



2027 EXECUTIVE BUDGET ADDRESS

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY EXECUTIVE PAUL M. WENDEL JR.



[Introduction]

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

TONIGHT, I HAVE THE HONOR AND PRIVILEGE OF PRESENTING MY 2027 TENTATIVE BUDGET.

AS I BEGIN TONIGHT'S PRESENTATION, I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE A MOMENT TO THANK MY STAFF AS WELL AS 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 2027 TENTATIVE BUDGET.

[Targets & Goals]

AS COUNTY EXECUTIVE, I HAVE MADE IT MY PRIORITY TO PROTECT, STRENGTHEN, AND EXPAND THE ESSENTIAL COUNTY SERVICES OUR RESIDENTS RELY ON ... ENSURING THAT, NO MATTER THE CHALLENGES WE FACE, THE PEOPLE OF CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY CAN COUNT ON THEIR COUNTY GOVERNMENT TO BE THERE WHEN THEY NEED US MOST. EVERY RESIDENT DESERVES SERVICES THAT ARE ACCESSIBLE, RESPONSIVE, AND DELIVERED WITH DIGNITY ... AND WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE THEM IN THE MOST EFFICIENT, EFFECTIVE, IMPACTFUL, AND FISCALLY RESPONSIBLE WAY POSSIBLE.

AT A TIME WHEN FAMILIES ACROSS OUR COUNTY ARE STRUGGLING TO KEEP UP WITH THE RISING COST OF GROCERIES, HOUSING, UTILITIES, AND EVERYDAY NECESSITIES, AFFORDABILITY HAS BEEN *AND REMAINS* MY TOP PRIORITY. I KNOW THAT EVERY DOLLAR MATTERS TO OUR RESIDENTS, AND I BELIEVE GOVERNMENT MUST BE JUST AS DISCIPLINED WITH TAXPAYERS' DOLLARS AS FAMILIES ARE WITH THEIR OWN.

THAT IS WHY MY GOAL FOR THIS BUDGET WAS CLEAR: DELIVER A SPENDING PLAN THAT PROTECTS THE SERVICES OUR RESIDENTS RELY ON, PRESERVES CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY'S STRONG FINANCIAL POSITION, AND *MOST IMPORTANTLY* KEEPS THE TAX LEVY FLAT.

FOR FAMILIES ALREADY FEELING THE SQUEEZE, KEEPING THE LEVY FLAT IS MORE THAN A BUDGET DECISION ... IT IS A COMMITMENT TO MAKING SURE COUNTY GOVERNMENT DOES NOT ADD TO THE FINANCIAL BURDEN THEY ARE ALREADY CARRYING.

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 AT NO ADDITIONAL COST.

[2026 Challenges]

THIS YEAR'S BUDGET PRESENTED SOME SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES. WHEN WE BEGAN THE BUDGET PROCESS, WE FACED A SIGNIFICANT BUDGET DEFICIT, DRIVEN BY RISING UNFUNDED MANDATE COSTS AND THE SAME INFLATION THAT IS PUTTING PRESSURE ON HOUSEHOLD BUDGETS ACROSS OUR COUNTY.

THANKFULLY, DUE TO OUR PREVIOUS BUDGETS FOCUS ON FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY AND DISCIPLINE, *AND* WITH THE SUPPORT OF MY PARTNERS IN THE LEGISLATURE WHO YEAR AFTER YEAR HAVE VOTED IN SUPPORT OF MY BUDGETS WE ARE IN A STRONG ENOUGH FINANCIAL POSITION TO WEATHER THESE CHALLENGES AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, PROVIDE REAL RELIEF TO OUR RESIDENTS AT A TIME WHEN SO MANY FAMILIES ARE STRUGGLING TO MAKE ENDS MEET.

AND HERE IS WHAT MATTERS MOST TO OUR TAXPAYERS: IN 2027, OUR PROPERTY TAX RATE WILL BE JUST \$5.32, AND THE COUNTY TAX LEVY WILL REMAIN FLAT!

