



## CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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**PAUL M. WENDEL, JR.**  
County Executive

### 2026 Budget Presentation - Speech

#### [Introduction]

GOOD EVENING, MR. CHAIRMAN, MEMBERS OF THE CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY LEGISLATURE, AND COUNTY RESIDENTS. . .

WELCOME TO THE 2026 CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY EXECUTIVE TENTATIVE BUDGET PRESENTATION.

AS I BEGIN TONIGHT'S PRESENTATION, I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE A MOMENT TO THANK MY STAFF FOR THEIR HARD WORK AND DEDICATION . . . I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO THANK BUDGET DIRECTOR JENNIFER SWAN, FINANCE DIRECTOR KITTY CROW, OUR DEPARTMENT HEADS, AND THE MANY FISCAL SUPERVISORS ACROSS THE COUNTY WHO WERE ALL INSTRUMENTAL IN PLANNING, PREPARING AND ORGANIZING OUR 2026 TENTATIVE BUDGET.

#### [Targets & Goals]

OUR GOALS FOR THIS BUDGET WERE TO ACHIEVE A STRUCTURALLY BALANCED SPENDING PLAN . . . KEEP THE TAX LEVY AT OR BELOW THE STATE CAP. . . AND PRESERVE CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY'S STRONG FINANCIAL POSITION BY RESPONSIBLY UTILIZING THE GENERAL FUND BALANCE. WE WILL CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN RESERVES BETWEEN 5 AND 15 PERCENT OF COUNTY APPROPRIATIONS, AS OUTLINED IN OUR FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT PLAN . . . WHILE ALSO SUSTAINING ... AND IN MANY CASES, IMPROVING . . . THE SERVICES OUR COUNTY RESIDENTS RELY ON.

IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THESE GOALS, WE HAD TO CONTINUE OUR RECORD OF CREATING FISCALLY CONSERVATIVE BUDGETS THAT SERVE THE BEST INTEREST OF OUR RESIDENTS.

#### [2026 Challenges]

THE CHALLENGES WE FACED WHEN CREATING THE 2026 BUDGET WERE RISING UNFUNDED MANDATED COSTS . . . INFLATION RATES OF 3.4% PERCENT THAT SURPASS THE 2% TAX CAP LIMIT. . . AND FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 2021 WE NO LONGER HAVE THE USE OF AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT FUNDS. KEEP IN MIND WE DID NOT USE THE ARPA FUNDS TO BALANCE THE BUDGET, RATHER IT WAS USED FOR CAPITAL INVESTMENTS ACROSS COUNTY DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES.

IN ORDER TO ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES AND MAKE ALL OF OUR TARGETS AND GOALS WE HAVE TO DO MORE... WITH LESS.

#### [Accomplishments]

OUR 2026 BUDGET REFLECTS MY VISION AND STRATEGY FOR CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY. WE REMAIN COMMITTED TO DELIVERING THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF SERVICES AND PROGRAMS FOR OUR RESIDENTS. WE WILL STAY UNDER THE STATE TAX CAP, PRESERVE OUR STRONG FINANCIAL STANDING, AND CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE STEADY GROWTH OF OUR ECONOMY. DESPITE THE CHALLENGES, THIS BUDGET ENSURES WE NOT ONLY MEET BUT EXCEED EXPECTATIONS.

#### [Expenses By Committee]

FOR 2026, I AM PROPOSING A \$309.7 MILLION BUDGET, INCLUDING OUR ENTERPRISE FUNDS, AND EXCLUDING OUR INTERNAL SERVICE FUNDS AND MUNICIPAL SALES TAX. KEY INVESTMENTS INCLUDE 49 PERCENT IN HUMAN SERVICES, 22 PERCENT IN PUBLIC FACILITIES INCLUDING OUR WATER AND SEWER DISTRICTS, 19 PERCENT IN PUBLIC SAFETY, 9 PERCENT ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES, AND 2 IN PERCENT PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, THIS UNDERSCORES OUR COMMITMENT TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES.

