

State of the County Address 2011

Thank you very much.

Chairman Pillmeier, Majority Leader Bonacic, Minority Leader Berkman, Leader Amo, distinguished members of the Legislature, ladies and gentlemen of Orange County ...

We are here today to talk about the future, our future.

“One thing we Americans like is the future, like the sound of it, the idea of it, the hope of it. Yes, we Americans like the future and making the most of it.”

Spoken twenty-three years ago by President Ronald Reagan these words are still true, and they hold particular significance for us today as this address is not just a proud list of accomplishments by my administration, but rather, a record of decisions and actions taken to guarantee a more prosperous tomorrow, for all of us.

But first, let’s take a moment together to recognize the brave men and women who afford us the opportunity to dream of better days ahead.

The United States Military sacrifice for us and defend our freedoms, and for that we salute you. We’d like to welcome home those who have returned after serving our nation so courageously, and to the injured, we wish them a healthy recovery. To the members that are still missing, we say “Never Forget.” To those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, a forever grateful County of Orange honors your memory.

This past year saw great accomplishments on behalf of our residents. Our financial house is in order, our public safety efforts are second to none and our commitment to our overall quality of life remains a top priority of this administration.

Orange County has a balanced budget that reduces taxes by \$4 million dollars.

Our Triple-A Bond Rating has been reaffirmed, confirming our County’s strong financial position.

We have completed building the Newburgh SUNY Orange Branch Campus on-time and under-budget.

We have streamlined government services to improve efficiencies.

Mr. Chairman, Legislators, fellow citizens, the state of our County remains strong, healthy, and ready for the challenges ahead.

Our nation remains in the midst of a fiscal crisis as the United States is \$14 trillion dollars in debt.

The State of New York has a \$10 billion dollar budget gap.

Here in Orange County, nine New York State mandates consume 80 percent of the County property tax levy.

Under these extremely difficult circumstances, that aren't controlled by Orange County, this administration has been forced to make hard, and sometimes unpopular, policy decisions not only to keep the County solvent, but to responsibly prompt its development, and nurture its future growth.

To do anything less would be irresponsible of me as your County Executive.

The role of government is to create conditions where we may all flourish to make the most of our future. Although I believe government's role in people's lives is vital, it should be limited, as envisioned by our Founding Fathers, because only with a limited government will we be able to pursue our own happiness.

I have kept this philosophy since I first took office, focusing on improving the foundations of what really impacts Orange County's quality of life most - ensuring the public's safety, presenting a responsible budget, and maintaining solid County infrastructure.

By working together, we are strong enough to keep these pillars firmly in place, creating better lives for ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren.

As I describe in detail some of the actions Orange County has taken over the last year, please know that each elected official, commissioner, or department head, and all the employees of Orange County work constantly to improve the lives of our fellow citizens. Whether you are specifically mentioned in this address or not, you are all part of Team Orange and you deserve our thanks for doing the people's work.

Protecting the public is our top priority, and in Orange County that means a coordinated public safety effort between the District Attorney's Office, the Department of Emergency Services, the Sheriff's Office, and the Department of Probation.

In 2010, the Orange County District Attorney's office continued their excellent track record that resulted in a felony conviction rate of over 95 percent. This

office also works on preventing future crime through programs that divert and rehabilitate first-time offenders.

District Attorney Phillips has served as our DA since January 1986, seeking justice for those who have been victimized, while applying the law fairly yet firmly. He marks a milestone, having just completed his 25th year in office.

Please join me in congratulating and thanking Frank for his service to the people of Orange County...

Commissioner Walter Koury oversees the five divisions that make-up the Department of Emergency Services. Together, Emergency Management, Fire Services, Police Liaison Services, Emergency Medical Services, and E-911 provide for the safety of all Orange County residents.

Several years ago, we invested in a new state-of-the-art Emergency Services Center, certainly a worthwhile commitment for the safety of our residents. Our facility's fast growing reputation as the best Emergency Services Center on the Eastern Seaboard is an achievement of which we should all be proud.

This past year, E-911 answered more than 260,000 calls, a 6.5 percent increase over 2009, and, along with the County's Mental Health Department, created the County's first address based 911 registration system for people with developmental disabilities, ensuring their safety.