THIS WILL BE OUR LOWEST PROPOSED PROPERTY TAX RATE SINCE 1975... WHICH WAS THE FIRST YEAR A COUNTY EXECUTIVE PROPOSED A BUDGET IN CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY! THIS IS THE 15TH TIME UNDER DIRECTION OF A COUNTY EXECUTIVE THAT THE COUNTY LEVY HAS REMAINED FLAT OR DECREASED.

AT A TIME OF ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY... *THIS* IS WHAT RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT *SHOULD* LOOK LIKE: PROTECTING YOUR POCKETBOOK... SAFEGUARDING THE SERVICES YOU RELY ON... AND MAKING SURE WE ARE PREPARED FOR WHATEVER CHALLENGES LIE AHEAD.

[Accomplishments]

OUR 2027 BUDGET REFLECTS A CLEAR VISION AND STRATEGY FOR THE FUTURE OF CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY... ONE THAT PRIORITIZES FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY WHILE MAINTAINING OUR COMMITMENT TO DELIVERING HIGH... QUALITY SERVICES AND PROGRAMS FOR OUR RESIDENTS.

WE WILL STAY UNDER THE STATE TAX CAP, PRESERVE OUR STRONG FINANCIAL POSITION, AND CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE STEADY GROWTH OF OUR ECONOMY.

DESPITE THE CHALLENGES, OUR 2027 BUDGET ENSURES WE NOT ONLY MEET BUT EXCEED OUR OWN EXPECTATIONS.

[Expenses By Committee]

FOR 2027, I AM PROPOSING A \$330 MILLION BUDGET, INCLUDING OUR ENTERPRISE FUNDS, AND EXCLUDING OUR INTERNAL SERVICE FUNDS AND MUNICIPAL SALES TAX.

BROKEN DOWN BY LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE, 49 PERCENT WILL GO TO HUMAN SERVICES, 21 PERCENT TO PUBLIC FACILITIES INCLUDING OUR WATER AND SEWER DISTRICTS, 20 PERCENT TO PUBLIC SAFETY, 8 PERCENT TO ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES, AND 2 PERCENT TO PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

[Sources Of Revenue]

THE NEXT QUESTION IS SIMPLE: WHERE DOES THE MONEY COME FROM? 56% IS COUNTY FUNDS INCLUDING 21% THAT COMES FROM COUNTY PROPERTY TAXES, 17% FROM SALES TAX, 14% FROM DESIGNATED REVENUES, 4% FROM FUND BALANCE; 20% FROM STATE AID *AND* 12% FROM FEDERAL AID. KEEP IN MIND, THAT 12% OF OUR COLLECTED REVENUE IS OUR SHARED MUNICIPAL SALES TAX...

[Controlled Vs Uncontrolled]

NOW, HERE IS THE SCARY REALITY: THE MAJORITY OF OUR BUDGET IS MADE UP OF COSTS WE SIMPLY DO NOT CONTROL.

UNLIKE OTHER LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, COUNTIES IN NEW YORK ARE REQUIRED BY LAW TO ADMINISTER AND FINANCE MORE THAN 40 STATE...DEFINED AND CONTROLLED PROGRAMS USING YOUR LOCAL TAX DOLLARS. THESE 40 PROGRAMS MAKE UP 67 PERCENT OF OUR TOTAL TAX LEVY, TOTALING NEARLY \$50 MILLION (\$49.5).

DESPITE HAVING LIMITED FLEXIBILITY, CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY CONTINUES TO DELIVER ESSENTIAL SERVICES, MAKE CRITICAL INVESTMENTS IN OUR INFRASTRUCTURE, AND BUILD STRONGER COMMUNITIES ... AND WE HAVE TO DO THIS WITHOUT PLACING AN UNNECESSARY BURDEN ON OUR RESIDENTS.

SOME OF THE LARGEST STATE...IMPOSED MANDATES WE FACE INCLUDE: TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES, SAFETY NET, MEDICAID, EARLY INTERVENTION, PRE-K SPECIAL EDUCATION, MANDATED MEDICAL SERVICES FOR INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS,

PROBATION, YOUTH DETENTION, CHILD WELFARE, PENSIONS, AND *NEW THIS YEAR* 75% OF SNAP ADMINISTRATION COSTS.

