



NIAGARA COUNTY
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
CONTACT: CHRISTIAN W. PECK
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER
TEL: (716) 439-7241
FAX: (716) 439-7058

January 5, 2010

TEXT OF THE 2010 STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESS

LOCKPORT—Niagara County Legislature Chairman William L. Ross, C-Wheatfield, will deliver the following address tonight at the Niagara County Courthouse in Lockport.

The 2010 State of the County address will focus on the 2010 adopted county budget, the Niagara Falls International Airport and its new terminal and service, economic development initiatives and tools to promoted economic retention and growth in Niagara County, and the Chairman's goals and priorities for Niagara County in 2010.

The text of the address follows:

Members of the Niagara County Legislature, County Manager, Department Heads, county employees, media, ladies and gentlemen, I want to thank my legislative colleagues for your vote of confidence in selecting me as the 2010 Chairman of the Niagara County Legislature. It is an honor and a pleasure to address you this evening on the State of the County.

I want to begin the re-organization address by wishing everyone in the Legislative Chamber and the outside listening audience, a Happy, Healthy and Safe New Year for 2010.

Tonight's State of the County Address will review the legislative highlights of 2009, including the 2010 Adopted Budget, the Niagara Falls International Airport (General Aviation and Military), the reduction of the County Legislature from 19 to 15, Economic Development (retention and growth) and the techniques to initiate action. The State of the County Address will also list priorities for 2010.

The first quarter of 2009 featured the official closing of the Niagara County Bicentennial Celebration which occurred on March 10, 2009 at Niagara County Community College's Fine Arts Auditorium with a free concert featuring the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. It was a full house and a great event to complete the Bicentennial Celebration in Niagara County.

The County Legislature, working closely with the County Manager, his team, Department Heads and Commissioners, put together an excellent 2010 budget. The Budget Team continued to move in the direction of sound fiscal stability with the 2010 budget, which still provides all the essential services for the residents of Niagara County with a reduction in county taxes.

The adopted 2010 budget passed on December 15th provides for the fifth year in a row a reduction in county taxes for many of the government entities within Niagara County. The Niagara County Legislature unanimously approved a \$305.1 million budget resulting in an overall 2.5 percent reduction in property tax rates for county taxpayers.

The approved budget sets a tax levy of \$7.35 per \$1,000 of assessed value. This is a drop from the 2009 tax rate of \$7.54 per \$1,000 and represents a zero percent increase from the 2009 adopted budget.

The adopted 2010 budget funds 1,463 full time positions along with 125 part time and seasonal jobs. This is almost 200 fewer jobs than the county had three years ago. The 2010 adopted budget accomplished the goals that were set by the Niagara County Legislature with respect to a zero percent increase.

The unanimous budget vote of the Niagara County Legislature supported my statement of Niagara County having a healthy fund balance, good credit rating and several economic development projects on the horizon. Niagara County government has come a long way over the past six years.

The Department Heads, Commissioners and lead Administrators are proud of their hard work in establishing a zero tax levy in spite of tight fiscal constraints imposed upon them. It also points out that Niagara County has top-notch employees who provide excellent services to the citizens of the county. These employees deliver everyday and are one of our county's great strengths.

The Niagara Falls International Airport has for years been seen as an economic engine for Niagara County. The 300 acres that comprise the area of the N.F.I.A. is half in the Town of Niagara and half in the Town of Wheatfield. The N.F.I.A. is a manmade jewel which has enjoyed high and low points. It began its history as a small general aviation airport and along came the clouds of World War II and its onset which changed its status to a warplane manufacturing venue. The Bell Aircraft Company began to manufacture P-39 warplanes for the United States and its allies. A military presence was being built on the north side of the airport and also on the southwest corner of the general aviation side.

Bell Aircraft became Bell Aero Systems and played a vital role for 35 years before packing up and moving to Fort Worth, Texas. The City of Niagara Falls who owned the airport was running a deficit in operating the complex. The City Fathers in the late 1960's sold the airport to the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority, who continue to own and operate the airport complex.

A new terminal was added in the early 1970's, the runway was made longer and there were other improvements, but the airport was not living up to its economic potential.

There were several airport studies through the 1980's and early 1990's. The studies all pointed out potential for freight, small airlines, charters and maintenance.

The last ten years our local State Legislators working with the N.F.T.A. and its Commissioners, along with the Niagara County Legislature have made positive headway which includes:

- A new Signature Airport Terminal with over 60,000 square feet which triples the size compared to the old terminal and has a jet bridge with room for a 2nd bridge, when needed.
- New Air Services by DirectAir not only to Myrtle Beach, but also Melbourne and Fort Myers area in Florida.
- Increase Freight Services with pending new freight contracts.

There has to be intense marketing for a total success of this new terminal and airport infrastructure.

