

# COUNTY OF SUFFOLK



## OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

H. Lee Dennison Building  
100 Veterans Memorial Highway  
P.O. Box 6100  
Hauppauge, New York 11788-0099  
(631) 853-4000

**Steve Levy**  
SUFFOLK COUNTY EXECUTIVE

## State of the County Address

### Patchogue Theatre for the Performing Arts January 24, 2006

Thank you, Presiding Officer Lindsay, Minority Leader Losquadro, members of the Legislature, and the many residents throughout Long Island who are joining us live here tonight courtesy of *News 12*. I would like to extend a special thank you to Patchogue Village Mayor, Paul Pontiere, who has so graciously agreed to host this year's State of the County address in this remarkable venue – the Patchogue Theatre.

I chose Patchogue as the site of this year's State of the County because this village is symbolic of the kind of revitalization that communities can experience with the rebirth of their downtowns. Such a rebirth requires a solid plan – and planning for our future is one of the major themes of my address to you tonight. But first, let us focus on the state of our county.

I am pleased to say that the state of our county is strong. We are headed in the right direction. Things that should be going up are going up – our open space preservation programs, our affordable housing starts and the county's bond rating - are all indeed going up. Those things that should be going down – such as our General Fund taxes and the crime rate, are indeed going down.

But there is important work to be done. Recent surveys show once again that high taxes remain the number one concern of our residents. Most of our constituents are doing all they can to make ends meet; consequently, we must do all we can to make cost containment our number one priority. Let us dedicate this upcoming year to these two important precepts – protecting our taxpayers and planning for our future.

Over the course of this coming year we will see hundreds of pieces of legislation come before the Legislature for adoption – and requests for hundreds of additional positions. Individually, we could find justification for passing or funding them all. However, if we fail to prioritize; if we do not exercise fiscal constraint, when added together, these individual programs will collectively lead to higher tax rates our constituents simply cannot bear. All the programs in the world are irrelevant if we can't afford to live here. This is why we must continue to practice smarter government; we must promote reforms and innovations; we must continue our policy of “doing more with less.” We must show that together – we have the will to take on special interests that benefit from the status quo; and, most importantly, we must have the courage to say, “No” when “No” is the prudent answer.

Saying “yes” is easy. Anyone can say “yes”. You can pick a person randomly out of the phone book, make them an elected official, and have them say “yes” to every program that comes before them. What makes us special is when we can show that we have the ability to distinguish the good programs from the unnecessary ones and to demonstrate that we can prioritize. While there may be some short-term political flak over such an approach –it’s the right thing to do.

The most pro-child or pro-family thing we can do is not tax our children and parents out of their homes. That is why we must continue on our path of fiscal restraint. That is why we must remain focused on protecting the taxpayers and planning for our future.

We can be very proud of our fiscal record over these past two years. We have had six budgets in all: two college budgets, two capital budgets and two operating budgets. All six I have presented to you, including two General Fund budgets, were at or below the previous year's tax rate. And our Police District fund was the leanest it has been in years, lower even than the rate of inflation. And, of course, we have provided for two straight General Fund tax cuts.

Though the tax rate at the County level has been stabilized, the rates at other levels of government, including our schools, have continued to rise. I will continue to personally appeal to our colleagues at all levels of government to create a different system on Long Island – one that maximizes accountability within all of our local districts. While there is one County Executive, who is the chief budget officer of county government, and while there is one Town Supervisor, who is the chief budget officer of town government, there is no single, accountable, independently-elected individual within our other districts, which account for more than 70 percent of our tax bill.

Our residents deserve greater control of their fate beyond the futile remedy of simply voting down a school budget to register protest. Residents should be able to vote for or against a single budget officer in each of these districts.

As an incentive to keep school taxes within the rate of inflation, the Governor has recently proposed a STAR-Plus program providing a rebate for taxpayers in districts where expenditures are kept within four percent. I propose to you the creation of a new Suffolk Senior Star program for 2007. Under the Suffolk Senior STAR program we will guarantee no increase in any county taxes for any seniors in the Enhanced STAR program in those districts keeping taxes within four percent. Hopefully, these plans, in tandem, will provide extra incentive to keep school taxes reasonable.