UNFUNDED MANDATES WILL COLLECTIVELY COST CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY TAXPAYERS MORE THAN \$113 MILLION IN 2027.

[Fighting Unfunded Mandates]

THANKFULLY, OUR STATE REPRESENTATIVES, SENATOR GEORGE BORRELLO AND ASSEMBLYMAN ANDREW MOLITOR, UNDERSTAND WHAT THESE STATE MANDATES MEAN FOR THE PEOPLE OF CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY. WHEN ALBANY IMPOSES COSTLY MANDATES FOR THEIR PET PROJECTS WITHOUT FUNDING THEM, THE BILL ULTIMATELY LANDS ON YOU... THE LOCAL TAXPAYER.

THAT IS WHY I HAVE ALSO USED MY ROLE AS A BOARD MEMBER OF THE NEW YORK STATE ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES TO PUSH BACK AGAINST UNFUNDED MANDATES AND DEMAND THAT THE STATE STOP SHIFTING ITS COSTS ONTO THE COUNTIES... AND ULTIMATELY OUR RESIDENTS.

NEXT WEEK, I WILL BE IN SYRACUSE WITH A BIPARTISAN COALITION OF COUNTY LEADERS FROM ACROSS NEW YORK STATE TO REQUEST THAT GOVERNOR HOCHUL NOT SHIFT THE ADDITIONAL SNAP ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS ONTO THE COUNTIES. INSTEAD, I AM ASKING THE GOVERNOR TO DO WHAT SHE DID WHEN NEW YORK CITY COULD NOT BALANCE ITS OWN BUDGET: USE STATE FUNDS TO COVER THE COST.

I WILL ALSO BE SHARING A VERY SIMPLE MESSAGE... DURING MY TIME IN OFFICE, I HAVE WORKED ACROSS THE AISLE WITH PEOPLE I SOMETIMES HAVE SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL DISAGREEMENTS WITH. I DO THIS BECAUSE I REFUSE TO ALLOW PARTISAN POLITICS TO NEGATIVELY IMPACT THE RESIDENTS OF MY COUNTY.

IT IS TIME FOR THE LEADERS OF NEW YORK STATE TO ADOPT THAT SAME MENTALITY.

WHAT WE SEE ARE THAT PARTISAN FIGHTS WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT DOES NOTHING BUT HARM THE RESIDENTS OF NEW YORK STATE. OUR JOB AS ELECTED OFFICIALS IS TO PUT POLITICS ASIDE, FIND COMMON GROUND, AND GET TO WORK FOR THE PEOPLE WE REPRESENT.

AS COUNTY EXECUTIVE, I WILL CONTINUE TO FIGHT FOR YOU AND FOR EVERY TAXPAYER IN CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY. WE MUST PROTECT YOUR HARD-EARNED MONEY, HOLD THE LINE ON UNNECESSARY COSTS, AND MAKE SURE THAT DECISIONS MADE IN ALBANY DO NOT FORCE FAMILIES HERE TO PAY A PRICE THEY SIMPLY CAN NO LONGER AFFORD.

[Controlled Expenses]

MY ADMINISTRATION IS COMMITTED TO RESPONSIBLE SPENDING AND FINDING EFFICIENCIES WHEREVER POSSIBLE. BY REDUCING UNNECESSARY COSTS AND STREAMLINING OPERATIONS, WE CAN MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY TAXPAYER DOLLAR.

THIS YEAR, I MADE THE DECISION TO TAKE A HARD LOOK AT ONE OF OUR MAJOR VENDOR CONTRACTS. RATHER THAN SIMPLY ACCEPT THE EXISTING TERMS, WE ENTERED INTO NEGOTIATIONS WITH OUR CURRENT VENDOR WHILE ALSO SOLICITING PROPOSALS FROM ALTERNATIVE VENDORS TO DETERMINE WHETHER WE COULD ACHIEVE GREATER VALUE AND ADDITIONAL SAVINGS FOR THE COUNTY.