Under the leadership of Deputy Commissioner Seamus Leary, Orange County is 1 of only 18 counties in New York State to be designated as "Storm Ready" by the National Weather Service.

In the Division of Police Liaison Services, Deputy Commissioner Craig Cherry is overseeing the completion of the Automatic Vehicle Locator Dispatching System, a real-time police response software system coordinated with 31 police agencies (including the Sheriff and State Police) and linking approximately 365 police vehicles, enhancing public and officer safety.

Police Liaison Services now also administers the Traffic Safety/Stop DWI Program focused on the safety of our young people, the future of Orange County.

These are just a few highlights from their daily work...

You may have heard media reports about two West Point cadets who were trapped on Storm King Mountain. What many people probably don't know is the role that Orange County Emergency Services played in this 10 hour ordeal involving 13 municipalities.

Not only did the original 911 call for help come into our Emergency Services Center, but our E-911 staff worked for hours trying to find helicopter support that would take on a rescue mission with extremely high winds in midnight darkness. Once that challenge was met, Orange County's enhanced 911 technology was used to triangulate the cadets' cell phone signal to pinpoint their exact location resulting in their rescue.

I want to thank Allen Wierzbicki, Deputy Commissioner of E-911, who's here today on behalf of his team.

The Orange County's Sheriff's Office, under the leadership of Sheriff Carl DuBois, continues to secure the peace and safety of our citizens.

Last May, in another high profile media report, we saw how the Sheriff's Office assisted the FBI, the Marshall Service, New York State Police and local authorities in coordinated pre-dawn raids in the city of Newburgh to combat drug trafficking and gang violence. These efforts were meant to bring hope to this city of 29,000 on the banks of the Hudson by crushing the gang culture there.

The Orange County Department of Probation has a mission to improve public safety. New for this department in 2010, was the implementation of policies and procedures to handle DWI cases sentenced under Leandra's Law, as the department is designated the monitoring agency for Ignition Interlock Devices for both probation and conditional discharge cases.

After providing for the safety of our citizens, I believe the most important role of County government is to be a responsible steward of County finances. Every decision made is weighed against its potential financial impact in order to maintain and preserve our County's fiscal health for future generations.

As I mentioned earlier, Orange County once again received a Triple-A Bond Rating by Moody's Investors Service due to the conservative fiscal practices of my administration and this Legislature. This happened just last week. We should all be very proud of this distinction. According to Moody's, our County government enjoys a low level of risk, reflecting Orange County's strong financial performance. We are 1 of only 2 counties in New York State to currently hold this distinction, and 1 of 87 counties out of 3,140 nationwide.

In addition, Orange County was awarded a Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting by the Government Financial Officers Association. We were also recognized as "outstanding" for our Popular Annual Financial Report. These awards acknowledge governments who maintain high standards of excellence in financial reporting and demonstrate a spirit of full disclosure to clearly communicate a full financial picture to the public.

When speaking of the economy and finances, I would be remiss if I didn't mention our job creation efforts. The future of Orange County will only be brighter if we have enough good paying jobs for our citizens. Job creation and retention are paramount to our sustainability as a thriving County.

That's why I have tasked Deputy County Executive James O'Donnell to continue to direct the County's Office of Business Assistance. This office works in cooperation with the Industrial Development Association (IDA), the Orange County Business Accelerator, the Orange County Chamber of Commerce, and the Orange County Partnership to attract and retain businesses in the County.

As a result of their efforts, last year we retained over 400 jobs, added 596 jobs for the residents of our County, and received over \$80 million dollars in capital investments in 2010.

We saw companies such as Kolmar Laboratories, Array Optronix, Taylor Biomass, C&S Grocers, Shortline/Coach USA and Satin Foods either recommit, expand, or open businesses in Orange County last year.

Another bright spot in our efforts to retain and attract businesses is Stewart International Airport, now being managed by the Port Authority. Stewart is on the rise again after having made significant structural improvements, and expanding services to more destinations, including its first international service, which started 3 weeks ago.