We at the county level have been leading by example. We managed our finances so prudently we were able to cut our General Fund taxes for the second straight year – and still suspend the energy tax by 40 percent. For the first time in 35 years, the county budget I submitted actually called for less spending than the previous year. This responsible fiscal policy helped raise our bond rating to an A+, Suffolk’s highest rating in 30 years.

To continue these successes into the future, we must never stop in our efforts to restructure and reform this government to maximize efficiency. That will require bi-partisan cooperation. The people of Suffolk don’t care about party labels. They care about smart ideas and common sense.

Common sense has been the key ingredient to our recipe for success in these first two years. It was common sense that dictated the decision to hire a professional manager for the county-owned Westhampton Airport. As a result, we increased revenues one hundred times over what was collected the year before I took office. It was common sense that drove us to take highly trained professional police officers doing audio-visual or accounting work out from behind the desk. As a result, the same is being done by civilians earning much less and there are more officers on the streets. Last year our smart government reforms took a controversial health care plan that was \$36 million in the red and made it flush again. We put financial experts on the review panel replacing political appointees and injected the process with competition. We said we’d do it, and we did. Working in partnership with our friends in labor, our efforts saved the taxpayers \$18 million.

Protecting the taxpayer and planning for the future – that must be a major priority in the months ahead. For the last two years I’ve been saying our government must operate more like a business, always paying close attention to the bottom line. That is why I am calling for a major restructuring of various departments to enhance efficiency over the upcoming years.

I ask your help in consolidating our computer databases scattered throughout the county into a single Department of Information Technology. Last year, at least four different departments were duplicating efforts to purchase and maintain county map data. One centralized department can eliminate this inefficiency. Upon creation of the department, I will submit the name of Sharon Cates-Williams as our Commissioner. In addition to her sterling qualifications, Sharon will be the first African-American female Commissioner in Suffolk's history.

Our smart government mindset dictates that we utilize the talents of the private sector where it makes sense to do so. I am announcing today that we will be soliciting proposals to help the county more aggressively oversee Workers Compensation claims and eradicate fraud. I will also be seeking proposals from experts in the private sector to assist the county with our real estate leases, to solicit grants from previously untapped sources and to help the County uncover waste and abuse in the Medicaid system.

We recently reaped the benefits of just such a public-private partnership through the creation of our Suffolk Prescription Drug Discount program that can save families an average of 20 percent on their prescription drug costs. Our citizens get lower drug costs and our taxpayers will save over \$1 million next year through our high-volume discount purchases.

We are also promoting a reform to bring the county sick-day policy more in keeping with the private sector. We have seen cases of some retiring employees receiving cash out checks of a quarter of a million for unused sick and other accumulated time. Let's help those who are truly sick – not perpetuate a system that pays no heed to the bottom line.

While we can and must tighten these rules, we must also keep in mind that our recent successes would simply not have been possible without the dedication of our outstanding county workforce. These are the dedicated men and women who protect our streets, plow our roads, clean our parks and care for our needy. We have with us here tonight a group of county employees in our park stewardship unit who this year went above and beyond the call of duty.

This past May they noticed smoke coming from a house adjoining park property. Their quick and courageous actions led to the sleeping family inside being safely evacuated. Let us recognize their selfless actions.

More revenue will be available for recreation as we continue to weed out waste and fraud within the bureaucracy. We hired more auditors, implemented cash-control systems to keep better tabs on public funds, and installed a new consumer-friendly reservation system that will allow our residents to spend more time enjoying our county parks and less time waiting on lines or experiencing delays in the reservation process.

Implementing smart government principles not only helps us to save taxpayer dollars; it helps us to create a more compassionate county government. Three years ago the homeless population in Suffolk was housed primarily in motels costing up to \$5,000 per month per family. I am happy to report that we have turned the corner. In January 2003 there were 190 families housed in motels. Today, that figure is down to 6. And thanks to the creation of new shelters, the number of singles living in motels was reduced from over 200 last winter to a mere 8 individuals today. This smart government approach also has saved us over \$7 million in emergency housing costs.