#### [Sources Of Revenue]

SO WHERE DOES THE REVENUE FOR OUR 2026 BUDGET COME FROM? AS SHOWN IN THE GRAPH, CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY'S TOTAL 2026 GOVERNMENTAL FUND BUDGET IS \$309.7 MILLION. OF THIS TOTAL, 23% COMES FROM COUNTY PROPERTY TAXES, 19% FROM STATE AID, 18% FROM SALES TAX, 14% FROM DESIGNATED REVENUES, 13% FROM FEDERAL AID, AND ONLY 1% FROM FUND BALANCE. MY ADMINISTRATION LOOKS BEYOND PROPERTY TAX INCREASES TO FUND COUNTY SERVICES . . . RELYING ON ALTERNATIVE REVENUES SUCH AS GRANT FUNDING, INCREASED SALES AND OCCUPANCY TAX, AND OTHER SMART BUDGETING STRATEGIES THAT STRENGTHEN OUR ABILITY TO SERVE RESIDENTS WITHOUT ADDING A FINANCIAL BURDEN.

#### [Controlled Vs Uncontrolled]

A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY'S BUDGET IS BEYOND OUR CONTROL. UNLIKE OTHER LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, COUNTIES IN NEW YORK ARE REQUIRED BY LAW TO ADMINISTER AND FINANCE MORE THAN 40 STATE-DEFINED PROGRAMS USING LOCAL TAX DOLLARS. THIS LEAVES LIMITED FLEXIBILITY . . . YET CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY CONTINUES TO DELIVER ESSENTIAL SERVICES . . . INVEST IN OUR INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES . . . WITHOUT OVERBURDENING OUR RESIDENTS. SOME OF THE LARGEST STATE-IMPOSED MANDATES ON CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY INCLUDE: TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF)/SAFETY NET, MEDICAID, EARLY INTERVENTION, PRE-K SPECIAL EDUCATION, MANDATED MEDICAL SERVICES FOR INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS, PROBATION, YOUTH DETENTION, CHILD WELFARE AND PENSIONS.

UNFUNDED MANDATES WILL COLLECTIVELY COST CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY TAXPAYERS MORE THAN \$93.2 MILLION IN 2026.

SAFETY NET WILL INCREASE \$1.17 MILLION THIS YEAR ALONE. THIS SINGLE UNFUNDED MANDATE INCREASE IS 65% OF THE INCREASE TO OUR 2026 TAX LEVY.

THANKFULLY, OUR STATE REPRESENTATIVES, SENATOR GEORGE BORRELLO AND ASSEMBLYMAN ANDREW MOLITOR, RECOGNIZE HOW CRIPPLING THESE MANDATES CAN BE AND CONTINUE TO ADVOCATE ON OUR BEHALF.

#### [Controlled Expenses]

MY ADMINISTRATION LOOKS TO SAVE WHEREVER POSSIBLE, FOCUSING ON EFFICIENCY SO COUNTY EMPLOYEES CAN DEDICATE MORE TIME TO ESSENTIAL TASKS AND BETTER SERVE OUR COMMUNITIES.

WE HAVE LIMITED NEW FTES TO ONLY THOSE THAT ARE GRANT-FUNDED, BUDGET-NEUTRAL, OR CRITICALLY NECESSARY. FOR 2026, THE ONLY NEW UNFUNDED FTE IS A STATE-MANDATED POSITION IN THE PROBATION DEPARTMENT. WE ALSO STRATEGICALLY USE STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING TO OFFSET LOCAL SHARE EXPENSES, ENSURING TAXPAYER DOLLARS ARE MAXIMIZED.

#### [2026 Projects]

HOW WILL OUR RESIDENTS BENEFIT FROM THIS BUDGET?

IN 2026, WE ARE COMMITTED TO MAINTAINING AND IMPROVING THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES THAT DIRECTLY IMPACT OUR RESIDENTS' DAILY LIVES . . . THIS INCLUDES TREATING AND MAINTAINING MORE THAN 660 MILES OF COUNTY ROADS, ALONG WITH SIX CULVERT AND BRIDGE REHABILITATIONS, TWO BRIDGE REPLACEMENTS, AND TWO CULVERT REPLACEMENTS, IN TOTAL, WE WILL INVEST MORE THAN \$13 MILLION IN CAPITAL PROJECTS THROUGH OUR DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC FACILITIES.