A key industry in Orange County, and one that I want to highlight, is agriculture. Agriculture is our number one industry. It has a rich history and a proud future in our County. During these difficult times we are committed to working with our partners in the agricultural community and continue to support this important industry.

Orange County is committed to doing everything we can to help our residents find jobs. Our Office of Employment and Training Administration (ETA), directed by Steve Knob, counsels job seekers on employment skills, making them more marketable to potential employers, while they also recommend candidates to local businesses.

In 2010, Orange County One-Stop Career Centers served more than 9,000 residents in our three cities. In total, ETA assisted in placing over 3,600 Orange County residents in employment, despite the poor economic climate.

ETA also hosted the 11th Annual Orange County Job Fair in May, at the Galleria Mall at Crystal Run, with 55 companies participating and 2,000 people attending it resulted in approximately 400 job placements.

Together with the County's Department of Social Services, and the Regional Economic Community Action Plan (RECAP), ETA helped open the Fresh Start Café culinary programs in Newburgh and Middletown. These programs offer an invaluable opportunity for trainees to make positive changes in their future as they acquire employment skills to successfully enter the workforce.

Programs and initiatives need to be reformed if we are to regain our title as Empire State. No matter how hard Orange County works to secure jobs for our residents, the fact is many businesses decide where to locate based on a state's business environment.

Here in New York, the business community is often burdened with high taxes, never ending regulations, and an expensive work force - but it doesn't have to be that way.

A good place to start is by repealing the MTA payroll tax. It's the most unfair, regressive, job-killing measure that I've seen in all my years in government. Supporting the MTA at the expense of local employers is outrageous, especially given the disparity of dollars Orange sends to the MTA for the amount of service we receive. This tax obstructs job creation and continues to devastate our local economy.

In stark contrast to New York State's budget issues, by working with this Legislature, Orange County has a balanced budget that reduces taxes by \$4 million dollars. It was presented on-time and meets our obligations for critical services, while providing genuine tax relief for Orange County residents.

This is a difficult task considering that nine New York State mandates consumed 80 percent of Orange County's property tax levy. Absent these mandates, Medicaid, Public Assistance, Child Welfare, Preschool Special Education, Early Intervention, Indigent Defense, Probation, Youth Detention and Pensions, Orange County would have been able to reduce taxes much more than the \$4 million we did!

Clearly mandate relief is no longer an option. It's a necessity that has to happen now. The time for rhetoric is over. The time for action is now!

These services need to be reevaluated at the local level, where they are administered. The County needs a strong voice on the programs we deliver every day. We know where the system works well, where it breaks down, and how to make it more efficient and effective.

Medicaid in its current form is absolutely unsustainable. It looks nothing like the program that was initiated in the mid-1960s to serve as a simple safety net built on the platform of County services to provide for the health and welfare of its residents.

Orange County residents will pay \$73.5 million dollars this year to support Medicaid. The cost we pay per recipient is 3 times higher than other states because New York State requires that 39 services be provided, even though the federal government requires just 19.

I can assure you that Medicaid funding is one of the most critical issues facing County government. I urge our federal lawmakers to support the permanent funding of FMAP, the Federal Medical Assistance Program, which is a Medicaid matching rate that helps states pay for the shared costs of Medicaid.

We desperately need an overhaul in the State's pension system.

In Orange County, we budgeted \$22 million dollars for New York State pension costs in 2011, an increase of \$5.2 million dollars, or 32 percent from 2010, and yet, we have little to no control over the pension benefits awarded to our own employees. By 2014, state-required contributions for County pensions will consume nearly 25 percent of our entire County property tax levy!

During these trying financial times, we continue to support our fellow citizens who have fallen on difficult circumstances. The Orange County Office of Community Development, along with the Orange County Rural Development Advisory Corporation (RDAC), organized a foreclosure workshop series to help homeowners. Over the course of three weekend workshops, representatives from six banks met with approximately 300 residents - one on one - to discuss and process loan modifications, in hopes of preventing foreclosure.

I'd like to focus now on Orange County's internal infrastructure.

