



State of New York County of Broome Government Offices

Executive's Office

Jason T. Garnar, Broome County Executive

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2018 State of the County Address

Good evening. Thank you to everyone for being here. We have several special guests with us including Legislature Chairman Dan Reynolds, Majority Leader Steve Flagg, Minority Leader Mark Whalen, Members of the Broome County Legislature, District Attorney Steve Cornwell, Sheriff David Harder, County Clerk Joseph Mihalko and several of our towns and villages leaders.

I also want to thank my wife Amanda and my children, Nolan, Miles and Ben for being here tonight and for supporting me. My two oldest Nolan and Miles were among the students singing tonight from Chenango Valley. I'm very proud of my sons tonight and every day. I don't know if they came tonight for me or because we're all at Animal Adventure, but I'll take it. Let's give our CV students who sang tonight and all of our school districts in Broome County a big round of applause.

Thank you to Supervisor Winsor and Supervisor Price for their warm welcome and introductions tonight, to Pastor Charles Kark for the inspiring invocation and the members of the Honor Guard. Also let's recognize Animal Adventure, Jordan Patch, his wife Colleen and Stephen Donnelly for hosting us here this evening.

Many of you may be wondering, how did we end up in a zoo tonight? I love coming to work every day, working with my employees, department heads to make it all happen. But what I love even more is getting out of the office, into the community and talking to people. Because of that, I wanted to get the State of the County address out of the county office building and into our community. I knew immediately where I wanted to go and that was Animal Adventure.

When you think Animal Adventure, you think April the Giraffe. April the Giraffe put Broome County on the map last year. But the decision to hold tonight's address at Animal Adventure isn't just about April, it's about what's been built here. Jordan Patch had a dream to open a zoo. Many of you probably know his story. After the flood in 2011, he decided not to reopen his business in Conklin and wondered what was next. He spent a year traveling. He came back to Broome County and in 2012, he decided to buy some land right here in the Town of Colesville.

The property supported his dream and gave him his vision for Animal Adventure Park and look what's happened. Last year, over 200-thousand people walked through the gates at Animal Adventure Park. On any given day, people from 12 different states visited and even international visitors from Australia, Japan and Ireland. He is a business owner who had a dream to build something great and a county that has rallied around and supported a business in one of our small communities.

That is what Broome County is all about: overcoming challenges and rebuilding better than ever. I love Broome County. I love the diverse neighborhoods, the hills and valleys, our schools, churches and most importantly, the people. There is no place I'd rather be. But Broome County can be better. I know that. Everyone here tonight knows that as well. When Amanda and I come home from work every day and sit down for dinner with our boys, I ask Nolan, Miles and Ben, "Tell me about your day." I don't ask them to just tell me about the good parts of their day. I want to hear about everything. The same goes for the State of the County. Tonight, I'm putting it all out there. That includes the good news, but also things we should work on as a county.

Tonight, I'm here to talk about building. Building a better Broome County. To do that, we need jobs. We need to provide quality services for our residents. We need safe communities. We need good, sound infrastructure. We need to keep our taxes low and put our county in a strong financial position.

County Finances

From day one, I've been laser focused on rebuilding our county's finances. Just a few weeks ago, New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli released the final audit report on our county's finances. What was in the report was no surprise. When I took office, Broome County was in a financial mess, a nightmare really. A fund balance of \$250,000 on a \$370 million budget. That's scary. I knew it, taxpayers knew it and the Comptroller confirmed it.

To build a better Broome, I've gone back to the basics with conservative and realistic budgeting and no gimmicks. No more budgeting \$850,000 for medical marijuana and getting \$1,700. The budget I built was approved by every single member of the Legislature because it was fiscally conservative and a step in the right direction in rebuilding our county's finances. I've looked in every nook and cranny to find ways to save this county money. I've reorganized departments to save money and I made the difficult but necessary decision to unfund dozens of positions.

