IN THE NATION TO HAVE A COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM THAT CONNECTS FIRE AND POLICE DEPARTMENTS, EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES, HOSPITALS AND THE COUNTY'S BEE LINE BUS SYSTEM.

THIS STATE OF THE ART NETWORK IS BEING ENHANCED WITH AN INTERNET PHONE HOTLINE THAT WILL ALSO CONNECT WITH NASSAU, SUFFOLK AND NEW YORK CITY. IF REGULAR PHONE SERVICE GOES DOWN, WE CAN ALL STILL COMMUNICATE TO KEEP YOU SAFE. WE HAVE ALSO CREATED A SPECIAL NEEDS REGISTRY TO IDENTIFY THOSE HOMEBOUND RESIDENTS WHO MIGHT NEED HELP IN AN EVACUATION.

WHILE OUR DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY SERVICES COORDINATE THE RESPONSE TO TORNADOES, FLOODS AND HURRICANES, THERE ARE SMALLER EMERGENCIES THAT REQUIRE COUNTY HELP. WHEN THERE IS A SUSPICIOUS FIRE OR AN OIL SPILL ON OUR ROADS OR WATERWAYS, WE RESPOND. IN 2008, COUNTY ARSON SPECIALISTS INVESTIGATED 120 FIRES AND OUR HAZMAT TEAMS HELPED MOP UP MORE THAN 90 POTENTIALLY HAZARDOUS SPILLS.

MORE THAN A THOUSAND COUNTY EMPLOYEES HAVE BEEN TRAINED IN CPR, AND WE HAVE DEFIBRILLATORS IN ALL COUNTY FACILITIES TO PROVIDE THE PUBLIC WITH IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE. LIVES HAVE BEEN SAVED, AS A RESULT, IN OUR PARKS AND AT THE COUNTY AIRPORT.

PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN AGAINST PREDATORS IS A CONSTANT CONCERN. OUR POLICE AND THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE COMB INTERNET SITES FOR CHILD MOLESTERS, AND OUR PROBATION DEPARTMENT MONITORS SEX OFFENDERS IN OUR COMMUNITY. BUT THAT DOESN'T EVEN BEGIN TO COVER THE DOZENS OF OTHER THINGS OUR PROBATION DEPARTMENT DOES. AND

SOON THEY WILL HAVE MORE. WITH THE REPEAL OF THE ROCKEFELLER DRUG LAWS, OUR JAIL WILL RECEIVE INMATES FROM STATE PRISONS WHO WILL REMAIN THERE PENDING A COURT HEARING. THIS MEANS ADDITIONAL COSTS TO OUR CORRECTION DEPARTMENT IN HOUSING THEM AND TO THE DEPARTMENT OF PROBATION IN SUPERVISING THEM, ONCE THEY ARE RELEASED.

IT COSTS ABOUT \$2 A DAY TO SUPERVISE SOMEONE ON PROBATION COMPARED TO \$250 A DAY IN THE COUNTY JAIL. THAT'S WHY OUR PROBATION DEPARTMENT – WHICH IS NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED FOR ITS CUTTING EDGE PROGRAMS –HAS COME UP WITH SUCCESSFUL ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION. PROBATIONERS ON THESE PROGRAMS HAVE ONE OF THE LOWEST RECIDIVISM RATES IN THE NATION. SAME HOLDS TRUE FOR OUR NATIONALLY ACCREDITED CORRECTION DEPARTMENT. THEY TOO HAVE A LOW RECIDIVISM RATE DUE TO THE MANY PROGRAMS FOR INMATES AND THOSE NEWLY RELEASED. THAT MEANS THEY DO NOT RETURN TO CRIME, WHICH MAKES US SAFER AND SAVES TAX DOLLARS AS WELL.

THE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT WAS FORMED YEARS AGO WHEN LOCAL OFFICIALS REALIZED THAT ONE COUNTY DEPARTMENT WOULD BE MORE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE THAN THREE SEPARATE HEALTH DISTRICTS. WHO SAYS CONSOLIDATION DOESN'T WORK?

TODAY, THAT DEPARTMENT PLAYS A MAJOR, BUT SOMETIMES INVISIBLE ROLE IN PROTECTING THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF OUR RESIDENTS.

