



County of Onondaga  
**Office of the County Executive**

John H. Mulroy Civic Center, 14th Floor  
421 Montgomery Street, Syracuse, New York 13202

Phone: 315.435.3516 Fax: 315.435.8582

[www.ongov.net](http://www.ongov.net)

**Joanne M. Mahoney**  
*County Executive*

**Ann Rooney**  
*Deputy County Executive, Human Services*

**William P. Fisher**  
*Deputy County Executive*

**Matthew J. Millea**  
*Deputy County Executive, Physical Services*

State of the County Address

It's a pleasure to be at West Genesee High School for the 2011 State of the County Address. I would like to thank Superintendent Chris Brown for this opportunity and West Genesee High School Principal Barry Copeland and all of your staff for your hospitality.

Superintendent Brown, you should be proud of the way you have led your school district during these difficult fiscal times. It is truly impressive. Through collaboration and creativity you have addressed major challenges and the school district has performed very well. I would like to commend you and the entire faculty and staff of the West Genesee School District for working together and more importantly, for remembering that it's about the students.

Thank you to the members of the West Genesee High School Chorale for singing the National Anthem and Town of Camillus Supervisor Mary Ann Coogan for leading us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Welcome to the members of the Onondaga County Legislature. I would like to acknowledge Jim Corbett, Bob DeMore, Marty Masterpole, Tom Buckel and Jim Rhinehart, who recently announced they will not seek re-election this fall - thank you for your dedicated public service. Bob DeMore left the Legislature last month and accepted my offer to become the Community Development Director for Onondaga County. We are happy to have Bob on our team and he is off to a fast start

Welcome to my fellow county-wide elected officials, thank you for being here. Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner and members of her team are here tonight as well.

A few weeks ago I attended the Mayor's State of the City Address. It was an honest and direct assessment of the challenges the city faces in 2011. The line that perhaps stayed with me most was when she said, "The day of reckoning is not coming; it has arrived". Mayor, I have enjoyed working with you and I look forward to continuing to work with you on the challenges the City and County will face this year. Thank you for being here tonight.

To those of you here on behalf of our state and federal representatives, thank you for coming. The decisions made at the state and federal level have a tremendous impact on the work we do, and I appreciate the ongoing partnership with all of our local delegation.

Welcome also to the officials from our towns and villages.

I appreciate you being here. Also, welcome to the Department Heads and county employees. Your service to this community during one of the most difficult times in Onondaga County history is impressive and I am grateful for your dedication to our citizens.

Every year on the first Tuesday in March, the County Executive is required to report on the "State of the County". This is my fourth time and I'm not sure whether I feel like "It's ALREADY my fourth" or "it's ONLY my fourth".

Our COUNTRY, our state, and our COUNTY continue to weather a very difficult financial crisis. As economists have reported, the recession has ended, but as we know ourselves, the recovery has been slow. I am confident that each of us could provide a personal story about how someone we know, was directly affected by the recession. While the financial state of our county continues to be difficult, the state of our county as a whole is strong. We are very resilient. The people who call Central New York home have an unwavering spirit and a belief ---always-- that our best days are in front of us.

Until recently, New York State government has met the financial storm with business as usual. For years we've seen increased spending and an ever-growing deficit in the State budget. A real source of frustration has been the failure to connect the decisions made at the state level to the extraordinarily high property taxes New Yorkers pay.

The costs of state mandated programs in New York State are not sustainable for any county. There seems to be a very real lack of understanding about how these mandates affect property taxes. In December, I joined County Executives from across the state in calling for reform of state mandates. In 2010 nearly \$4.4 billion were collected statewide in county property taxes. Of that amount, \$4 billion was paid to the state for the bills they sent us for only 9 mandated programs. That's 90 percent of all county property taxes paid in New York State to fund only 9 programs over which no county has any control at all.

In Onondaga County, 2011 will be the first time in our history where more than every single dollar of property tax the county collects will be used to pay for state mandated programs. Total property tax collected will be nearly \$154 million dollars and our bill from the state will exceed \$160 million dollars — it's important for county property taxpayers to understand --- county property tax dollars are not funding COUNTY programs, they are funding STATE programs.