At the start of this year, we created two mobile nursing units to bring important early prenatal health care to under-served communities. As a result, we are seeing a greater number of healthier outcomes. There has been a 9 percent increase in prenatal visits, which in turn has reduced the number of infant malpractice claims from an average of 6 to 10 per year to only one in 2005.

Protecting our taxpayers – that must be the primary goal for all of us in county government. We need to work more closely with other levels of government to share in cost-cutting. I have already met twice with our town supervisors to explore ways of sharing services

such as park and road maintenance, the results of which will be announced in the upcoming months. Department heads from Nassau and Suffolk counties have been meeting to come up with ways to consolidate our purchasing power to bring about efficiencies through the joint purchases of paper, petroleum and other supplies. And later this month, the Nassau County Executive and I will meet to discuss potential plans to match Suffolk's expanding commercial need for sewers with Nassau's excess sewer capacity. Under this scenario, we save money in not having to expand an existing plant, and Nassau receives money it can parley into environmental protection. We need to be less Balkanized and more regionalized.

We recognize that you cannot go back to the taxpayer over and over again to meet the demands of government. That is why it is so important to continue to grow our economy. Expanding our tax base spreads the tax burden across more shoulders and lessens the weight we bear individually. We must continue to attract good paying jobs that will allow our families to take root here.

One of the many challenges we face on Long Island is balancing our desire to grow with preserving our fragile environment. We want the jobs that come with economic growth. We need more housing for our young. We also want to preserve our open spaces and our clean, plentiful water supply. In the past, these issues were viewed as mutually exclusive. We have changed that. We have shown that with proper planning, these interests need not be pitted against each other. We can indeed grow our economy, build more affordable housing, and do so without sacrificing our precious environment. We will succeed in striking that delicate balance only through proper planning. Good government starts with good planning.

We have worked vigorously to identify those locations ideal for preservation while at the same time targeting previously developed areas for expansion of our economic base. Why

destroy our beautiful open spaces and farms when we can redevelop the abandoned shopping centers, warehouses, and industrial complexes blighting our neighborhoods?

Last year we worked with the Nassau County Executive in reinvigorating the Long Island Regional Planning Board. This year, I am calling for a review of the regional master plan to be coordinated with the plans of local towns and villages. Included in this analysis will be a study of the convergence of numerous new big box commercial developments on traffic flow – especially the Long Island Expressway-Sagtikos corridor, where the Towns of Huntington, Babylon, Islip and Smithtown meet, and along Route 58 in Riverhead– the gateway to the North Fork.

Our plans to bring hundreds of high tech jobs to Suffolk through the development of the county-owned Westhampton Airport as an economic hub are ready to be marketed. At last year's address, I laid out my vision for a state-of-the-art workforce housing center coupled with a sports, entertainment or cultural venue to create a new sense of identity for both the hamlet of Yaphank and the county. I'm pleased to tell you that we are now at the stage where we are receiving plans from the development community to make this vision a reality.

We will promote economic development further by assisting the Center of Excellence at Stony Brook that is becoming a leader in wireless technology. I will be issuing an executive order to allow our county land to host the equipment needed to make us a wireless county.

As I stated earlier, overall growth in Suffolk cannot progress without a serious investment in enhancing our sewer capacity. Our most recent capital budget infused a new commitment to the construction and expansion of our sewer districts to a level not seen in more than three decades. Creating more sewer capacity will help us meet our goal of allowing businesses to grow on our Route 110 corridor, in the Hauppauge Industrial Park, and numerous other industrial sites throughout the county.

As a hallmark of our smart government and smart planning, we must also make it easier for our companies to do business in Suffolk County. The red tape and delays inherent in our

overlapping bureaucracies result in frustration and lost revenue. In the business community, time is money. It is absurd for businesses to have to wait 16 weeks, as was the case two years ago, for an application to be reviewed by government personnel. Our smart government restructuring has reduced the review time to less than four weeks for both commercial applications and residential subdivisions.

The formerly frustrating process has been expedited even further by innovative cross-referencing, a program we adopted earlier this year. Now agents from our Departments of Public Works and Health meet on a bi-weekly basis to perform simultaneous reviews of an applicant's paperwork. I propose that this year we pursue having the towns participate in this process as well.