HEALTH INSPECTORS MAKE SURE THAT THE 75,000 CHILDREN WHO ATTEND THE 267 DAY CAMPS IN WESTCHESTER ARE SAFE. THEY CHECK SAFETY PLANS, INSPECT WATERFRONTS AND POOLS, AND MAKE SURE THE STAFF HAS THE TRAINING, CERTIFICATION AND BACKGROUND CLEARANCE REQUIRED. THIS SUMMER, THE COUNTY WILL ONCE AGAIN PROVIDE TRAINING FOR CAMP DIRECTORS AND SUPERVISORS AND CONDUCT MORE THAN 600 ON SITE INSPECTIONS. THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT ALSO INSPECTS THE COUNTY'S 54 PRIVATE AND PUBLIC BEACHES TO MAKE SURE CONDITIONS ARE SANITARY AND CLOSES THEM WHEN THEY ARE NOT.

WESTCHESTER'S HEALTH INSPECTORS MAKE SURE THAT THE FOOD YOU EAT IN YOUR COMPANY CAFETERIA, SCHOOL LUNCHROOM, OR LOCAL RESTAURANT IS PREPARED AND SERVED SAFELY. LAST YEAR, STAFF CONDUCTED NEARLY 10,000 UNANNOUNCED INSPECTIONS AT THE COUNTY'S 3,500 FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS.

THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT NURSES ARE VITAL, BUT OFTEN GO UNACKNOWLEDGED. THEY ADMINISTER FLU SHOTS TO SENIORS AND ADULTS WITH CHRONIC MEDICAL CONDITIONS. THEY INNOCULATE CHILDREN FROM LOW-INCOME FAMILIES SO THEY CAN ATTEND SCHOOL. OUR PUBLIC HEALTH NURSES, VISIT TUBERCULOSIS PATIENTS TO BE SURE THEY ARE TAKING THEIR MEDICINE, CARE FOR THE ELDERLY IN THEIR HOMES AND ASSIST CHILDREN WITH ASTHMA.

AFTER SIX YEARS, OUR FIT KIDS PROGRAM IS STILL EXPANDING, NOW REACHING 54 WESTCHESTER SCHOOLS TO ENCOURAGE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES TO EAT HEALTHIER AND BE MORE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE.

WHAT WOULD OUR COUNTY BE LIKE WITHOUT THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER PROTECTION? I ASK BECAUSE THERE ARE THOSE WHO WOULD ELIMINATE IT, ALONG WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF SENIOR PROGRAMS AND SERVICES, YOUTH BUREAU, OFFICE FOR WOMEN AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION.

CONSUMER PROTECTION IS ONE OF THE SMALLEST COUNTY AGENCIES. IT COSTS TAXPAYERS A MERE \$116,000 LAST YEAR. WHAT IT ACCOMPLISHES IS PRICELESS.

THE DEPARTMENT WORKS TO MAKE SURE THAT CONSUMERS ARE PROTECTED FROM FRAUD AND ARE GETTING THEIR MONEY'S WORTH. INSPECTORS REGULARLY CHECK ALL THE GAS PUMPS IN THE COUNTY SO YOU RECEIVE THE KIND AND THE AMOUNT OF GAS YOU PAID FOR. THEN THEY LIST THE PRICES ON THEIR WEBSITE SO YOU CAN FIND THE CHEAPEST GALLON. IT LICENSES HOME CONTRACTORS, KEEPS A RECORD OF COMPLAINTS AND ADJUDICATES DISPUTES. AT SUPERMARKETS, INSPECTORS CHECK TO SEE THAT THE PRODUCTS YOU BUY ARE NOT OUT OF DATE. IN FACT, OUTDATED ITEMS ON SUPERMARKET SHELVES HAVE DROPPED 60 PERCENT SINCE WE BEGAN CRACKING DOWN LAST YEAR.