I believe responsible government means we should always be looking to improve how we serve the people. By reviewing what works, and what doesn't, better policies may then be put in place for better results. This is good governance and makes great business sense.

This Legislature moved forward and funded a study that will give us options regarding the future of Valley View, the County's licensed skilled nursing facility that provides 24 hour care, as it operates on an annual deficit subsidized by the taxpayers. The current subsidy is \$18 million dollars. The review of Valley View is being done in a responsible manner that takes into account the many aspects of government run healthcare. I thank the Legislature for taking this important action.

The New York State Berger Commission Report resulted in the closing of the Parry Building at Valley View. Unfortunately, with fewer residents to serve, staff reductions were necessary. When that decision was announced, I said

that the County would stand committed to helping those workers get retrained and hired, and I stood by my word.

I'm happy to report, that as of today, 13 of these workers have been rehired, while others are being trained as Certified Nursing Assistants, enhancing their skills making them even more marketable. Orange County's newly named Human Resources Department, along with the Department of Risk Management, and ETA worked hard for this positive outcome focusing on the importance of building human capital.

With the approval of the Legislature, we've restructured and streamlined operations in order to find new efficiencies.

A new department of General Services was created to centralize Procurement, Government Operations, Contract Compliance, and Grants. James Burpoe has been named the department's first commissioner, unanimously confirmed by this Legislature.

This new department is working with the Municipal Electric and Gas Alliance (MEGA), a consortium that pools potential customers and bids out power loads to private energy service companies resulting in significant savings for the County.

I want to thank the Orange County Legislature for passing the resolution allowing Orange County to apply for membership in the Hudson Valley Local Government Cooperative Purchasing Project, allowing the County and even our municipalities and local non-profits to now take advantage of pooled purchasing of goods and services.

In these difficult times government must continue to find efficiencies in our operations. That's why back in 2009 the County introduced the Lean Six Sigma program that focuses on customer satisfaction and enhanced performance geared to use project management to drive results. Orange County is customer driven, and we believe this training program enhances our employee's efficiencies, production and interaction with the public, our customers. To date, 100 County employees have been trained in this program.

We're already seeing results. The County Department of Health's Early Intervention division received the "Making a Difference" award from New York State Department of Health, a recognition the staff credits with their Lean Six Sigma training.

It's no surprise to everyone here that our County Government Center is falling apart and will require significant and costly repairs to continue operating. We've already spent millions of dollars over the years on the maintenance of

this now 44 year old building, including fixing the 85 roofs and replacing the overhang on the building's façade.

Nine years ago, I spoke about the inefficiencies and need to address the inadequacies of this building. Today, I'm pleased that we are moving forward with the cost analysis study and exploring opportunities to build new. We look forward to the study's findings later this year.

Commissioner Charles Lee directs the Department of Public Works, which is responsible for maintaining the County's infrastructure. This department provides many services to the public in a safe, efficient, and cost-effective manner concentrating on the County's buildings, roads, bridges, and solid waste management.

In 2010, DPW crews paved or surface-treated 34 miles of County roads, completed construction of Laroe Road, painted 20 bridges and replaced the deck structure for the Freeland Street Bridge in the Village of Monroe, and reconstructed Petticoat Lane Bridge in the Town of Crawford. DPW also oversaw the construction of Phase I for Gonzaga Park in Southern Orange.

DPW also worked with the County Law Department to submit a Comprehensive County Solid Waste Management Plan to the New York State Department of Environmental Protection; and one hundred forty-five thousand tons of material was processed at the County's three Solid Waste Transfer Stations.

Additionally, our plans to improve Orange County's airport are on target as we now have completed land acquisition of 71 acres to facilitate the expansion of the airport's main runway to improve safety and allow for enhanced airport operations.

When speaking of the future of our County, we must make sure that we plan in a responsible manner. The Orange County Planning Department and Commissioner David Church continue to provide the framework for development that respects our overall master plan, environmental assessments, and provides consistent application of land use regulations. Last year the Department of Planning completed 497 reviews of individual planning or zoning permits referred by municipalities.