Our businesses are being further boosted by our reinvigorated downtown revitalization program. The rebirth of the Village of Patchogue is a shining example of the successes that can materialize when various levels of government work together to strengthen communities. Look around you and see what Patchogue has done here; this historic hall, which first opened its majestic doors onto Main Street as Ward and Glynne's Patchogue Theatre in 1923, is a symbol of the Village's ongoing renaissance. We want to assist our towns and villages in replicating this type of success.

Formerly, county downtown funds were spread so thin there was often very little lasting impact to our expenditures. The new merit-based policy that the Legislature has supported allows us to concentrate our funding on a few large scale projects that will truly make a difference for local communities. An unused blighted park in Brentwood will be resurrected to become a gateway to a resurgent downtown. A parking lot alongside the Peconic River is being developed into a scenic entrée into downtown Riverhead.

Over the next year, our concept of business incubators in economically distressed areas, particularly within our diverse communities, will come to fruition. Entrepreneurs who would not otherwise think of investing in distressed areas may now be convinced to do so with the many incentives available through these incubators. Fledgling businesses run out of garages and attics can now come together in the incubator to share not only their ingenuity but their office space, secretarial staff, and equipment as well, to help their up and coming businesses thrive. The investment is indeed contagious, and as more businesses settle in distressed and diverse neighborhoods, their energy and success will uplift nearby establishments.

Our minority and women-owned businesses have been helped even further over the past year through the creation of our new website dedicated specifically to aiding these companies that will soon receive direct e-mails from the county whenever a bid is being solicited.

One constant refrain repeated by businesses large or small is that the lack of affordable workforce housing on Long Island is hampering their ability to grow. If we are to prosper, our businesses need young, educated, talented workers. Unfortunately they are in shorter supply as more and more of our best minds make the fateful decision to pack their bags and leave Long Island for more affordable pastures. This brain drain not only tears families apart; but it has the potential to tear our economy apart as well.

The Workforce Housing Commission has brought together representatives from the towns and the county to join forces with builders, environmentalists and civic leaders - not simply to talk about affordable housing, but rather, to find specific parcels appropriate for the creation of more affordable housing.

With the cooperation of our towns and villages, we have identified numerous such parcels. The very first project to come through this process is sited right here in the Village of Patchogue. This project will produce 80 new homes, 40 of which are affordable and are in the

works right now. Suffolk assisted this effort in various ways and will assist further with sewer and water hookups from the \$15 million dollar fund we established in our capital budget.

Other successes include our bid to lure the not-for-profit entity ArtSpace, which will help create affordable lofts for artists in downtown Patchogue and Riverhead. We are currently working with the Village of Westhampton Beach to facilitate several hundred workforce homes there and a program in the Town of Southold that provides new homes and accessory apartments as well. Several thousand more workforce units are slated for the grounds of the former Pilgrim State Hospital, and we remain committed to developing workforce homes at our county-owned Yaphank site. These homes are being kept affordable in part because of the generosity from the fine folks in the Long Island building trades – many of whom have agreed to provide up to a 50 percent discount in the construction of these dwellings. Please join me in recognizing Mike Conroy and Allan Ehl from the Empire State Regional Council of Carpenters.

Our careful planning and smart government also opened the door of opportunity for many families previously shut out from participation in our affordable housing programs. New, more realistic eligibility requirements now allow couples earning up to \$85,000 to find homes valued up to \$390,000.

Later this year I will be traveling throughout the County to tout what may be the best kept secret in Suffolk - our Employer Assisted Housing Program. Few are aware of this program which can leverage a \$3,000 employer grant into as much as \$32,000 in government assistance for employees purchasing a home in Suffolk. Imagine converting a Christmas bonus into a real opportunity for a young family to experience the American dream here on Long Island.

So, to all of our business leaders, I say: Be part of the solution. Joining the program could turn out to be the best raise you could ever give to an employee.