Last year, Governor Andrew Cuomo challenged counties and municipalities to find more ways to share services and save taxpayer money. Broome County took the challenge and worked with our municipalities and county department heads. Our Risk Manager Tom Dellapenna found a way to save millions on our prescription drug costs. In fact, this proposal, which we just submitted to the Legislature, has the potential to save us 10 million dollars. This could be the biggest cost savings initiative in Broome County history.

Jobs and Workforce Development

In 2017, we saw signs of improvement in the economy. Sales tax revenue went up 4%. A 9 percent increase in home sales in 2017. There were a lot of big job announcements including nearly 750 jobs total between Dick's Sporting Goods, the Imperium battery factory in Endicott and Syracuse Behavioral Healthcare.

Last week we announced that Evolution Jets is landing at the Greater Binghamton Airport. This company in Texas could've chosen hundreds of other airports, but they chose us. They chose to bring their jets and jobs right here to Broome County. And we'll bring more jobs to Broome County by working with Kevin McLaughlin at The Agency and Jennifer Conway with the

Greater Binghamton Chamber of Commerce. We'll work together better than ever with the opening of Broome County's one stop shop for economic development.

But the fact remains that we have thousands of jobs right now in Broome County that are open because people lack the skills and training to get them. This is one of the biggest challenges we are facing in Broome County.

Sara Liu and her staff helped over 18,000 people over last year at workforce training. There were over 100 job recruitment events and 16 career fairs. In Broome County, we're not going to be content anymore to wait for people to come into the unemployment office, we're going to meet you before you even get there. We have a new Warehouse training program. If you qualify and complete the program, you are guaranteed a job. We need to get people in Broome County off of the unemployment line and into the workforce. I am developing a brand new Welfare to Work program with the Department of Social Services to get people back to work and to clean up our neighborhoods. Our streets, sidewalks, parks riverbanks, and many other places could use a good cleaning, and now we have the resources to do it. Not only will Broome County get cleaned up but participants will learn to show up to work on time, how to listen, how to work with a team and how to work with a manager. It will give people the skills and experience they need to get a job. If you can work, you will work. My hope is that every able-bodied person in Broome County will be working by the end of the year.

Greater Binghamton Fund

I want Broome County to be the destination for young professional to life, work, and play. For 30 years people have talked about revitalizing the Triple Cities, and with the help of the Greater Binghamton Fund, we're ready to do it.

Governor Cuomo listened to my call for more state investment in Broome County and he delivered in a big way. In just my first year in office, I was selected co-chair of the Greater Binghamton Fund. This is a game-changing \$20 million investment for projects that will completely transform our urban areas in Endicott, Johnson City and Binghamton. 50 proposals were submitted, leveraging millions of dollars in private investment and creating hundreds of jobs.

Washington Avenue in Endicott will be brought back to life. Main Street in Johnson City will be completely transformed. And in Binghamton, improvements to The Forum and a massive investment in streetscapes will anchor a major revitalization that will make this part of Binghamton a true destination. Proposals will be announced later this year and I can't wait to see the final product.

Fighting Blight

I am taking on the biggest eyesores in the fight against blight in Broome County.

That massive, white building in Johnson City - 59 Lester Avenue is the biggest eyesore in Broome County. I put out a Request for Proposals and sold the building to a developer who will

put it back on the tax rolls, invest \$60 million dollars into it and create much needed senior housing. A victory for the Victory building.

In Binghamton, the former ANSCO Camera Factory - 6 Emma Street. I found a great young developer with a proven track record of taking on old factory buildings to buy it and invest \$20 million dollars. He's bringing in market-rate housing and commercial spaces which will attract young professionals to live and work in Broome County.

This year, I am determined to take on another huge blighted building, a county-owned property in the Town of Union, 1 North Page in West Endicott. Everywhere I go, someone says something to me about it. The neighbors can't stand it and want to see it torn down and I do too. Later this year, God willing, Legislator Baldwin and I will get out the sledgehammers and bring this eyesore down.