Last month, Governor Cuomo released his budget. It is a difficult budget, but in it, the Governor has shown a willingness to take the steps necessary to stop New York State's downward spiral. As a co-chair of Governor Cuomo's transition team, I saw first hand that he understands our collective circumstances and is willing to tackle this sobering reality.

Like many of you, I am encouraged that the proposed State budget actually spends less money. The Albany budgeting scheme of the recent past was to claim that they were cutting spending when they were really just cutting the rate of growth or increasing the cost to local governments. When we split the cost of a program (one they voted for and required us to pay half of), the state paid 50% and we paid 50%.

In the past, when Albany had budget problems, they would unilaterally decrease their contribution to 48% and require us to pay 52%. They call it cutting....I call it misleading. This proposed state budget does not do that. It actually cuts spending and is an attempt to start to turn things around.

I commend Governor Cuomo for his early efforts to begin to right the ship of state, and I urge the state legislature to work with the Governor to implement a cost-cutting budget. At the same time, the Governor's team is working to reform state mandated programs. Only real reform will solve the budget problems of the state and the counties.

Governor Cuomo has just accepted the recommendations of the Medicaid redesign team. Medicaid reform is crucial to New York State. We can provide healthcare for the truly needy. The issue is the number of legal loopholes created over the years, which allow individuals with greater financial means to access Medicaid, and in particular, long term care services which make up almost half of all Medicaid spending in New York State.

Medicaid eligibility planning is now a very lucrative industry in the legal and financial communities, where practitioners actively help families shield income and assets toward the goal of qualifying family members for Medicaid. These loopholes can, and should, be closed.

Many of you have heard about the problems Erie County has faced. Rockland County is now being audited by the State Comptroller's office because Moody's downgraded their credit rating. The problems don't stop there.

New York State recently seized control of Nassau County's finances because the assumptions used to balance their budget are not reliable. Nassau County has the second highest property taxes of any county in the United States and they still can't keep up. Taxing our way out of this situation is impossible.

Politicians are far more willing to make the easy choice to cut taxes but have struggled with an inability to tackle the more difficult part of the job ---cutting spending. It is basic math and the failure to do both is a recipe for fiscal disaster. I implore the state legislature to remember this while they are discussing a property tax cap. A property tax cap without cuts in state spending will result in an entire state of Nassau Counties!

Nassau's lesson is one to remember in our own budgeting as well. We must ensure reductions to our levy are backed up by the elimination of recurring expenses from our budget.

While much was reported about the vetoes during the 2011 budget process, one point must be emphasized --- The County Executive cannot BY LAW veto a budget cut, I am only able to veto increases in revenues and expenses. The fact that I was able to veto nearly \$32 million and did veto nearly \$24 million, in changes made to the Executive Budget demonstrates that they were not cuts.

I know the process is complicated and we can debate philosophies but we have a responsibility to be straight with taxpayers. The fact is that the budget passed by the legislature reducing the levy by nearly \$50 million contained only \$4.6 million dollars in real spending cuts---Onondaga County is at a tipping point... further attempts to lower

the levy without real spending cuts will put us on a slippery slope to Nassau County. In addition to properly managing our expenses, the key to avoiding fiscal ruin is making sound policy decisions.

This Legislature took a giant step forward by passing the new sales tax sharing formula last year. I am happy to report, during the second half of 2010, we began to see the impact. The new agreement, approved unanimously by this Legislature, corrected inequities which had existed for decades.

The most recent evidence of the wisdom of the new policy was on Onondaga County's bond rating. Last month Fitch's not only affirmed our AAA bond rating, they also changed the financial outlook for Onondaga County from "Negative" to "Stable".

Part of the reason for the upgrade is Onondaga County's diverse economy with a stable employment base bolstered by the strong presence of health care and higher education institutions, which are a tremendous asset to our community.

The report also gave specific credit to the revised sales tax agreement stating, "The revision in outlook to stable from negative reflects Fitch's belief that the financial position of the county has stabilized with the implementation of a ten-year sales tax agreement effective" this year.

While Time magazine reports 348 municipal downgrades in the first 3 quarters of 2010, we can be proud that in Onondaga County we are being upgraded. It was a tough vote, and I commend the legislature for standing together and doing the right thing. The old formula meant that densely populated municipalities received more sales tax.