The reasons people want to live in Suffolk County are obvious – our exceptional schools, our stunning shorelines and breathtaking parks, our low crime rate, our diverse economy and our proximity to good paying jobs, and, perhaps most importantly, our quintessential suburban environment. Those settling in Suffolk, more often than not, do so with the goal of owning a single family home in a nice neighborhood that is well maintained and safe for their children. It is what the concept of neighborhood is all about.

Our local civic associations work very hard to defend the concept of neighborhood, and rightly so. This Administration and this Legislature understand that no family wants to work hard their entire lives only to see their largest investment placed at risk because local zoning codes are ignored. How did we ever get to the point where 60 people were allowed to live in a 900-square-foot single family home? Those residents and community leaders who have spoken out against this abomination are right to do so and are looking to their government to defend the integrity of their neighborhoods. Those speaking out are not cold-hearted; they are not narrow-minded, and they should not be labeled as such. Some out-of-touch advocacy group has gone so far as to label the Village of Patchogue as one of the “meanest” municipalities in the country for its “Operation Clean Sweep” which combats public drunkenness and drug dealings. To them I say: help us improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods or get out of the way!

Suffolk’s hard-working families pay our salaries and look to us for leadership. I am proud that this Administration and this Legislature have responded in kind. Our Police Department, along with District Attorney Thomas Spota, is aggressively pursuing those slum lords who exploit both the tenants living under these conditions and their neighbors in the surrounding communities.

Our combined efforts toward neighborhood protection reached a crescendo this past month with new legislation that provides incentives for towns to adopt tougher codes to help combat the more egregiously overcrowded facilities.

Two years ago our open space program was dead in the water, mired in controversy. This new Administration and the Legislature combined to draft new laws to weed out conflicts, prioritize parcels and expedite the mechanisms for land acquisition. We appointed a renowned environmentalist to head up our program, assigned additional attorneys to help close our deals, and we created three master lists of over 9,000 environmentally sensitive parcels targeted for preservation. These parcels were chosen not for political reasons, but by the leaders of our environmental community. The results have been extraordinary. In our first year alone we doubled the number of acres closed on or in contract over the previous year's total. Over a two year period, we have acquired or reached agreement upon nearly 3,000 acres of open space and active farmland – more than three and a half times the size of Central Park.

To ensure that we have the resources necessary to win the race against overdevelopment, we collectively passed a \$75 million dollar open space bond that was overwhelmingly endorsed by the voters.

Our program is in such high gear that we will run out of funds next year – before our work is done. We owe it to our grandchildren to finish the job. I am proposing that we leave them a legacy – an Environmental Legacy Fund of \$50 million to match funds with other public and private sources for a total of \$100 million to preserve our open spaces and farms and restore our parks.

But our environmental record extends beyond preserving open space. We are simultaneously engaged in restoring our bays and revitalizing our shellfish industry. In the 1980's one-quarter of the nation's scallop harvest came from right here in Suffolk. Over time that production virtually disappeared, but we are on the comeback trail. Our landmark program to reseed millions of scallops in the Peconic Bay, the largest such program in the country, is now bearing fruit. The recent harvest showed promise, and we are hopeful that next year our previously decimated scallop population will be on the way back. And this year, through a

legislative initiative and in concert with The Nature Conservancy, we are embarking on a \$1 million dollar clam restoration program in the Great South Bay.

Our waterways and wetlands will be further protected through the mitigation of pesticide use in our ongoing efforts to battle the devastating effects of mosquito-borne illnesses. We are learning to utilize innovative methods that will reduce dependence on pesticides. Last year I stated that for the first time Suffolk County would not engage in new ditching in our marshlands. This year, we will go further by restoring wetlands in an environmentally sound manner and creating new habitats in which fish populations can flourish. We believe healthy wetlands and natural predators of mosquito larvae can help us reduce our dependence on pesticides by as much as 75 percent over the next decade.

Equally damaging is the runoff from road tar, salt, and other byproducts from rainstorms that wind up in our ground and surface waters. Years ago, the Legislature envisioned an innovative method of using charcoal filtering devices to stop pollutants from seeping into our waterways.

To accommodate this program we transferred 19 employees to help ensure that many catch basins throughout the county are equipped with these filters.