ON MAY 12TH, THE COUNTY WILL HOLD ITS FIRST FINANCIAL FITNESS FORUM AT THE COUNTY CENTER. IT IS FREE AND DESIGNED TO HELP PEOPLE MAKE WISE FINANCIAL CHOICES. NOTHING COULD BE MORE IMPORTANT ESPECIALLY TODAY. WE HAVE GATHERED A GROUP OF EXPERTS FOR SESSIONS ON CREDIT CARDS, LOANS, HOUSEHOLD BUDGETING, PLANNING FOR RETIREMENT AND FUNDING A COLLEGE EDUCATION. YOU DON'T HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL NEXT MONTH, SINCE THERE'S A NEW SPECIAL SECTION ON OUR WEBSITE RIGHT NOW.

AS DIFFERENT CONSUMER ISSUES ARISE, THIS DEPARTMENT IS FRONT AND CENTER. AT MY DIRECTION, THEY INVESTIGATED LEAD IN CHILDREN'S JEWELRY AND CRACKED DOWN ON THE DOLLAR STORES THAT WERE SELLING IT. THEY CONTINUE TO CONDUCT STING OPERATIONS TO CATCH UNLICENSED CONTRACTORS.

IS THE DEPARTMENT WORTH IT? YOU BE THE JUDGE. THEY HELPED OUR RESIDENTS GET BACK MORE THAN \$833,000 IN RESTITUTION LAST YEAR, AND HELPED RESIDENTS AVOID AN INFINITE NUMBER OF PROBLEMS.

MY VISION FOR WESTCHESTER HAS ALWAYS CALLED FOR INNOVATION AND CHANGE. IN 12 YEARS WE HAVE CONSTANTLY MOVED FORWARD WITH NEW IDEAS, NEW PROGRAMS AND NEW WAYS TO CONTAIN COSTS. THERE IS NOTHING THAT IS MORE HIGHLY VALUED IN THIS GOVERNMENT THAN FINDING A SMARTER WAY TO DO THINGS.

IF WE HAD AN INNOVATION AWARD IT WOULD GO TO THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH. THIS DEPARTMENT WITH A TOTAL BUDGET OF ABOUT \$8 MILLION DOLLARS WAS ABLE TO SAVE \$1 MILLION THIS YEAR BY RESTRUCTURING PERSONNEL, INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY AT OUR FOUR MENTAL HEALTH CLINICS, AND BY DEVELOPING A MODEL PROGRAM TO CUT MEDICAID COSTS BY PROVIDING COORDINATED SERVICES TO THE HIGHEST USERS. WORKING WITH WHITE PLAINS POLICE AND MOST RECENTLY WITH YONKERS POLICE, THEY CREATED A SPECIAL RESPONSE TEAM TO HANDLE DISTURBANCES INVOLVING PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES.

EARLIER, I ACKNOWLEDGED THE IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTEERISM AND THE VOLUNTEERS WHO HAVE UNSELFISHLY GIVEN THEIR TIME AND ENERGY TO MAKE LIFE BETTER FOR THE REST OF US. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE OF THE

MEMBERS OF OUR ORIGINAL GLOBAL WARMING TASK FORCE AND OF OUR RECENTLY FORMED COUNTY CLIMATE CHANGE ADVISORY COUNCIL. LEADERS FROM GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS, EDUCATION, AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNITY HAVE ALREADY LAUNCHED A COUNTY-WIDE GREEN BUSINESS INITIATIVE TO TEACH BUSINESSES HOW TO REDUCE THEIR ENERGY CONSUMPTION AND A K-12 GREEN SCHOOLS INITIATIVE TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS.

TO CONTINUE OUR OWN EFFORTS, WE ARE PARTNERING WITH THE NEW YORK POWER AUTHORITY TO INVEST IN THE MOST ADVANCED GREEN ENERGY TECHNOLOGY. PROJECTS CURRENTLY IN DEVELOPMENT INVOLVE SOLAR PANELS ON THE ROOFS OF SOME COUNTY FACILITIES, CAPTURING GASES AT THE YONKERS WASTE WATER PLANT TO GENERATE ONSITE ELECTRICITY AND ESTABLISHING A COUNTY-WIDE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR CENTRALIZED CONTROL TO MONITOR ENERGY USAGE. THESE INVESTMENTS AND OTHERS WILL SAVE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN ENERGY COSTS.

NEXT MONTH WE WILL HOST ICLEI'S NORTHEAST WORKSHOP ON CLIMATE CHANGE. IT IS A RECOGNITION THAT WESTCHESTER IS IN THE CENTER OF THINGS WHEN IT COMES TO TAKING LOCAL ACTION TO COMBAT GLOBAL WARMING.