The new agreement provides more equity, makes the cost of government more transparent, drives consolidation and shared services and recognizes the City of Syracuse as the vital core of our region. As a result of this change, almost half the property tax payers in Onondaga County saw a decrease in their county property taxes.

This fact was acknowledged by Chairman Rhinehart at a recent Skaneateles Town Board meeting. On the subject of town taxes, he said that the town of Skaneateles' taxes went down overall this year. That's both the town's and county's share...It brings back people's confidence in government." The additional sales tax revenue the county retained was used to close a nearly \$60 million dollar budget gap. A gap created by a poor economy and increasing state mandates.

Of the entire amount Onondaga County collects in property and sales taxes, about **\$160** million dollars goes to pay for State Mandated Programs. Another \$113 million dollars are for public safety; this includes 9-1-1, the Sheriff's Office, the District Attorney, Jails, and Probation. That leaves about 72 million dollars to fund "the rest of county government", including the county's administrative functions, the County Legislature, County Clerk and Comptroller.

It also includes the Department of Transportation, which is responsible for plowing and maintaining county roads, Facilities which maintains all the buildings the county owns, our Library system and our entire Parks Department, including the Zoo and Alliance Bank Stadium. A closer look at Parks, DOT and Facilities--- departments we are able to

run without state interference--- shows that when we exercise local control, we are very efficient.

In 2007, the County spent almost 41.5 million dollars in these three areas and had 410 staff positions. In 2011, we will spend 34.4 million dollars and have 350 positions. That's a reduction of 17% in spending and 15% in staffing.

While we have been successful trimming the size and cost of county government, we cannot entirely cut our way out of the problem. Consider this --- I could eliminate the entire Parks Department from Onondaga County's budget and would still need to find another \$1 million dollars just to cover the \$10.3 million dollar increase in Medicaid costs from 2010. Further, eliminating things in this area would have very little effect on the tax rate, but an enormous effect on the quality of life for our residents.

For the majority of taxpayers in Onondaga County, roads that are plowed in the winter, trips to one of our diverse county parks, or use of the libraries are some of the only benefits they receive for the county property taxes they pay.

Another of our goals in changing the sales tax sharing formula was to bring transparency to the cost of government thereby creating incentives to consolidate and reduce the overall amount of property taxes collected in the county. I've said many times that we should consider ourselves with joint balance sheets and remember that the goal is to reduce the overall amount of taxes collected. Property owners care more about the total of their tax bills and less about to whom they write the check. I am happy to report that there is much progress now being made.

We hear new stories about consolidation almost every day. Skaneateles closed its 9-1-1 center. Geddes reduced the size of its planning board and by a public vote of 530 to 55 eliminated the town receiver of taxes position. It was also announced last week that Geddes and Salina are working on an agreement to share one comptroller.

Salina eliminated a special district tax which it had been collecting for 20 years to provide ambulance service at no cost for residents of the town-- a benefit paid for by all of the property owners but used by fewer than 1% of the people.

For two decades the old sales tax sharing formula, which I remind you guaranteed a certain level of sales tax paid to municipalities regardless of what the county collected, allowed practices like this to exist. A recent article quoted Salina Supervisor Mark Nicotra as saying, "We want to get out of a business that we are not supposed to be in."

With sales tax revenues being used to offset expenses county wide, town's like Salina must now make decisions about the services they can continue to provide— this is exactly what we hoped the new sales tax sharing agreement would accomplish. We must continue to lower all taxes in Onondaga County.

It's important to point out that the public referendum's that have occurred recently regarding reducing the County Legislature by two seats, eliminating the Geddes receiver of taxes and eliminating the Clay Police Department all passed with strong majorities. The elected officials in towns and villages should be giving their residents the opportunity to decide what they want to pay for by using the public referendum process and holding a vote.

Last year I also announced an initiative to consolidate municipal purchasing in Onondaga County. Before I had even returned to my office from making the announcement as part of the budget message, I already had municipalities looking to join. In addition to the city of Syracuse, including the school district, we have 23 municipalities interested in joining. The additional buying power that will come from combining county, city and the school district for purchasing, will mean the biggest beneficiaries are going to be the taxpayers in the towns and villages who are on board.