And for the first time in this county we are making a serious effort to monitor and manage the thousands of acres we have preserved over these many years to inhibit dumping and ensure that our open spaces remain pristine. We can be additionally proud of our environmental record when we look at our successful joint efforts with the federal government and Brookhaven Lab in cleaning up the Peconic River.

We have become the state leader in energy efficiency and the use of cleaner alternative energy sources. This year we will save over \$1 million on energy costs through our Clean Energy Action Plan. We were the first municipality on Long Island to adopt this plan. Thanks to bills promoted by both our branches, cleaner bio-diesel fuel is now being used in a north shore

dredging project and in our heavy duty fleet. The county is purchasing an additional 25 hybrid vehicles. And we are working with a private company to convert excess grease produced by the restaurant industry and recycle it for energy purposes rather than see it dumped illegally.

Additionally, this past year Suffolk became the first county in New York State to adopt tax incentives for residents and businesses that install solar equipment.

Our beautiful county parkland is not *all* reserved for open space, however. Our active parkland provides an oasis of recreation that helps make Suffolk County so unique. Over the last year we saw a renewed investment in our park infrastructure. Major repairs were effectuated at Meadowcroft, Sagtikos Manor, Flanders Gun Club and the West Neck Farm, just to name a few. We are reopening our trap and skeet range at Southaven Park and hired nine additional full-time park police over the last year for greater security, the largest increase since 1977. We also enhanced our restrooms for the visiting public at Southaven Park and Smith Point and implemented a new water-to-campsite project at the Indian Island camp site in Riverhead.

Last year we achieved an unprecedented level of success in seeking assistance from our colleagues in Albany. As one of the four County Executives on a committee to bring about Medicaid reform, I worked with our Albany delegation to cap Medicaid costs to the local property taxpayer. Now we will ask our delegation to set its sights on several other items of importance.

Last summer I hosted a meeting with mental health professionals and our state delegation to discuss ways in which Suffolk County could be reimbursed by the state government for the disproportionately high number of people with mental illness in Suffolk. For decades Suffolk County hosted numerous psychiatric institutions that housed up to one-third of the State's mentally ill population. Upon closure, the occupants settled overwhelmingly here in Suffolk County. What is most unfortunate is that far too many have had the correctional facilities in Riverhead and Yaphank as their latest place of residence. It is estimated that up to 10 percent of

our jail population suffers from mental illness. It is my hope that the creation of a mental health court next year will be a first step in assuring that these individuals stay on their medication, remain healthy and on the right course.

We will be seeking assistance from both the state and federal governments to ensure that we have the resources to deal with man-made and natural disasters. While Suffolk is ahead of the curve in relation to other counties throughout the state, Hurricane Katrina showed us that even our best laid plans may have gaps in the face of nature's fury. We have since implemented a top-to-bottom review to help ensure that we have an adequate number of evacuation sites, cots, vaccines, supplies and backup equipment on hand. Additionally I met with our congressional delegation in Washington to coordinate and upgrade our disaster response plans.

We will also be asking the state to pass legislation to benefit those who serve their community and their nation. It is becoming increasingly difficult for our volunteer fire departments and ambulance companies to recruit and retain members. That is why I will be lobbying for state legislation to award bonus points on civil service exams to these selfless volunteers.

Our veterans already receive this civil service bonus, and they deserve even more. As it presently stands, war veterans will receive a property tax exemption only after they are discharged from military service. But veterans need this assistance most at the time they are away from their families and sent to foreign lands to defend our nation.

We have with us today members of the 106<sup>th</sup> Air National Guard base at the Westhampton County Airport. Last year our lobbying efforts helped prevent the closure of this important facility – one of the largest east end employers. Please join me in recognizing Colonel Michael Canders and members of the Air Guard who have recently returned from serving their

country in Iraq. The tax benefits we give these heroes should kick in while they are actively engaged in the defense of our country. They should not have to wait until they are discharged.

Our veterans defend us abroad and our outstanding Police Department defends our streets right here at home. We also have with us members of our county police force who have recently returned from service in Iraq. Please join me in welcoming them home.