OTHER CRITICAL CAPITAL PROJECTS WE ARE INVESTING IN TO STRENGTHEN OUR COMMUNITIES, INCLUDE:

OVER \$2 MILLION IN UPGRADES AT JAMESTOWN COMMUNITY COLLEGE, \$350,000 FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, FEATURING GREEN FIELD DEVELOPMENTS, THESE INCLUDE NEARING THE COMPLETION OF OUR RIPLEY SHOVEL READY SITE, COMPLETION OF THE SHOVEL READY SITE IN THE MASON INDUSTRIAL PARK, AND FURTHER EXPLORATION OF SHOVEL READY SITES IN THE WITHIN CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY

OVER \$3 MILLION TO ENHANCE PUBLIC SAFETY THROUGH THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE AND THE DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY SERVICES,

AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, NOT ONLY WILL WE MAINTAIN THE SAME HIGH LEVEL OF SERVICES AS IN 2025 . . . BUT WE WILL EXPAND OUR COUNTY FLY CAR PROGRAM TO DELIVER FASTER EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE TO RESIDENTS IN SOUTHERN CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY, PARTICULARLY IN THE CLYMER AND SHERMAN AREAS.

#### [Tax Levy & Rate]

FOR 2026, THE COUNTY TAX LEVY IS ALLOWED TO INCREASE BY \$1.7 MILLION, OR 2%. THE TAX CAP, SET BY NEW YORK STATE, DETERMINES THE MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF TAXES WE CAN ASSESS. IT IS CALCULATED BASED ON SEVERAL FACTORS AND IS LIMITED TO THE LESSER OF 2% OR THE RATE OF INFLATION.

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY CONTINUES TO SEE A POSITIVE TREND IN THE REAL ESTATE MARKET, RESULTING IN AN OVERALL ASSESSED VALUE OF \$12.15 BILLION . . . AN INCREASE OF APPROXIMATELY 11.2% . . . BECAUSE PROPERTY VALUATIONS GREW MORE THAN THE TAX LEVY, THE OVERALL TAX RATE HAS DECREASED.

THIS GROWTH REFLECTS BOTH REASSESSMENTS AND THE CONTINUED STRENGTH OF PROPERTY SALES. MANY PROPERTIES CONSISTENTLY SELL ABOVE THEIR ASSESSED VALUES, DRIVING UP OVERALL VALUATIONS ACROSS THE COUNTY. THIS IS A CLEAR SIGN THAT OUR EFFORTS ARE SUCCEEDING . . . PEOPLE ARE INVESTING AND RETURNING TO CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY. IN ESSENCE, WE'RE DOING SOMETHING RIGHT HERE IN CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY!

#### [Tax Rate & Historical Data]

IN MY 2026 BUDGET, I AM PROPOSING A TAX RATE OF \$6.17 PER THOUSAND— \$0.54 CENTS BELOW LAST YEAR'S RATE. THIS IS MY SIXTH BUDGET AS COUNTY EXECUTIVE AND THE SIXTH YEAR I AM PROPOSING A DECREASE IN THE TAX RATE. NOT TO MENTION, THIS IS ALSO THE FIFTH CONSECUTIVE YEAR CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY HAS BEEN AT OR BELOW THE STATE MANDATED TAX CAP. AS SHOWN IN THE GRAPH, WHEN I TOOK OFFICE IN 2020 THE TAX RATE WAS \$8.46, AND I AM PROUD TO ANNOUNCE SINCE MY TIME IN OFFICE, THE TAX RATE HAS BEEN REDUCED BY \$2.29.

I AM ALSO PROPOSING A TOTAL LEVY INCREASE OF \$1.7 MILLION DOLLARS. THE 2026 PROPOSED LEVY IS YET AGAIN UNDER THE NEW YORK STATE TAX CAP. WHILE WE DO SEE AN INCREASE OF 2 PERCENT, THIS IS BELOW THE RATE OF INFLATION THAT IS 3.4 PERCENT. THE LAST FEW YEARS, I'VE BEEN PROUD TO ANNOUNCE THAT THE 2024 TAX RATE WAS THE LOWEST SINCE 1982 AND I AM HAPPY THAT WE WERE ABLE TO DO BETTER FOR 2026. HOPEFULLY SOON WE'LL BE ABLE TO BEAT THE RATE FROM 1981.