We have also had success consolidating snowplowing in the county. I appreciate those who took on more county roads this year. We have formed a snowplowing committee, which is led by former Town of Manlius Supervisor Dick Lowenberg and Vito Sciscioli, former Executive Director of Syracuse 20/20. This committee is tasked with finding the best way for the county to address snow covered roads. Following political boundaries is impractical and expensive and it is part of our larger effort to work more cooperatively to save taxpayers money. Thank you Dick and Vito for agreeing to serve.

In November, voters in the county overwhelmingly passed a referendum to reduce the size of the County Legislature from 19 seats to 17. The man who sponsored many resolutions on this issue, Legislator Tom Buckel, said that if the reduction passed with a significant majority he would work to reduce it even more- Tom, you may be leaving the Legislature at year's end, but I trust you will continue your crusade to right size county government!

After years of talk, real change is finally happening and we must keep up the momentum.

When you add all the taxes property owners in our county pay— the county, city, town, village, school, fire, water, sewer, sanitation, special districts and more---- it totals a staggering \$866 million dollars. It is a phenomenal amount of money to expect local property owners to pay year after year. I am proud to report that we have ended the practice of simply debating how to divide the pie differently. Together we are working to make the pie smaller. The city, town, village, school and fire officials who have worked so hard to find solutions are to be commended.

People all over the COUNTRY adopted the mantra of not letting a good crisis go to waste and I am proud to say that Onondaga County did not sit idly by during the tough financial times. We rolled up our sleeves and we went to work together. We've accomplished a lot and there is much more to do. It hasn't been easy but as a community, we are coming out of the recession stronger than we went in. Our governments are smaller and taxpayers will benefit for years to come.

This same time last year, I told you about the duplication of fire equipment we have in the 57 fire departments that support 96 fire stations in the county. I talked about the tremendous cost this represents to businesses and homeowners. I committed then to find a way to make response time data available to the public, and I am happy to report that we have accomplished this goal.

Onondaga County's website has a link on the homepage that provides access to monthly response time data. While most residents will be relieved to see how quickly their neighbors are able to respond in a crisis, there is also some cause for concern. I

committed to make the information available knowing that, armed with data, conversations would begin.

It is certainly not easy to be the first, so I am particularly happy to see that the village of Elbridge has begun the process of finding ways for firefighters to work together--- a process that will result in a better, stronger fire service and at the same time reduce costs for taxpayers.

Everyone who takes tax money from Onondaga County Residents must do their part to lower the overall tax burden and school districts are no exception. With state mandates and sky rocketing pension costs, schools face the same economic situation as municipalities. The difference is that they already collect the lion's share of taxes. If you look at the total tax burden in Onondaga County, you will see that school taxes are 54% of all the property taxes paid.

School districts must continue to look for ways to work across districts to lower overall costs. Their success can provide the biggest relief for Onondaga County taxpayers. We stand ready at the county to be as helpful as we can.

We are taking on the function of purchasing for the Syracuse City School district and welcome conversations with school leaders about what else we can do to help ease the burden.

This year West Genesee Superintendent Chris Brown asked district employees to voluntarily agree to a pay freeze in order to limit teacher layoffs. Public employees certainly did not cause the financial crisis we are in but they are in the best position to help us navigate through it.

Because personnel costs represent enormous percentages of our budgets, we have to ask employees to help if we are to be successful. No where is it more evident than in school districts--- and nowhere is it more important. I want to add my voice to the chorus of people who have thanked both the superintendent and the district employees for leadership at a time when it is greatly needed. You have inspired people all around the state. We have reason to believe that we will get through this when we see people like the teachers, administrators and staff of a school district giving something up for the greater good.

Historically, in difficult economic times Americans have been willing to sacrifice but lately we seem to have lost our way. With this agreement, you have renewed our faith. This year, we will be negotiating a new contract with one of our own unions.

Nowhere has the mindset of "we are all in this together" prevailed more than with the Onondaga County Sheriff's Police Association. (OCSPA), which is comprised of the Road Patrol Deputies, has consistently worked with us to make adjustments to their contract so we can avoid layoffs. We have had spirited debates and tough negotiations, but they are people who have recognized the bigger picture and have made thoughtful decisions and for that, I thank them.