Our Suffolk County Police Department is second to none. A great Department has been made even better over the past two years with the smart government principles we have implemented. While the number of sworn personnel on the force has remained rather constant, the number of officers out on street patrol has increased. Placing civilians in Department desk jobs earning one-half to two-thirds less than sworn personnel has allowed for more of our highly trained dedicated officers to be transferred to the front line of defense in our neighborhoods. We are deploying officers where they are needed most and when they are needed most.

I am proud to report that for the second year in a row Forbes Magazine has designated our suburban community as the safest in the nation. In fact, our reforms have helped bring about an 11 percent decrease in crime over the last two years. We created new specialized units – anti-gang units, as well as units to combat identity theft, drag racers and other reckless drivers, and sexual predators using the Internet to prey upon children.

Thanks to our partnership with Parents for Megan’s Law, Suffolk County has one of the lowest sex offender registration failure rates in the nation. Through collaboration with the police department, schools and Parents for Megan’s Law, concerned parents will be able to obtain sex offender notifications quicker through email alerts.

Next year we will enhance our Police Department even further by installing video cameras in our police cars and creating a new unit to recruit a more diversified Department. We will also consider upgrading the requirements to two years of college credit or above before an officer is eligible for a promotion.

The innovations we promoted last year in cross-referencing suspected felons with immigration lists will be followed this year with a new program cross-referencing arrestees with

child support arrears. If assets are seized and money is owed for support, we'll take it and make sure these assets get to the children.

I'd also like to note that the first class of more than 100 officers under my administration will be graduating shortly. They will be combined with a new class of 100 recruits that will begin training later this year.

Several months ago I authorized new positions within the District Attorney's office and the Department of Social Services that are helping us uncover fraud in our schools and in the Medicaid system. Recent reports indicate that up to 10 percent of Medicaid applications are tinged with fraud. We will not tolerate such abuse. I want to thank Suffolk County Comptroller Joe Sawicki for assisting my Administration and District Attorney Tom Spota's office in this effort.

Smart government means professionalizing our government. Appointments to the county's boards and commissions should be made far less political and more professional. I will be seeking to work with a majority of Legislators to reverse the misguided actions of last year that saw a noted environmentalist removed from our Council of Environmental Quality. Let us ensure that legislation is passed that will have highly qualified individuals on this Council, as well as on our Planning Commission and Water Authority.

And in an historic approach, we will seek to revamp the office of Off Track Betting, long a den of patronage abuse, to see that excessive salaries are cut and unnecessary cars are taken away. Let us work together to enhance people's confidence in the government that serves them.

In conclusion, our upcoming year will be one where we concentrate on reform, restructuring and cost-containment. We all know how property values have risen in the county. It's no surprise. So many people want to live here – and for good reason.

We have a duty as the people's representatives to keep taxes stable for today's generation and to lay out professional, visionary planning for our future generations.

**We can protect our taxpayers today:**

- By creating a Suffolk STAR program to freeze county taxes for our seniors;
- By advocating for the election of a single, accountable, elected budget official in schools and other special districts;
- By working with the private sector to control leasing, Workers Compensation and Medicaid costs;
- By curbing sick time abuse;
- By creating efficiencies through department consolidations;
- By reforming management of OTB with directors committed to cutting costs;
- By promoting town-county coordination on purchasing and maintenance;
- And by continuing our policy of Smart Government in every department and at every level of county operations.

**While we do this, we can set the course for tomorrow:**

- By creating the \$100 million Environmental Legacy Fund;
- By coordinating the regional master plan with those of towns and villages;
- By undertaking greater analysis of regional traffic issues;
- By promoting economic growth through sewer expansion for our businesses;
- By partnering with Nassau County to match our commercial sewer needs with its excess capacity;
- By promoting business incubators in economically distressed areas;

- By encouraging economic development through the use of Empire Zones;
- By balancing our need for economic growth with our need to preserve our precious environment;
- And by continuing to promote affordable and workforce housing programs so that the generations to come will have the means, as well as the desire, to establish roots and raise their families here in this great place we call Suffolk County.

When our children look back on whether we provided the leadership to make Suffolk the envy of the state, let us be able to say, indeed we did.

Thank you and good night. God bless America, and God bless Suffolk County.