AS A RESULT OF THAT PROCESS WE WERE ABLE TO SECURE THE EXACT SAME LEVEL OF COVERAGE WHILE SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCING THE COUNTY'S COSTS. THAT IS A HUGE SAVINGS TO TAXPAYERS, AND IT IS A DIRECT RESULT OF TAKING A PROACTIVE APPROACH, CHALLENGING EXISTING COSTS, AND REFUSING TO SIMPLY ACCEPT THE STATUS QUO.

[2027 Projects]

HOW WILL OUR RESIDENTS BENEFIT FROM THIS BUDGET?

IN 2027, WE ARE COMMITTED TO MAINTAINING AND IMPROVING THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES THAT DIRECTLY IMPACT OUR RESIDENTS' DAILY LIVES. DURING MY TIME IN OFFICE, WE HAVE TREATED ALL 550 MILES OF COUNTY ROADS, WE'VE ALSO CONDUCTED 32 CULVERT *AND* BRIDGE REPLACEMENTS, . . . IN 2027, WE WILL INVEST MORE THAN \$17 MILLION IN CAPITAL PROJECTS THROUGH OUR DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC FACILITIES.

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

OVER \$70,000 IN UPGRADES AT JAMESTOWN COMMUNITY COLLEGE,

\$310,000 FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,

AND OVER \$700,000 TO ENHANCE PUBLIC SAFETY THROUGH THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE AND THE DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY SERVICES.

[Tax Levy & Rate]

FOR 2027, THE STATE TAX CAP WOULD ALLOW THE COUNTY TAX LEVY TO INCREASE BY 2% WHICH WOULD BE \$76.4 MILLION. HOWEVER, AS I SAID EARLIER, IN 2027 OUR TAX LEVY WILL REMAIN FLAT!

CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY CONTINUES TO SEE A POSITIVE TREND IN THE REAL ESTATE MARKET, RESULTING IN AN OVERALL ASSESSED VALUE OF \$14 BILLION . . . AN INCREASE OF APPROXIMATELY 15.8% . OUR REALESTATE MARKET IS STILL BOOMING HERE IN CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY!

[Tax Rate & Historical Data]

IN MY 2027 BUDGET, I AM PROPOSING A TAX RATE OF \$5.32 PER THOUSAND ... \$0.85 CENTS BELOW LAST YEAR'S RATE. THIS IS MY SEVENTH BUDGET AS COUNTY EXECUTIVE AND THE SEVENTH YEAR I AM PROPOSING A DECREASE IN THE TAX RATE. 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 \$3.14.

THERE ARE SOME THINGS WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHEN IT COMES TO WHAT IT TOOK TO KEEP THE PROPERTY TAX LEVY FLAT. IN FACT, OUR UTILITIES AND FUEL COST ALONE INCREASED BY \$1.26 MILLION, YET YOU DON'T SEE THAT INCREASE OUR LEVY. WHAT THAT DOES MEAN IS WE CONTINUE TO LOOK FOR COST REDUCTIONS AND EFFICIENCIES THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE BUDGET PROCESS.

OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, I'VE BEEN PROUD TO SAY THAT OUR TAX RATE WAS THE LOWEST SINCE 1982. WELL TONIGHT I AM HAPPY TO ANNOUNCE WE'VE DONE BETTER FOR 2027.... NOW, WE HAVE THE LOWEST PROPOSED COUNTY TAX RATE SINCE OUR FIRST COUNTY EXECUTIVE PROPOSED HIS BUDGET IN 1975!

LET'S TAKE A MOMENT AND THINK BACK TO 1975.

GERALD FORD WAS PRESIDENT. JOE GERACE WAS SWORN IN AS THE FIRST COUNTY EXECUTIVE, MARKING THE BEGINNING OF OUR CHARTER AND COUNTY EXECUTIVE FORM OF GOVERNMENT. AND OUR COUNTRY WAS NOT EVEN 200 YEARS OLD YET!