IMAGINE WESTCHESTER WITHOUT OUR PARKS DEPARTMENT, THE ONLY NATIONALLY ACCREDITED COUNTY DEPARTMENT IN THE STATE. WHAT WOULD OUR RESIDENTS DO WITHOUT OUR WELL-MAINTAINED GREEN SPACE, BALL FIELDS, PUBLIC GOLF COURSES, WORKING FARMS, POOLS, BEACHES AND THE 200 MILES OF HIKING AND BIKING TRAILS. FROM OUR SURVEYS, WE KNOW THAT WESTCHESTER RESIDENTS THINK THAT OUR PARKS CONTRIBUTE GREATLY TO OUR QUALITY OF LIFE, BUT THAT DOESN'T STOP US FROM WORKING TO KEEP COSTS AS LOW AS POSSIBLE.

WHEN PLAYLAND OPENS NEXT MONTH, THERE WILL BE NO COST TO OUR TAXPAYERS. SOME HAVE QUESTIONED WHY WE OWN IT. PLAYLAND IS MORE THAN AN AMUSEMENT PARK, IT IS PART OF WESTCHESTER'S HISTORY. IT'S A PLACE WHERE ALMOST ONE MILLION PEOPLE GO EACH YEAR FOR GOOD, CLEAN, FUN AND ENTERTAINMENT. TO MAKE PLAYLAND FINANCIALLY SELF-SUFFICIENT, OUR PARKS DEPARTMENT CAME UP WITH A PAY-ONE-PRICE PLAN

THAT WILL KEEP THIS PRICELESS ASSET AFFORDABLE, WHILE GIVING FREE ACCESS TO EVERYTHING BUT THE AMUSEMENT AREA.

THIS YEAR, CONSTRUCTION WILL BEGIN TO TURN THE 82-YEAR-OLD TIBBETTS BROOK PARK POOL INTO A WATER FANTASYLAND WITH SLIDES, ISLANDS AND A LAZY RIVER, A DESPERATELY NEEDED IMPROVEMENT THAT WILL ATTRACT MANY MORE FAMILIES AND INCREASED REVENUE. WHEN WE REMODELED WILLSON WOODS POOL IN 2006, ATTENDENCE WENT FROM 15,000 TO 50,000.

OUR GOLF COURSES, WHICH ARE A REASONABLY-PRICED ALTERNATIVE TO PRIVATE CLUB MEMBERSHIP, INCREASED THEIR REVENUE BY MORE THAN \$700,000 LAST YEAR. AND, WE FULLY EXPECT A REVENUE INCREASE THIS YEAR AS WELL.

IN TIMES OF TROUBLE, MORE PEOPLE RELY ON GOVERNMENT TO HELP THEM. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE WHEN IT COMES TO THE MOST VULNERABLE... VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, THE VERY POOR AND HUNGRY, THE FRAIL ELDERLY, CHILDREN WITHOUT PARENTS TO CARE FOR THEM, YOUNG PEOPLE IN TROUBLE, AND THOSE WHO NEED OUR ATTENTION TO STAY OUT OF TROUBLE.

THROUGH OUR SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT, MORE THAN 120,000 WESTCHESTER RESIDENTS ARE CURRENTLY RECEIVING SOME FORM OF MEDICAID OR OTHER ASSISTANCE— FOOD STAMPS, NURSING HOME CARE, HOUSING, DAYCARE, AND HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE. WHILE THESE PROGRAMS ARE MANDATED AND THEIR COSTS ARE SHARED BY THE STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, THERE IS A \$200 MILLION DOLLAR COST TO OUR PROPERTY TAXPAYERS.

WE TAKE CARE OF CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN ABUSED OR WHO SUFFER FROM PARENTAL NEGLECT BY PUTTING THEM IN FOSTER CARE OR IN ADOPTIVE HOMES. AS WE MONITOR THEIR LIVES IN THEIR NEW SURROUNDINGS, WE ALSO MAKE SURE THEY HAVE SOME FUN. LAST SUMMER, 350 UNDERPRIVILEGED, BOYS AND GIRLS ENJOYED A WEEK OR TWO AT CAMP MORTY, THE COUNTY'S SLEEP-AWAY CAMP ON THE GROUNDS MOUNTAIN LAKES PARK. THESE KIDS GET ANOTHER FUN EXPERIENCE WITH A SPECIAL DAY AT PLAYLAND.