#### [Fund Balance]

SINCE I BECAME COUNTY EXECUTIVE, I HAVE MAINTAINED A MODEST FUND BALANCE UNDER SHARP CRITICISM FROM THOSE WHO FEEL WE SHOULD UTILIZE OUR FUND BALANCE TO PROVIDE A ONE TIME REDUCTION TO THE TAX LEVY . . . THIS YEAR, WE ASKED OUR DEPARTMENT HEADS TO DIG DEEP AND TO REDUCE THEIR LOCAL SHARE INCREASE TO HALF THEIR ORIGINAL PROPOSAL. THESE REDUCTIONS CONTINUE TO ENSURE OUR LONG-TERM FINANCIAL STABILITY FOR CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY. UNDER MY ADMINISTRATION WE HAVE REJECTED POLITICAL THEATRE AND RESPONSIBLY ADHERED TO OUR FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT PLAN . . . TO ONLY UTILIZE OUR FUND BALANCE FOR ONE TIME AND NOT REOCCURRING EXPENSES, THIS ENSURES THAT OUR BUDGETS ARE STRUCTURALLY BALANCED, AND SAFEGUARDS CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY'S LONG-TERM FINANCIAL POSITION. AS YOU CAN SEE IN THE GRAPH, WE PROJECT TO MAINTAIN A FUND BALANCE OF 11.5 PERCENT.

SINCE 2020, OUR FUND BALANCE HAS BENEFITED FROM SEVERAL ONE-TIME, UNEXPECTED REVENUES, INCLUDING ADDITIONAL MEDICAID ASSISTANCE, PROPERTY TAX FORECLOSURE AUCTIONS, INTEREST AND PENALTY INCOME, PRIOR-YEAR TRIBAL COMPACT SETTLEMENTS, RELEASED MEDICAID SETTLEMENTS AND EXPENSE ACCRUALS, AS WELL AS IDA BOND PROCEEDS. TOGETHER, THESE SOURCES HAVE ADDED APPROXIMATELY \$17.5 MILLION TO THE COUNTY'S FUND BALANCE. WHILE WE PREVIOUSLY SAW DOUBLE-DIGIT INCREASES, THE LAST TWO YEARS HAVE BEEN MORE MODEST, MAKING IT MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER TO PROTECT OUR FUND BALANCE. DOING SO IS ESSENTIAL TO MAINTAINING CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY'S FINANCIAL STRENGTH AND ENSURING A STABLE, PROSPEROUS FUTURE FOR ALL OUR RESIDENTS.

#### [Levy Growth Vs. Inflation]

SINCE TAKING OFFICE IN 2020, INFLATION HAS INCREASED DRAMATICALLY. MY ADMINISTRATION HAS WORKED DILIGENTLY, TO KEEP THE LEVY BELOW THE RATE OF INFLATION. IN THIS GRAPH, THE BLUE LINE REPRESENTS OUR ACTUAL PROPERTY TAX LEVY, AND THE RED LINE REPRESENTS OUR LEVY IF IT INCREASED WITH THE RATE OF INFLATION. IN 2026 OUR PROPOSED TAX LEVY IS \$74.9 MILLION. IF OUR BUDGET HAD INCREASED TO MATCH THE RATE OF INFLATION IN 2026, OUR LEVY WOULD BE \$84.9 MILLION, AN INCREASE OF \$9.9 MILLION. IF WE HAD INCREASED BY THE RATE OF INFLATION SINCE 2020, WE WOULD HAVE COLLECTED AN ADDITIONAL \$42 MILLION DOLLARS IN PROPERTY TAXES. THUS DEMONSTRATING OUR COMMITMENT TO DELIVERING ESSENTIAL SERVICES USING TAXPAYER DOLLARS WISELY, AND NOT OVERTAXING OUR RESIDENTS.