In addition, the first-ever Water Master Plan was developed jointly by the County of Orange, County Planning Board and Water Authority. The Planning Department took part in nearly two dozen public forums, meetings, and hearings to listen to residents' comments, concerns, and suggestions on the topic. This plan addresses the County's water supply and water resource protection priorities well into the future and was adopted by this Legislative body last year.

The County Comprehensive Plan was updated, and the 5-year review was also completed by the Planning Department. This included the first-ever chapters on affordable housing needs, water supply, and resource protection, as well as updated priority-growth area maps.

With a population of over 380,000, and as the fastest growing County in the State of New York, most Orange County residents use the high quality services of County Clerk Donna Benson's office, recording land records and court documents, utilizing one of the four motor County vehicle departments, obtaining passports, and other services.

Seniors are quickly becoming the major demographic in Orange County. The Office for the Aging works to protect seniors' interests, while meeting their needs as valued contributors to our community. Directed by AnnMarie Maglione, this department bills itself as the first, and only, stop seniors need to make to receive County-wide services.

Aging's programs include providing over 215,000 home delivered or congregate meals, in-home personal care, legal services, caregiver help, health and education services, volunteer opportunities, counseling on insurance, help with tax preparation, and assistance with the federal home energy program, HEAP.

At the same time, we must not forget the future of our County, our youth.

It is with them in mind that the County invested in education by building a new SUNY Orange branch campus in Newburgh. I'm proud to report that Kaplan Hall was finished on-time and under-budget. In January, students began using the newly constructed state-of-the-art 87,000 foot educational facility.

In 2010, Orange County was recognized as one of the nation's 100 Best Communities for Young People by America's Promise Alliance, the nation's largest partnership organization dedicated to youth and children. I'm very proud of this award as it shows we're making the right choices in planning for our County's future. I want to thank Orange County's Youth Bureau Executive Director Carol Chichester for her department's programs and services, which led us to this distinguished designation.

The Youth Bureau has been a County Department for 33 years and is funded by the State of New York, but in the governor's recent budget address he announced the state will no longer financially support this office. I urge the New York State legislature to review this decision and reinstate funding.

The Mental Health Department, led by Commissioner Chris Ashman, is responsible for the planning, development, and coordination of services in the

field of mental health, developmental disabilities, and chemical dependency treatment and prevention within Orange County.

Recent tragedies with respect to teen suicide have highlighted the need for awareness and intervention and this department has been working closely with our schools, religious institutions, and community leaders to help our youth and families understand the choices available to them during times of crisis.

Commissioner Dave Jolly leads the County's Department of Social Services (DSS), a department that provides and manages a wide range of social programs to help our friends and neighbors in need. In these challenging economic times, it's no surprise to hear that families and individuals receiving temporary assistance increased in 2010 by over 10 percent, and the Medicaid program realized a 7 percent increase from 2009.

One of the innovative programs to help move people from dependency to independence is the Center for HOPE in Newburgh. This facility offers educational and recreational opportunities for youth and their families in order to provide an alternative to the negative influences affecting our youth.

Another successful initiative that will reduce costs and improve services is the Regional Managed Medical Transportation Services. This project will reduce the cost for Medicaid consumers receiving non-emergency medical transportation services, while improving service quality. Recognized for its innovation, this program was recently adopted by New York State as a model program.

As we all know freedom isn't free, it comes at a dear price.

The Orange County Department of Veterans' Service Agency, directed by Tony Zippo, provides counseling and assistance to Orange County veterans, their dependents, and active duty personnel.

Director Zippo, his staff, and the Orange County Advisory Board, and the Orange County Veterans Coalition understand the special needs of this population: 26,715 veterans, with their dependents, nearly 100,000 people are being assisted by this department.

The agency operates a van service, which provides veterans and their dependents transportation to Veteran Affairs medical facilities from locations throughout the County. They run 5 days a week, with over 2,300 veterans using the service – an increase of 300 users over 2009.

In addition, more than 5,300 have enrolled in a new veterans discount program, a partnership between the County Clerk's Office, the Veterans

Agency, and more than 400 local businesses to provide discounted items and services to Orange County veterans.