IF THERE IS ONE COMMITMENT WE MUST NEVER BREAK, IT'S TO TAKE CARE OF OUR CHILDREN.

COUNTY GOVERNMENT MAY SEEM BIG AND AMORPHOUS. DESPITE OUR EFFORTS THERE STILL ARE PLENTY OF PEOPLE WHO ARE CLUELESS ABOUT WHAT WE DO. THERE WILL ALWAYS BE THOSE WHO THINK THERE IS TOO MUCH GOVERNMENT; THAT PEOPLE MUST FEND FOR THEMSELVES. THEY WANT FEWER LAWS AND LESS REGULATION. OF COURSE, IT TAKES JUST ONE LOOK AT THIS ECONOMY TO SEE WHERE THAT PHILOSOPHY HAS BROUGHT US.

MY PHILOSOPHY IS DIFFERENT. I BELIEVE THAT COUNTY GOVERNMENT IS DOING EXACTLY WHAT IT SHOULD BE DOING... WORKING FOR YOU... WORKING TO IMPROVE YOUR LIVES... WORKING TO PROTECT YOUR FAMILIES, AND YES, WORKING TO SAVE YOU TAX DOLLARS.

NOW, MORE THAN EVER, WE ARE FOCUSING ON A CHANGING SOCIETY, AND WESTCHESTER WILL BE IN FOREFRONT OF THAT CHANGE. THAT'S WHY WE HAVE BEEN AGGRESSIVELY AND SUCCESSFULLY PURSUING STIMULUS MONEY TO CREATE THOUSANDS OF NEW JOBS, TO PUT PEOPLE BACK TO WORK, TO RETRAIN THE UNEMPLOYED, AND TO CREATE NEW GREEN BUSINESSES.

JUST THIS WEEK I WAS ON A CONFERENCE CALL WITH THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES WHO WANTED SOME THOUGHTS ON HOW THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION COULD PUMP MONEY INTO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS FASTER SO IT COULD BE SPENT QUICKER TO REVIVE THE ECONOMY.

NOT A DAY GOES BY WHEN I AM NOT ASKED FOR HELP BY A BUSINESS OWNER, A NON-PROFIT DIRECTOR, A SENIOR ON A FIXED INCOME, OR A PERSON WHO SIMPLY CAN'T MAKE ENDS MEET. WE CAN DO A LOT, BUT WE CANNOT DO IT ALL. THE PROBLEMS WE FACE ARE OBVIOUSLY BIGGER THAN WESTCHESTER, BUT IN WESTCHESTER WE MUST DO WHAT WE CAN TO HELP OUR OWN.

WE HAVE A WONDERFUL COUNTY. WE HAVE SPIRIT, AND WE HAVE DRIVE. THERE'S A REASON WHY PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE HERE. AND I WANT TO KEEP IT THAT WAY. WE ARE FACING TOUGH TIMES NOW, BUT THAT WILL CHANGE. AND THIS GOVERNMENT IS NOT SITTING IDLY BY.

WE HAVE A REPUTATION AS A CREATIVE AND INNOVATIVE COUNTY. WE HAVE A GOVERNMENT THAT IS COMPASSIONATE, YET FISCALLY CONSERVATIVE. WE HAVE NEVER BEEN A STATIC “SAME OLD” ADMINISTRATION. WE’VE BEEN PROGRESSIVE IN SEARCHING OUT NEW COST-EFFICIENT WAYS TO DO THINGS— AND DISCARDING THE OLD WAYS THAT NO LONGER WORK.

TONIGHT, YOU HAVE SEEN WHERE YOUR VALUABLE TAX DOLLARS GO. YOU HAVE SEEN THE FACES OF OUR EMPLOYEES AND THE FACES OF THE PEOPLE WE SERVE. IF YOU NEED US, WE WANT TO BE THERE FOR YOU.

THANK YOU AND GOOD NIGHT.