YOU COULD TURN ON THE TELEVISION AND WATCH THE PREMIERE OF SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE OR HEAD TO THE MOVIES TO SEE SUMMER THRILLER: JAWS.... THAT FALL, SPORTS FANS WATCHED MUHAMMAD ALI AND JOE FRAZIER FACE OFF IN THE LEGENDARY "THRILLA IN MANILA," ... ON THE RADIO YOU'D HEAR QUEEN'S NEW HIT BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY. AND WHEN YOU WENT TO THE GROCERY STORE, YOU COULD BUY A CARTON OF EGGS FOR 69 CENTS OR A POUND OF GROUND BEEF FOR 75 CENTS.

THINK ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE THEN. WE'VE EXPERIENCED DECADES OF INFLATION. THE COST OF OPERATING GOVERNMENT INCREASED DRAMATICALLY. OUR COMMUNITY HAS CHANGED.

HERE WE ARE 50 YEARS LATER . . . DESPITE ALL OF THOSE CHANGES... I AM PROPOSING A COUNTY TAX RATE OF \$5.32. WITH FEWER RESIDENTS PAYING COUNTY TAXES... THAT IS A REMARKABLE POINT OF PERSPECTIVE AND ONE WE SHOULD KEEP IN MIND AS WE LOOK AT THE FINANCIAL DIRECTION OF CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY.

[Fund Balance]

AS YOU CAN SEE IN THE GRAPH, WE PROJECT TO MAINTAIN A FUND BALANCE OF 6.3 PERCENT. SINCE 2020, CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY HAS BENEFITED FROM SEVERAL UNEXPECTED, ONE...TIME REVENUES THAT ADDED APPROXIMATELY \$17.5 MILLION TO OUR FUND BALANCE.

BECAUSE WE'VE MAINTAINED FISCALLY CONSERVATIVE BUDGETS OVER THE YEARS, WE'RE NOW IN A STRONG FINANCIAL POSITION TO HOLD THE LEVY FLAT. IF WE HAD SPENT THOSE RESERVES OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS, WE WOULD NOT HAVE THE ABILITY TO KEEP THE LEVY FLAT WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT CUTS TO SERVICES... OR, ALTERNATIVELY, ASKING RESIDENTS TO PAY MORE AT A TIME WHEN MANY FAMILIES ARE ALREADY FEELING THE STRAIN.

[Levy Growth Vs. Inflation]

INFLATION CURRENTLY STANDS AT 3.4%. SINCE TAKING OFFICE IN 2020, WE HAVE EXPERIENCED SIGNIFICANT INFLATIONARY PRESSURES. THROUGHOUT THAT TIME, MY ADMINISTRATION HAS WORKED TO KEEP THE COUNTY'S PROPERTY TAX LEVY BELOW THE RATE OF INFLATION.

YOU CAN SEE THAT CLEARLY IN THIS GRAPH.

THE BLUE LINE REPRESENTS OUR ACTUAL PROPERTY TAX LEVY. THE ORANGE LINE SHOWS WHAT THE LEVY WOULD HAVE BEEN IF IT HAD SIMPLY KEPT PACE WITH INFLATION.

FOR 2027, OUR PROPOSED TAX LEVY IS \$74.9 MILLION. IF OUR LEVY HAD INCREASED AT THE RATE OF INFLATION, IT WOULD BE APPROXIMATELY \$77.5 MILLION ... NEARLY \$3 MILLION MORE.

TO PUT THAT \$3 MILLION DIFFERENCE INTO PERSPECTIVE: THAT IS ROUGHLY TEN TIMES OUR ENTIRE 2027 CAPITAL PROJECT FUND FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ... AND ABOUT HALF OF WHAT WE WILL SPEND MAINTAINING ALL COUNTY ROADS IN 2027.

IF WE WOULD HAVE INCREASED TO MATCH INFLATION SINCE 2020, OUR LEVY WOULD BE NEARLY \$90 MILLION.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR OUR COUNTY TAXPAYERS? TIMES WHEN THERE IS HIGH INFLATION, AND ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY IS WHEN OUR RESIDENTS RELY ON COUNTY SERVICES THE MOST...