TO PUT THIS INTO PERSPECTIVE, THAT EXTRA \$9.9 MILLION DOLLARS IS MORE THAN DOUBLE WHAT CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY WILL SPEND ON OUR DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT . . . THE \$42 MILLION DOLLARS SINCE 2020 IS ABOUT \$10 MILLION DOLLARS MORE THAN WE SPEND ON THE ENTIRE SHERIFF'S BUDGET!

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR OUR COUNTY TAXPAYERS? ... FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS, WE HAVE CONTINUED TO DO MORE WITH LESS, AND 2026 IS NO DIFFERENT. EVEN AS THE VALUE OF A DOLLAR HAS DECLINED SINCE 2020, WE KEEP PROVIDING THE SAME . . . OR IN MANY CASES, ENHANCED . . . LEVELS OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES WITHOUT OVERBURDENING OUR RESIDENTS. . . THROUGH SMART BUDGETING, TARGETED EFFICIENCIES, AND RESPONSIBLE USE OF OUR FUND BALANCE, WE ARE BUILDING ON OUR RECORD OF STRONG LEADERSHIP AND FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY, ENSURING A RESILIENT AND PROSPEROUS FUTURE FOR ALL WHO CALL CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY HOME.

#### [Occupancy Tax]

FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026, WE ARE BUDGETING \$2.39 MILLION DOLLARS IN ANTICIPATED OCCUPANCY TAX RECEIPTS. OUR STRATEGY FOR THE OCCUPANCY TAX IS TO SET OUR BUDGET EQUAL TO THE LAST FULL YEAR'S ACTUAL RECEIPTS.

AFTER ADMINISTRATION COSTS, 40 PERCENT OF THE FUNDS COLLECTED WILL GO TOWARDS THE PROTECTION OF OUR LAKES AND WATERWAYS AND 60 PERCENT WILL GO TO THE PROMOTION OF TRAVEL AND TOURISM.

AS SHOWN IN THE GRAPH, OUR OCCUPANCY TAX RECEIPTS CONTINUE TO SHOW STEADY GROWTH AND OUR INVESTMENTS IN OUR LAKES AND TOURISM INITIATIVES WILL CONTINUE TO BENEFIT OUR LOCAL ECONOMY AND IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR OUR RESIDENTS AND VISITORS ALIKE.

IN 2025, WE ALLOCATED OCCUPANCY TAX FUNDS TO SUPPORT SEVERAL MAJOR PROJECTS IN CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY, SUCH AS THE FREDONIA FARM FESTIVAL . . . THE WESTFIELD GRAPE AND WINE FESTIVAL . . . ROCK THE LAKE IN LAKEWOOD . . . SILVER CREEK FESTIVAL OF GRAPES . . . AND THE CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY HISTORY EXPO.

ADDITIONALLY, WE INVESTED IN VITAL INITIATIVES LIKE THE CHAUTAUQUA LAKE SYMPOSIUM AND DIRECT FUNDING TO SUPPORT IN-LAKE MAINTENANCE AND WEED HARVESTING.

OUR INVESTMENTS IN HEALTHY LAKES AND VIBRANT TOURISM NOT ONLY BOOST OCCUPANCY TAX RECEIPTS BUT ALSO ENRICH OUR COMMUNITIES, CREATING LASTING BENEFITS FOR OUR COUNTY.

#### [Sales Tax Receipts ]

SALES TAX RECEIPTS IN 2025 AND PROJECTIONS FOR 2026 CONTINUES AS SHOWN IN THE GRAPH ARE STILL SEEING A STEADY GROWTH.

RATHER THAN INFLATING SALES TAX PROJECTIONS, WE TAKE A REALISTIC APPROACH—REDUCING SPENDING AND RELYING ON VERIFIED DATA FROM THE NEW YORK STATE COMPTROLLER’S OFFICE. THIS ENSURES FISCAL STABILITY AND MINIMIZES THE RISK OF BUDGET SHORTFALLS.