My message to the State, towns, villages, fire departments and school districts is not one I deliver from an ivory tower where I philosophize about what is good for the

masses. It's a message delivered from where I have been since the day I took office — in the trenches running a county which leads by example.

Sharing services and consolidation are only part of what we have been doing to lower costs for taxpayers. As noted, one of the most expensive areas in government is personnel costs. Due to generous benefit programs, a county employee's actual cost is much higher than their salary. While we may pay an employee an annual salary of \$40,000, the additional cost for benefits results in a true cost of \$63,440.

Since my term began, we've been focused on modernizing government to increase productivity so when retirements occur, we don't have to refill every position. Since I took office, Onondaga County has reduced its staffing by over 530 positions and it has resulted in annual savings of more than \$35 million dollars in salary and benefits. One of the ways we did this is through competitive sourcing initiatives in correctional health, correctional food service, physical and occupational therapy and laundry services.

We are currently looking at a number of other areas and will seize opportunities where we find them to continue to reduce costs to taxpayers. As we continue to look ahead, we also see that between now and 2015, we will have an increase of over 65% in the number of County residents aged 85 and older. The implications are clear, Onondaga County faces a significant strain on its resources for the elderly.

We've already felt the impact of an aging population on our programs; and are preparing for what is to come. Under Deputy County Executive Ann Rooney's guidance, we proactively examined service delivery to our vulnerable elderly population to find a better way to deliver these critical services. I am proud to report that the Adult Protective Unit in DSS and the Neighborhood Advisor Program in Aging and Youth are now systematically coordinating their efforts, allowing for better responses to identified cases of need among the elderly.

Similarly, we are moving the Home Care program housed at Van Duyn to the Civic Center to improve coordination of case handling between that program, Adult Protective, the Dept. of Aging and Medicaid. The co-location of all of our Aging Services will allow for improved service coordination and delivery, a reduction in costs, and better outcomes for our seniors.

These types of creative solutions reduce the burden on the taxpayer and better serve the people who benefit from these programs.

We recently conducted a request for qualifications process concerning the future of Van Duyn Home and Hospital. Van Duyn has a long history of providing high quality care and acting as a safety net for many vulnerable members of our community. Our focus is on entering negotiations only with entities we feel strongly will maintain the reputation and tradition of Van Duyn in our community.

Tonight, I would like to make the important announcement that we are entering into negotiations with Upstate Medical University to take over operations of Van Duyn Home and Hospital. We are joined here tonight by Upstate's president, David Smith and University Hospital's CEO John McCabe.

We are thrilled with the ideas they have and are excited about moving toward an agreement that will benefit all of us and especially the residents of Van Duyn.

In another example of working with our neighbors, the County partnered with Galaxy Communications for this year's Lights on the Lake. Galaxy took on the responsibility to promote the event and it became the most successful year on record. 38,554 vehicles drove through the display and 192,143 people viewed the lights. The culmination was on New Year's Eve with First Night Central New York. The more than 7,000 people who attended enjoyed great music, family oriented games and an amazing fireworks show over Onondaga Lake at midnight.

The arrangement between Galaxy and Onondaga County is a great example of looking at something we've done for years and figuring out a new way to do it that improved the public's experience while removing financial risk to the County. Thank you to Ed and Pam Levine and Galaxy Communications for your hard work.

We are also implementing PeopleSoft this year, a computer solution which will connect our finance, budget and purchasing departments and allow us to provide better service with fewer people. As I said in my budget address—once up and running any town or village that would like to join the system will be able to at no cost to them. I am encouraged that 14 towns and 12 villages have shown interest in working with us.

The Say Yes to education program continues to grow and recently received a \$5 million dollar donation from SRC— thank you to President and CEO Robert Behler and the rest of SRC. Say Yes also had a great day of fundraising at the Carrier Dome during the SU/Villanova basketball game. With support from Pomco, fans texting donations contributed more than \$275,000 dollars- another example of how giving our community is.

While the promise of free tuition for students who graduate is what's talked about, it's important to remember that the program is a complete support network that creates an environment where students who may have struggled can now succeed. It also facilitates collaboration among many partners who contribute to the overall goal.