WE ARE KEEPING AFFORDABILITY AT THE FOREFRONT WE ARE MAKING EVERY TAXPAYER DOLLAR COUNT. . . WE ARE PROTECTING FAMILIES FROM UNNECESSARY FINANCIAL BURDENS, AND ENSURING THAT THOSE WHO NEED COUNTY SERVICES MOST CAN CONTINUE TO COUNT ON US.

[Occupancy Tax]

FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027, WE ARE BUDGETING \$2.17 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.

AS SHOWN IN THE GRAPH, OUR OCCUPANCY TAX RECEIPTS CONTINUE TO SHOW STEADY GROWTH.

IN 2026 . . . WE ALLOCATED OCCUPANCY TAX FUNDS TO SUPPORT SEVERAL MAJOR PROJECTS IN CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY, SUCH AS THE FREDONIA RED WHITE AND BLUES FESTIVAL . . . AND ROCK THE LAKE IN LAKEWOOD . . .

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

IN 2027, I HAVE BUDGETED AN ADDITIONAL \$100,000 TO OUR LAKE MAINTENANCE FUND! THESE INVESTMENTS IN OUR LAKES WILL BOOST OCCUPANCY TAX RECEIPTS *AND* ENRICH OUR COMMUNITIES.

[Sales Tax Receipts]

SALES TAX RECEIPTS IN 2026 AND PROJECTIONS FOR 2027 ARE STILL SEEING STEADY GROWTH.

WE TAKE A REALISTIC APPROACH TO SALES TAX BY RELYING ON VERIFIED DATA, CONTROLLING SPENDING, AND AVOIDING INFLATED PROJECTIONS. WHEN REVENUES EXCEED EXPECTATIONS, THOSE SURPLUSES ARE WHAT STRENGTHEN OUR FUND BALANCE, NOT ASSUMPTIONS OR STATEMENTS THAT WE'VE OVERTAXED OUR RESIDENTS. THIS GIVES US FLEXIBILITY TO COVER ONE-TIME COSTS WITHOUT RAISING PROPERTY TAXES.

OUR COUNTY HAS ONE OF THE MOST AFFORDABLE SALES TAX RATES IN NEW YORK, WITH ONLY SIX COUNTIES LOWER THAN OURS ... AND WE'RE ONE OF JUST NINE COUNTIES THAT

DOES NOT TAX CLOTHING AND FOOTWEAR UNDER \$110... OR RESIDENTIAL ENERGY. WE ALSO HAVE THE STATE'S 18TH...LOWEST PER...CAPITA SALES TAX BURDEN.

AND WE DON'T KEEP THAT REVENUE TO OURSELVES. IN 2027, WE EXPECT TO COLLECT MORE THAN \$102 MILLION IN SALES TAX, WITH OVER \$42 MILLION ... 41.25% SHARED DIRECTLY WITH OUR CITIES, TOWNS, AND VILLAGES. NOT EVERY COUNTY DOES THAT.... OF THOSE THAT DO.... ONLY NINE COUNTIES SHARE A LARGER PERCENTAGE THAN WE DO.

THAT REVENUE IS CRITICAL TO OUR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS. REDUCING COSTS TO COUNTY RESIDENTS AND CONTRIBUTES TO OUR RANKING AS THE SECOND MOST AFFORDABLE COUNTY TO LIVE IN NEW YORK.

[Government Reduction Initiative]

DURING MY TENURE AS COUNTY EXECUTIVE, I'VE MADE IT A PRIORITY TO MAKE GOVERNMENT WORK SMARTER, MORE EFFICIENTLY, AND ... MOST IMPORTANTLY ... MORE AFFORDABLY.

MANY PEOPLE DON'T REALIZE THAT BY STATUE CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY MAKES TOWNS, AND VILLAGES WHOLE FOR UNPAID PROPERTY TAXES, WHILE WE CHOSE BY RESOLUTION, TO MAKE OUR CITIES WHOLE. THIS MEANS WHEN SOMEONE DOESN'T PAY THEIR PROPERTY TAXES, THE COUNTY PICKS UP THE BILL.