Preventing disease and disability, while providing education regarding healthy living and ensuring healthy environmental conditions are top priorities for Dr. Jean Hudson and the Orange County Department of Health. This department monitors and protects the health status and health needs of our residents. They are committed to promoting good health, nutrition, and an active lifestyle through educational programs, health screenings, and other opportunities to maintain wellness.

Our County government was recognized by the American Heart Association for promoting a healthy workplace for employees and encouraging a culture of physical activity in the workplace.

Orange County residents are fortunate to have many choices for outdoor pursuits at our award winning parks and recreational facilities. Commissioner Richard Rose reports that visits to our parks have increased 4 percent in 2010, from the previous year. Snow-tubing alone increased over 16 percent.

Orange County's 11.5 mile Heritage Trail is a much beloved and used portion of our County Parks system. This has not gone unnoticed outside of the County. In this winter's issue of "Rails to Trails," a national membership publication of the non-profit organization Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, the Heritage Trail was praised for its accessibility and scenic setting.

See for yourself what a great resource we have here in Orange, take your family and friends to Orange County Parks located on 3,330 acres throughout our scenic County.

Orange County is committed to protecting the rights of our individual citizens. Last year, our Human Rights Commission, with its volunteer Board of Commissioners, worked hard to foster understanding and secure those basic human rights to which we are all entitled, and for that we thank them.

The County Attorney's Office, under the direction of Counselor David Darwin, helps to maintain efficiency, integrity, and fiscal soundness of Orange County in conjunction with my office.

The County Attorney and his staff played an integral role in aiding the Planning Department to obtain a \$3.5 million dollar grant from the Department of Energy for power savings in County buildings and facilities. I want to thank this legislature for having the foresight to expand this program to our local municipalities.

Critical to the future responsible development of our County is the consolidation of Orange County Sewer District No. 1. The County's Attorney Office has cooperated with the Department of Planning and Environmental Facilities and Services (EF&S) to obtain a \$49,000 New York State Department of State government efficiency grant to help fund the costs of establishing a governing body for this newly consolidated entity that will facilitate the reliable provision of wastewater treatment services to the entire area.

The world moves at an increasingly faster and faster pace these days. We see it with a 24 hour news cycle, a global marketplace, and in the way we communicate with one another.

Well, Orange County is keeping up...

Today, I'm proud to announce the launch of Orange County's new website at www.orangecountygov.com. Our website has a new look, a more user-friendly feel, and is better designed to showcase our County and all of the services we have in place for our residents, businesses, and visitors.

It will be an invaluable resource as this new site enables users to now interact with County government by voicing comments, and sharing feedback. With the new e-Notifications feature information on topics of your choice may be sent right to your email.

By improving the way we communicate with the public, I hope to get more people, especially young people, excited about what all we do here in Orange County. I'd like to hear from residents, know their thoughts, and have the opportunity to respond.

I invite you to visit us at www.orangecountygov.com, bookmark it for easy reference, and I encourage you to come see us there often.

In closing, I want to thank the Orange County Legislature for their work this past year. I appreciate the exchange of dialogue that helps us address the challenges that Orange County faces - together. I know we don't always agree, but I hope you know that my decisions are based on what I believe to be in the best interest of the people of the greatest County in the State of New York.

Furthermore, let me take the opportunity to mention my staff who work hard each and every day for the people of this County, Donna, Sheri, Doreen, Melanie, Jennifer, Jimmy, Richard, Kristin and Orysia - thank you.

Last, but certainly not least, my family is a huge inspiration to me as I do the work I love in serving the people of Orange - my wife Mary, my daughters Danielle and Lindsey, my son-in-law Marty, my granddaughter Ava and my new grandson Marc, as well as my extended family - I want thank you for your

continued support. Without you, none of this would be possible and much of this would not make sense.

The world is indeed changing quickly, but I assure you, Orange County is ready for tomorrow, as is evidenced by the actions of my administration and this Legislature. Residents should be confident that their interests are being guarded and the future protected.

Fellow citizens, it is an honor and a privilege to serve as your County Executive.

Thank you, God bless the County of Orange, and God bless the United States of America.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Diana', with a stylized flourish at the end.

EDWARD A. DIANA

Orange County Executive

March 3, 2011