For example, without the expenditure of any local dollars, there will be mental health clinics in each building in the Syracuse City School District, providing services to up to 1500 children, by the end of 2012.

This unprecedented expansion of school based services was made possible through strong collaboration between the County's Department of Mental Health, the New York State Office of Mental Health, the Syracuse City School District, the Say Yes to Education Foundation, and our private partners.

In late 2009, New York State provided the seed money in the form of a Promise Zone grant to our Department of Mental Health. In less than one years' time we have concrete plans to establish 32 on-site mental health clinics for children, and the first clinic is about to open at Bellevue Elementary School. This is a wonderful accomplishment, and could only have been achieved by all parties coming together and making change happen.

Onondaga County is well known for the great festivals that take place throughout the summer. One of our region's signature events is Jazz Fest which brings incredible talent and huge crowds to the campus of OCC every year.

Many jazz festivals have gone under during these tough economic times but ours has thrived due to Frank Malfitano's endless dedication and determination. This year he is once again working on plans for a great weekend and I would like to thank Allen Naples and M & T Bank for the biggest sponsorship support to date.

Tonight we have another first- the State of the County is being webcast live. If you go to our website there is a link on the homepage that will take you to a live streaming feed of this speech. Welcome to those of you watching on the web.

We would like to use this technology to make government more accessible for everyone. The County Legislature conducts its meetings during the day and it is sometimes difficult for people to attend. Next month I will submit to the legislature for their consideration a resolution requiring the web-casting of legislative proceedings.

For years, New Yorkers were unable to view the proceedings of their state legislature. Today, one can view legislative proceedings at the state level on cable television as well as on live and recorded web-casts. For a modest investment, I am confident that we can provide the same openness of our own legislative proceedings to the residents of Onondaga County. Additionally, we will begin archiving these broadcasts so our citizens will have the ability to better follow what is happening in County government.

One of the biggest projects we are involved in---- our efforts to clean up Onondaga Lake continue as well. Recently, columnist Sean Kirst did a great story about how bald eagles have been wintering on the lake. Viewing the eagles has become a popular attraction drawing many people to the lakefront. Due to my concerns for their safety and the safety of the eagles, I have asked Deputy County Executive Matt Millea to create a viewing plan for next season.

In Sean Kirst's story, one of the founders of the bald eagle program in New York State, Mike Allen, commented, "the idea of the once-endangered national symbol returning each winter to a recovering lake is a story of re-emergence." I could not agree more. It is a perfect example of how far our lake has come. But there is much more work to do.

This year our Save the Rain program will implement "Project 50." Onondaga County will construct fifty distinct green infrastructure projects to return rain water and snow melt to the ground instead of to our sewer system. It is part of our effort to dramatically reduce the amount of water overloading our sewer system and causing runoff into the lake.

The projects are exciting and are further solidifying our reputation of being on the forefront of the green movement. It will help attract people to our region and green jobs for our County. More importantly, it means that when you drive down Geddes Street, you will see a park across the street from Fowler High School and not a sewage treatment plant.

Based upon the response and the success of the Green Infrastructure Projects, I will be sending a request to the Legislature for the establishment of a \$1.2 million fund that will expand the programs into the suburbs.

Included within "Project 50" is the construction of a sixty thousand square foot green roof on the Onondaga County Convention Center, making Syracuse home to one of the largest green roofs in the Northeast. Construction of this green roof will capture over one million gallons of rainfall annually.

In addition to the green roof project, Onondaga County will also partner with the Syracuse Crunch on an exciting project at the War Memorial. The county is working on a water reuse system to capture rain water for heating and cooling. I am pleased to announce it will also be used to make ice for the hockey rink. So when the puck drops next season it will land on ice made from rain water!

And while downtown enjoying a Crunch game, you will be able to see first hand the world class lighting project which is now complete. The War Memorial, the Everson Museum and plaza, historic Columbus circle and the corridor between the courthouse and civic center are now bathed in what looks like moonlight.