THAT'S WHY, IN 2026, I EXPANDED OUR GOVERNMENT REDUCTION INITIATIVE TO HELP MUNICIPALITIES OVERCOME THE UPFRONT COSTS OF PURSUING MERGERS, CONSOLIDATIONS, AND SHARED SERVICES. MY GOAL IS TO ELIMINATE DUPLICATION, REDUCE WASTE, AND LOWER LONG...TERM COSTS OF GOVERNMENT.

THESE EFFORTS ARE VOLUNTARY AND LOCALLY DRIVEN, WITH THE COUNTY PROVIDING THE RESOURCES TO HELP COMMUNITIES PURSUE SOLUTIONS THAT WORK FOR THEM. WE'RE ALREADY SEEING THAT TAKE SHAPE THROUGH A SHARED DOG SHELTER, DISCUSSIONS AROUND A POTENTIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT MERGER, AND EXPANDED OPPORTUNITIES FOR SHARED SERVICES AND CONSOLIDATION IN NORTHERN CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2027, I HOPE EVEN MORE COMMUNITIES WILL BRING FORWARD INNOVATIVE IDEAS SO WE CAN CONTINUE CUTTING UNNECESSARY COSTS, IMPROVING SERVICES, AND REDUCE TAXES.

[Reflections]

I WANT TO COME BACK TO SOMETHING I SAID AT THE VERY BEGINNING.

****EVERY DOLLAR MATTERS.****

IT MATTERS TO THE FAMILY SITTING AROUND THE KITCHEN TABLE, FIGURING OUT HOW TO PAY THE MORTGAGE, THE ELECTRIC BILL, THE GROCERIES, AND EVERYTHING ELSE THAT COMES WITH RUNNING A HOUSEHOLD.

IT MATTERS TO THE SMALL BUSINESS OWNER WHO IS TRYING TO KEEP THE DOORS OPEN, MAKE PAYROLL, AND INVEST IN THEIR FUTURE.

AND IT MATTERS TO THE SENIOR WHO HAS SPENT A LIFETIME BUILDING A HOME AND A LIFE RIGHT HERE IN CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY.

****THAT IS WHO WE ARE BUDGETING FOR.****

THIS BUDGET IS NOT ABOUT GOVERNMENT FOR THE SAKE OF GOVERNMENT. IT IS ABOUT PEOPLE.....

IT IS ABOUT MAKING SURE A CHILD WHO NEEDS SERVICES CAN GET THEM....

IT IS ABOUT MAKING SURE OUR ROADS AND BRIDGES ARE SAFE....

IT IS ABOUT MAKING SURE OUR SHERIFF'S OFFICE, EMERGENCY SERVICES, AND FIRST RESPONDERS HAVE THE RESOURCES THEY NEED TO PROTECT OUR COMMUNITIES...

IT IS ABOUT INVESTING IN OUR COLLEGES, OUR COMMUNITIES, OUR INFRASTRUCTURE, OUR LAKES, AND OUR ECONOMIC FUTURE....

AND IT IS ABOUT MAKING SURE THAT WHEN A RESIDENT NEEDS THEIR COUNTY GOVERNMENT, WE ARE THERE...

OUR COMMITMENT IS SIMPLE: PROTECT WHAT MATTERS, STRENGTHEN WHAT WORKS, EXPAND OPPORTUNITY, AND KEEP CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY AFFORDABLE.

WE WILL KEEP FIGHTING FOR OUR TAXPAYERS, KEEP INVESTING IN OUR COMMUNITIES, AND KEEP BUILDING A COUNTY WHERE BUSINESSES CAN GROW, OUR COMMUNITIES CAN THRIVE AND FAMILIES CAN AFFORD TO LIVE. THIS ISN'T JUST A BUDGET, THIS IS A SOLUTION. . .

A SOLUTION TO THE CONTINUOUS FINANCIAL BURDEN OUR RESIDENTS FACE EVERY SINGLE DAY.

REMEMBER, THIS IS OUR HOME... ***AND TOGETHER***, WE ARE BUILDING ITS FUTURE. ONE DOLLAR AT A TIME....

THANK YOU, GOD BLESS YOU, AND GOD BLESS CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY, AND GOD BLESS THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.