ANY SALES TAX SURPLUSES RETURNED TO OUR FUND BALANCE PROVIDE FLEXIBILITY TO COVER ONE-TIME EXPENSES WITHOUT RAISING PROPERTY TAXES, WHILE MAINTAINING OUR STRONG FINANCIAL POSITION.

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY SHARES A CONSIDERABLE PORTION OF OUR SALES TAX REVENUE WITH OUR LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES. IN 2026, WE HAVE BUDGETED TO COLLECT OVER \$98 MILLION IN SALES TAX . . . THE COUNTY’S SHARE OF THE SALES TAX REVENUE TO BE \$57.9 MILLION AND WE EXPECT TO SHARE OVER \$40.6 MILLION WHICH IS 41.25% OF OUR COLLECTED SALES TAX WITH OUR LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES . . . THIS INCLUDES AN ESTIMATED \$4 MILLION TO THE CITY OF DUNKIRK, \$9.1 MILLION TO THE CITY OF JAMESTOWN, \$2.3 MILLION TO THE VILLAGE OF FREDONIA, THE REMAINING WILL BE DIVIDED BETWEEN OUR REMAINING TOWNS AND VILLAGES.

THE SALES TAX REVENUES SHARED WITH OUR LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES IS A VITAL SOURCE OF FUNDING FOR OUR TOWNS, VILLAGES, AND CITIES. SALES TAX UNLIKE PROPERTY TAXES, IS NOT ONLY COLLECTED FROM RESIDENTS BUT ALSO FROM VISITORS, THIS REDUCES THE BURDEN ON OUR LOCAL HOMEOWNERS . . . OUR REVENUE SHARING CONTRIBUTES TO LOWER HOUSING COSTS IN CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY AND HELPS MAINTAIN OUR STATUS AS THE 7TH MOST AFFORDABLE PLACE TO LIVE OUT OF THE 62 COUNTIES IN NEW YORK STATE.

NOT EVERY COUNTY IN NEW YORK STATE SHARES THEIR SALES TAX REVENUES WITH THEIR LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES; IN FACT, THERE ARE 12 COUNTIES THAT DO NOT SHARE ANY OF THEIR SALES TAX REVENUES . . . NOT ONLY DOES CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY SHARE OUR SALES TAX REVENUES, THERE ARE VERY FEW COUNTIES THAT SHARE A HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF THEIR REVENUES THAN WE DO. ACCORDING TO THE OFFICE OF THE NEW YORK STATE COMPTROLLER

BASED OFF THEIR MOST RECENT DATA OUT OF THE 62 COUNTIES IN NEW YORK STATE, THERE ARE ONLY 9 COUNTIES THAT SHARE A HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF THEIR SALES TAX RECEIPTS WITH THEIR LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES. (\*\*ERIE\*\*)

[Government Efficiency Fund]

IN 2026, I AM ALSO PROPOSING, SEPARATE OF THE TENTATIVE BUDGET, THAT WE UTILIZE \$500,000 OF OUR FUND BALANCE TO BE USED AS A GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY FUND THAT WILL SUPPORT LOCAL MUNICIPAL MERGERS, CONSOLIDATIONS, AND SHARED SERVICES . . . THE GOAL IS TO REDUCE REDUNDANCIES, STREAMLINE OPERATIONS, AND ELIMINATE DUPLICATE EFFORTS, ULTIMATELY LEADING TO SIGNIFICANT COST SAVINGS. THIS APPROACH ENABLES MUNICIPALITIES TO USE RESOURCES MORE EFFICIENTLY, BENEFITING TAXPAYERS THROUGH LOWER TAXES OR ENHANCED SERVICES.

OUR TOWNS, VILLAGES, AND CITIES, JUST LIKE CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY HAVE VERY TIGHT BUDGETS WITH LIMITED DISCRETIONARY FUNDING. MY PROPOSED GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY FUND WILL HELP REMOVE FINANCIAL BARRIERS FOR OUR LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES TO EXPLORE EXPANDED SHARED SERVICES, MERGERS, CONSOLIDATIONS, AND DISSOLUTIONS BY PROVIDING UPFRONT FUNDING THAT MAY NOT BE AVAILABLE WITHIN THEIR OWN BUDGETS.