The corridor is named for Murray Bernthal, a man who contributed much to the arts in Onondaga County. Unfortunately, Mr. Bernthal passed away in December at the age of 99, but we will remain forever grateful to him for the work he did. Mr. Bernthal founded and conducted the orchestras that led to the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra. He also began the Famous Artist series which has brought many stars to Syracuse for over 64 years. He will be missed and I think he would be pleased to know that the corridor bearing his name has never looked better.

Since the lighting project was completed, the response has been incredible. I have received many positive comments and it not only makes people feel more comfortable downtown at night, it also shows off the world-class architecture in downtown Syracuse. If you haven't seen it yet, please come downtown some night soon.

The Arts are a big part of our region — and not only for the pleasure of our residents and visitors but a key piece of our economy in a number of ways.

In visits with some of our major employers, I've heard time and time again that recruiting talent to the region requires ongoing effort. People may be reluctant to relocate to CNY but once they do, they seldom want to leave. One of the ways we can assist our local employers is by creating an environment that helps them to attract the talent they need. They've said specifically that the arts and cultural organizations are a great recruiting tool. The diversity and quality we offer for a city our size is impressive and we must not lose sight of their importance.

The struggles of the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra have made the front pages in recent weeks, but many of our arts and cultural organizations were given bad news when the most recent budget eliminated much of the funding for these organizations. In the 2010 county budget arts groups received \$198,000 local dollars. A study performed by the Arts and Cultural Leadership Alliance estimated that in 2009 these same organizations generated over 70 million dollars in economic impact— that's a very strong return on investment. The reality is that eliminating these organizations from the 2011 budget lowered the average homeowner's property tax bill only 90 cents.

I ask the Legislature to revisit the decision and recognize the wisdom of investing in a segment of our economy that generates 70 million dollars in economic impact and is a wonderful recruiting tool for our biggest employers.

I want to publicly thank the Trust for Cultural Resources for stepping up to close the gaps which were created. The Trust depleted much of its own resources and this is not something they will be able to do for us next year. In Addition, the resources they used are no longer available to do the things their funds were intended to do this year—things like continuing to work in partnership with local foundations to support the arts as a whole.

The Gifford Foundation is leading a new initiative to develop and engage audiences... it is referred to as the IDEAS collaborative. I would like to thank Deputy County Executive Bill Fisher for his work on this effort.

More than 3000 people were surveyed and the Gifford foundation held nine forums to find ways for arts groups to work collaboratively. They will release their report shortly and we are looking forward to the results. It is efforts like this for which the Trust for Cultural Resources was created.

We are at an important juncture in our history. Times have been tough but we do see signs of progress. Sales tax receipts are inching back toward **2008** levels. Our State is struggling, but we have a new Governor who appears willing to make the difficult decisions we need to move New York State forward.

It is my belief that out of crisis comes creativity. Difficult situations force us to question everything we do and to continually strive to do things better. The important thing is that we must keep a clear vision. We can't put our heads down and simply hope for a better day. A better day will come but only with hard work and a cooperative spirit.

We can take a lesson from our Native American neighbors and make decisions with a long term view. We live in a world of instant gratification and by contrast, our friends on the Nation look to impacts on the seventh generation before deciding on a course of action.

We must strive to overcome the mindset of planning only for today or for the next election cycle. We must look through a longer lens and consider the effect of our decisions on the Onondaga County of tomorrow. We are working every day to do that.

We could have put pipes in the ground and built sewage treatment plants in the city to stop pollution from flowing into Onondaga Lake---but we didn't--- we stopped and took a fresh look. We considered new options and thought about how the decisions we are making today will impact our children and grandchildren for generations to come. We chose a new path.

The Green solutions will take hard work and patience. We won't get the instant gratification but the end result will be infinitely better. It was the right thing to do and will benefit our county for years to come.

We have another difficult budget cycle in front of us and as the year proceeds and we look for solutions, let's work together and consider how our decisions will affect those who come after us.

Legislator John Dougherty has called for multi-year budgeting, and I support him wholeheartedly. When my team presents the budget later this year, we will do so with a look toward the future. No matter how difficult our challenges, we look forward with optimism. Together we have weathered the worst of the storm and together we are moving ahead.

We will continue to make Onondaga County a place where businesses look to grow, where our young people can find opportunity and where people want to live and raise a family.

Thank you

Sincerely,

Joanne M. Mahoney  
County Executive