The Niagara County Legislature believed they would set the example of doing more with less by reducing the number of legislators from 19 to 15. The resolution was submitted, a public hearing was held and a referendum was set for the November general election.

The Niagara County public voted with 83 percent approval to support the reduction from 19 to 15. The 15 legislators will begin on January 1, 2012.

The Niagara County Legislature believes the only way to maintain economic stability in the county is through economic development which will create jobs. People with jobs have money to purchase goods and services. These purchases generate sales tax. People with jobs buy homes and the assess valuation of a community grows. Economic Development is the solution to controlling property taxes.

The 2009 calendar year was a tough year for everyone. The staff of the Niagara County Economic Development Center was challenged to keep economic development in Niagara County moving forward, despite the economic climate. The N.C.E.D.C. focused on five areas during 2009:

- Creating and capitalizing on opportunities in these difficult times.
- Strengthening N.C.E.D.C. outreach initiatives.
- Closing deals and seeing tangible results in terms of capital investment and job creation.

- Securing funds for local projects through stimulus funds and other sources.
- Always planning for the future.

There were three areas to help Niagara County through these difficult economic times. 2009 saw the birth of the Opportunity Zones, the continuation of the highly successful Empower Niagara Program and the kickoff of a new funding program for Brownfields Remediation.

The new Opportunity Zone program the N.C.E.D.C. will run in conjunction with the three cities will help provide incentives to the tourism and retail sector companies who locate in economically distressed areas of Niagara County.

The Empower Niagara program which includes the Niagara County Legislature working with NYPA and our utility companies has been highly successful. This program is helping to ensure that even small businesses will be able to take advantage of the benefit of low-cost power. A great program, but Niagara County needs another couple of megawatts to keep it going. This Empower Niagara program has resulted in the creation and retention of over 500 jobs and a private investment of over \$10 million. Remember, these Niagara County megawatts came from the 50 year agreement signed with the New York Power Authority in June of 2005. Niagara County was the only Niagara Power Coalition member that used part of their megawatts for economic development.

The Brownfield program (Niagara County Brownfield Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund) will provide monetary assistance that can be leveraged to advance Brownfield sites to the next level of redevelopment. These original BCRLF funds have been supplemented with a \$900,000 grant through the Federal Administration's stimulus program.

THESE THREE PROGRAMS ARE CREATING OPPORTUNITIES IN TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES.

There are many economic initiatives that our N.C.E.D.C., along with the Niagara County Industrial Development Agency have to continue to be involved with. These include:

- Niagara County's Economic Development Center, working with member of the Niagara County Economic Development Alliance, will continue to administer the Countywide Business Growth & Retention Program in 2010. This type of outreach becomes even more important in difficult economic times. In 2009, 52 companies were contacted with 40 meetings held.
- Niagara County continues to be very active in promoting available low-cost hydropower from the New York Power Authority. The NYPA megawatts has helped retain existing companies and created new startup companies. The NYPA megawatts have also retained and created hundreds of jobs while these companies invested \$325 million in renovating or building new facilities.
- The Yahoo project in the Town of Lockport's I.D.A. Park is a win-win situation for Niagara County. The complex will be operating in mid 2010 with many well paying jobs. Yahoo's high profile should encourage other companies to follow their example of locating in Niagara County. It was great effort by the Town of Lockport's leadership, Economic Development Director, and our Commissioner of Economic Development, Sam Ferraro. N.Y.P.A.'s allotment of megawatts sealed the deal.
- Globe Specialty Metals has reopened the Niagara Falls plant, and are investing over \$60 million in the project that will create around 500 new jobs. Globe will be producing 30,000 tons of metallurgical grade silicon annually. In addition, the project calls for Globe to construct a new 100,000 square foot facility in Niagara Falls, which will produce solar grade silicon, and have the potential to attract new solar panel manufacturers to our area.
- 2010 will see several of Niagara County's significant projects begin to reap their economic benefits. Hickory Stick Golf Course will be coming on line this year. In 2010, this project will generate an estimated \$350,999 to \$312,000 in property tax and more than \$388,000 in sales tax during its first year of operation. The project will create approximately 44 new jobs with an estimated annual payroll of \$1.4 million. This exciting new attraction, which created an economic impact of over \$11 million during the construction phase, is projected to have a total economic impact of \$4.3 million in its first year of operation.
- The Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority has created much excitement on Niagara Falls Boulevard, with the opening this September on the new Niagara Falls International Airport Terminal. The economic impact during the

construction phase was over \$90 million. Activity is increasing at N.F. I.A., and Myrtle Beach Direct has had to change their name to DirectAir because of increased flights to not only Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, but also Fort Myers, Florida. The airline, which is headed into its fourth year of operation, has already had a multi-million dollar impact on our region.