RESPECTING HOME RULE AUTHORITY IS ESSENTIAL. ANY PROPOSED MERGERS OR CONSOLIDATIONS MUST BE INITIATED VOLUNTARILY BY THE MUNICIPALITIES INVOLVED. WE CAN SUPPORT THIS PROCESS BY OFFERING INCENTIVES AND ASSISTANCE TO ENCOURAGE COLLABORATION, WITHOUT MANDATING IT. BY FOSTERING OPEN COMMUNICATION AND WORKING CLOSELY WITH LOCAL LEADERS, WE CAN ENSURE THESE INITIATIVES ARE IMPLEMENTED EFFECTIVELY AND WITH BROAD COMMUNITY SUPPORT.

THIS INVESTMENT WILL HELP LOWER OUR LONG-TERM PROPERTY TAXES FOR COUNTY RESIDENTS AND I ENCOURAGE OUR LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES TO UTILIZE THIS RESOURCE.

CURRENT LOCAL LAW ALLOWS MUNICIPALITIES TO RECEIVE UP TO \$50,000 OF LOCAL FUNDING, WHICH IS A REIMBURSEMENT AFTER THE PROJECT'S COMPLETION. MY PROPOSAL IS TO AMEND THE CURRENT LOCAL LAW AND INCREASE THE ALLOWANCE FOR MUNICIPALITIES TO \$100,000, RATHER THAN THE CURRENT \$50,000 FOR UPFRONT COSTS.

[Reflections]

AS WE REFLECT ON 2025, I WANT TO THANK THE MEMBERS OF THE CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY LEGISLATURE WHO SUPPORTED A BUDGET THAT PRESERVED OUR STRONG FINANCIAL POSITION WHILE PROVIDING IMPROVED SERVICES FOR OUR RESIDENTS... ALL WITHOUT OVERTAXING OUR COMMUNITIES..... TOGETHER, WE DEMONSTRATED THAT SMART, RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP CAN ACHIEVE REMARKABLE RESULTS.

SINCE THE FIRST COUNTY EXECUTIVE TOOK OFFICE IN 1975, NO COUNTY ADMINISTRATION HAS LOWERED TAXES AS MUCH AS WE HAVE OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS.

SO TONIGHT, I STAND BEFORE YOU NOT JUST TO PRESENT A BUDGET—BUT TO REAFFIRM A PROMISE. A PROMISE THAT NO MATTER THE MANDATES, NO MATTER THE INFLATION, NO MATTER THE OBSTACLES HANDED DOWN .... CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY WILL NOT RETREAT. WE

WILL NOT LOWER OUR STANDARDS. WE WILL NOT SACRIFICE OUR FUTURE TO SHORT-TERM FIXES OR POLITICAL THEATER. . .

WE WILL LEAD.

BECAUSE LEADERSHIP IS NOT MEASURED IN RHETORIC, BUT IN RESULTS. AND THE RESULTS ARE UNDENIABLE: LOWER TAX RATES, STRONGER RESERVES, SMARTER SPENDING, AND BETTER SERVICES—ALL ACHIEVED TOGETHER.

LET THIS BUDGET SERVE AS A DECLARATION: CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY IS NOT JUST HOLDING THE LINE—WE ARE ADVANCING. WE ARE INVESTING BOLDLY, MANAGING WISELY, AND BUILDING A GOVERNMENT THAT WORKS FOR THE PEOPLE, NOT AGAINST THEM. A GOVERNMENT THAT BELIEVES EVERY TAX DOLLAR SHOULD DELIVER VALUE, EVERY CHALLENGE IS AN OPPORTUNITY, AND EVERY RESIDENT DESERVES A COUNTY THAT WORKS AS HARD AS THEY DO.

FROM SHERMAN TO SILVER CREEK, FROM JAMESTOWN TO DUNKIRK—WE ARE RISING. AND AS LONG AS I HAVE THE HONOR TO SERVE AS YOUR COUNTY EXECUTIVE, WE WILL CONTINUE TO RISE—TOGETHER.

THANK YOU, AND MAY GOD BLESS CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY.