



## **State of Cortland County Address**

**June 25, 2015**

Good evening, and thank you for allowing me time tonight to share with you the 2015 State of the County Address. I begin tonight by greeting my fellow legislators, Department Heads, our media representatives and guests. I want to thank the members of the Legislature for allowing me the opportunity to serve as your chairman.

This has been a difficult year, internally, for this Legislature. But despite the unfortunate activities of earlier in this legislative term, this Legislature has proven it is a cohesive and effective group with the best interests of Cortland County at heart. This group has overcome our personal struggles and accomplished a great deal. Due to the snail-like pace of most government work, many Legislatures in the past have been referred to as “do-nothing” groups. This can not be said for this 2014-2015 Legislature – we are a “Can Do” Legislature.

Last year, under the guidance of Ms. Briggs this Legislature set ambitious goals, and we have worked hard to obtain those goals. Issues that have plagued this County for years have been resolved in no small part to the hard work of our department heads, with the oversight of my fellow policymakers. Thanks to you, I am proud to say that the state of our county is strong. In my few short months as Chairman I can attest to the quality and dedication of our employees, and with them much has been achieved.

Many Legislatures prior to this one have argued, debated and ultimately done nothing about the deteriorating condition of some of our County facilities. Thanks to the efforts of Mr. Wheelock and Brian Parker, as you entered the building today you walked across a newly paved parking lot. And several departments that have for too long been in cramped and inefficient office spaces are in the process of being relocated at a minimal cost. These are just two instances of a new outlook this Legislature has committed to – that of supporting the maintenance of our facilities, not just talking about it.

Another longstanding concern that continues to be evaluated is the County’s Solid Waste program. While many grow anxious about delays in a proposed regional partnership with Onondaga County, I assure you Mr. Tom Hartnett and the Solid Waste Committee will continue to evaluate the implications of such an endeavor, including health and fiscal concerns. If proven to be

environmentally and financially sound, this partnership will put Cortland County in a better position to provide education and outreach to constituents to increase recycling and reduce municipal solid waste. A new committee, appointed tonight, will help the County develop additional green programs to complement those already in put in effect within the last year, such as battery collection and our newly implemented contract for Household Hazardous Waste.

Another costly issue in recent years has been our County jail. Renovations were completed at the jail with hopes of reducing the housing out of inmates to other facilities. However, those new cells have been filled, and we continue to board out at a cost of over \$100,000 every year. JPS Chair Dick Bushnell and Vice Chair Kevin Whitney, as well as staff from our emergency services departments, were instrumental in preparing and issuing RFPs for a consultant to evaluate the possibility of a new jail. Such an undertaking is a lengthy process and one that has been put off for too long. This Legislature will not put it off anymore and will thoroughly investigate the possibility of a new jail and public safety complex.

For many years the County suffered with a complex and inadequate Computer Aided Dispatch System at our 911 center. Last year this Legislature cut ties with the software company that has plagued our county for years, investing \$1 million instead in a company that has proven successes. Months of behind-the-scenes preparation and training by our IT and Emergency Communications departments have finally come to fruition, and the new Spillman software is up and running, allowing our Sheriff's Department to do the job they are meant to do in an effective manner and keeping our public as safe as possible.

For nearly a decade the Cortland County Bar Association has been at odds with the County as to how to properly administer our indigent defense program. I am proud to announce that with the help of County Attorney Karen Howe, the Assigned Counsel Plan submitted by Cortland County has been approved by the Office of Court Administration just this week. An Assigned Counsel Administrator will help provide better defense to those in need while at the same time hopefully reducing costs to the County.

The county highway department maintains nearly 250 miles of county roads, 60 bridges and 121 large culverts and we need to continue the commitment to our highways that we have in recent years with the annual allocation of \$1.6 million for these infrastructure improvements. It was nearly eight years ago when Congressman Schumer stood on the bank of Little York Lake promising money to replace our dam. That money never came through, but with the dedication of our Highway Department and Highway Committee, a new dam will be completed by the end of this year, ensuring the beauty and recreational tourism provided by our lake will continue for future generations.

And last, but certainly not least, this Legislature has restructured how our County administration will operate. With County Attorney Karen Howe, Clerk Jeremy Boylan, Personnel Director Annette Barber, Fiscal Manager Carolyn Kennedy, and a host of other department heads, the Legislature successfully filled the void left last August with the departure of our Count Administrator. And with the appointment of Peggy Mousaw as Director of Budget & Finance, this County is on the right track to prepare an accurate and precise budget for 2016. However, the County Administrator position is

still vacant, and the local laws governing that position are still on the books. I would like this Legislature to bring this issue to a close by the end of this year.

You will notice that many of the achievements outlined here tonight have been done almost exclusively with local money and local resources. New York State continues to become more demanding on counties to fund State programs with little or no mandate relief in sight. While I applaud the extension of the 2% property tax cap and the government efficiency rebate program I reiterate our annual plea to Albany for assistance. To date Cortland County has approved budgets under the mandated cap, despite annual contractual increases in employment contracts, retirement costs and other state mandates that regularly exceed that 2% increase. Staying under that cap has come at a cost. Fewer employees and reduced local services are a direct result of local resources going to pay for state programs. For example, NYS is one of only a few states in the nation where the age of criminality is 16, forcing many teenagers to be tried as adults. While this law has not yet been approved, increasing this age to 18 is the right thing to do. If approved through an Executive Order later this year, or by the State Legislature next year, it will come at a cost. Our County Attorney's office and Probation Department will see significantly more cases, and I implore our state representatives to provide the funds necessary to offset the costs to municipalities that will result from this, and other legislation that has traditionally passed the burden on to Counties, Cities, Towns and Villages.

As we prepare for the 2016 budget we have many difficult decisions ahead of us that will require long hours and a willingness to compromise. Our constituents are counting on us to develop a budget that provides the necessary services that ensure them the high quality of life that they deserve, and I believe this Legislature has proven that we are up to the task. Thank you all for your dedication to our County, and thank you for being a "Can Do" Legislature. I look forward to working together as a team to tackle the many challenges ahead.

Thank you

Donnell Boyden, Chair  
Cortland County Legislature