- 2009 saw the completion of DRC Development's new multi-tenant facility at Vantage International Point in the Town of Wheatfield. This \$3 million private investment creates 80,000 square feet of new, clean warehouse and light industrial space, one-third of which is already committed to a new company that has begun operation, creating about 50 new jobs in Niagara County.
- Niagara County, again with the assistance of its Economic Development Alliance partners, will continue its outreach to small business owners throughout Niagara County in 2010. It is more important than ever in these difficult economic times, to meet with our small businesses on their turf, to share available programs that can assist them in reaching their goals, and helping them to retain and even create new jobs in Niagara County. In 2009, these workshops were conducted in our three cities.
- The Niagara County Industrial Development Agency, a key member of the Niagara County Economic Development Alliance, will continue its mission in 2010 to create investment, jobs, opportunities and new tax revenue for the taxing jurisdictions of Niagara County.
- Sam Ferraro, the Niagara County Economic Development Commissioner, submitted proposals covering Niagara County for infrastructure and projects under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in February, 2009. The proposals were sent to the appropriate Federal government office and personally given the New York's Senator Kirsten Gillibrand in May, 2009.

The identified goals or priorities for 2010 are in most cases a repeat of 2009.

Fiscal stability / budget management.

An aggressive, detailed and sound Economic Development Program that creates jobs.

The safety of Niagara County residents

- a) Protection of life and property by the Niagara County Sheriff's Office – The Silver Alert System.
- b) Programs and services by the Niagara County Public Health Department.
- c) Monetary and verbal support from the Niagara County Legislature on solving the very serious environmental problem; CWM Hazardous Waste Landfill and Lake Ontario Ordinance Works (LOOW)

Strong County Legislative support for Niagara County Agriculture and Ag-tourism

- a) Agriculture in one of Niagara County's top industries.
- b) An agribusiness fund is needed for entrepreneurs who like to start winery or related agribusiness.

Strong support for county wide tourism.

- a) Remember 8 to 10 million visitors come to Niagara every year and view one of the greatest natural wonders in the U.S.A.
- b) Trolley Service to county tourist venues.
- c) Cross River Ferry between Youngstown and Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Retaining Niagara Falls Air Reserve Base.

First in payroll in the county along with first in number of employees.

Medicaid

- a) Use of Niagara County Medicaid Fraud Specialist to contain and work toward elimination of Medicaid Fraud.
- b) Keep requesting Medicaid reform from the State Legislature to reduce high costs.

Niagara County Community College.

- a) Continuous County Legislature support for this jewel of post high school education which provides an opportunity for Niagara County residents to gain a college education at a reasonable tuition cost.
- b) The N.C.C.C. dormitories for students are completely filled and there is a waiting list.
- c) A Culinary Institute is pending awaiting a final decision on location in downtown Niagara Falls.

Town of Niagara LRA Committee.

- a) Town of Niagara acquiring the 22 acre U.S. Army Reserve Complex on Porter Road (southwest corner of the airport).
- b) Prime economic development site.

Niagara County / New York Power Authority Advisory Board

- a) Meet in January, 2010.
- b) Agenda items for Niagara County will include the following:
 - i) Niagara County representative on NYPA Board of Trustees.
 - ii) Allocation of Hydropower: up to two megawatts to recapitalize the Niagara County Empower Niagara Program.
 - iii) Review NYPA Wind Energy RFP.
 - iv) Miscellaneous

The above goals / priorities are identified and several can be incorporated into a workable platform with specific keys needed to initiate the platform. The keys are as follows:

- A Majority Caucus of veteran and like-minded legislators along with an experienced Minority Caucus who together want to solve problems and create good government.
- A legislature that believes in teamwork and with legislators working together, compromising when necessary, placing egos in check and limiting discussion to legitimate issues related to county business.
- A Niagara County Legislature that believes in smaller government, reduction in property tax and a legislature that will wisely use the available economic tools, techniques and resources.

The keys are mixed with the following tools:

- A County Manager whose professional experience and expertise is fully utilized.
- County Manager's Team (Budget Director, Human Resources Director and Risk Management Director), along with Department Heads and Commissioners.
- The Niagara County Administrative Code.
- The 2009 Niagara County Comprehensive Plan.

As I conclude this evening's address, one word becomes all important and it is *communication*.

Communication is extremely important to our constituents. The Niagara County Legislature recognizes the problems, concerns and frustrations that can be generated by government at all levels. The following actions are taken by Niagara County Legislature to keep the lines of communication open.

- Published phone numbers of County Legislators.
- Involvement in Community Meeting.
- Scheduled Legislator / Constituents meetings in their respective Legislative District
- Public comment period at Niagara County Legislature meetings.

Good communication can lead to an understanding of county government that will help the Niagara County Legislature provide good county government in a fiscally responsible manner, while maintaining the health and safety of county residents.

The Niagara County Legislature will continually work toward making Niagara County a better place to live, raise a family and support more prosperous times in our Niagara Community.

MAY GOD BLESS NIAGARA COUNTY AND ITS RESIDENTS.

###