We also need to build healthier neighborhoods. I've got huge concerns about the quality of housing we have in Broome County. Things have to change. Last year, Mark Schuster with the Healthy Neighborhoods Program took me into some rental properties in Johnson City that he visits every week. You would not believe what people are living in. It's unsafe and unhealthy, it's not right. We held a big Housing Summit last year, bringing together all of the stakeholders in Broome County to answer one question - how can we making housing better in Broome County? Because it has to get better.

We're helping municipalities fight blight more than ever before. Late last year, we sold a number of properties to the city of Binghamton for \$1. We could've sold them for a lot more at the auction, but those properties are beyond repair and not safe. The City has money to demolish them and we're working together to do just that. The Land Bank, which was created and funded by Broome County, knocked down several eyesores improving neighborhoods throughout Broome County including Binghamton, Dickinson, and Vestal. In 2018, I will be proposing major changes to the foreclosure process, developing policy to protect good tenants and punish slumlords and working to implement policies that will make it easier and more affordable to renovate your home or build a new one.

Tourism

There's no doubt about it, the better the county looks, the more people want to visit and people are coming here because of the events we have. From LUMA Festival attracting thousands to downtown Binghamton - the county sponsored this event last year bringing over 30,000 people to downtown Binghamton. The Dick's Sporting Goods Open in Endicott once again had a record-crowd. Spiedie Fest also had a one-day Saturday record crowd come to Broome County's Otsiningo Park.

Coming soon, you can expect some great changes at the Broome County Arena, the Forum and En-Joie Golf Course. Thank you to Senator Akshar for securing a half million dollars in grant money for upgrades at these county-owned facilities.

There's lots of things going on in Broome County and we're going to make sure we are more aggressive than ever before in getting people from outside Broome County to visit.

Rural Communities

As I said earlier, my favorite thing about my job is getting out of my office and into the communities in Broome County. I want to do that more. I'd do that all day every day if I could.

Many of these visits take me to rural areas like Deposit, Triangle, Whitney Point, and the Town of Maine. Growing up in a small town myself, I appreciate the beauty, the close-knit community, and the value system that you get in a rural community. I am committed to continuing to build relationships with all of our rural communities. Last year, I did something that had never been done before. I brought the state of the county to you, taking it on the road to every municipality in Broome County. That's happening again this year. Starting next week, my team and I will be visiting your communities to answer your questions.

You've heard me say it before. Our rural communities in Broome County need more attention. I understand the challenges they face. The Small Communities Fund I included in my 2018 budget will help organizations and businesses in our rural areas by providing funds to help them grow and be more competitive.

Because in my administration, it doesn't matter whether you live in Binghamton or Barker, we work for everyone in Broome County.

Public Safety

I have a goal of making Broome County the safest county in New York. To do that, we must make major investments in public safety.

District Attorney Steve Cornwell is helping people see the light and making criminals feel the heat. He aggressively prosecutes drug cases and violent crimes, but also sees the value in helping our most vulnerable get the treatment they need.

Sheriff Harder and his Special Investigations Unit have made a number of major drug busts, getting drug kingpins off our streets and behind bars.

Let's not forget EMS Director Mike Ponticiello and his dedicated staff who led the county through three State of Emergencies last year. OES just became one of the first counties in the state to receive the Governor's Local Emergency Management Accreditation Program.

In my 2018 budget, I made big investments in the DA's Office, Sheriff's Office and Emergency Services.

I want to take a moment to thank all of our law enforcement officers, corrections officers, emergency responders, who put their lives on the line every day. Thank you.

Heroin epidemic

The heroin epidemic in Broome County remains a top priority of mine. We need more treatment in Broome County, and more treatment is on the way. This spring, we will officially welcome Syracuse Behavioral Healthcare to Broome County. Securing a treatment center was a major priority of mine when I took office last year. Thank you to the Legislature for approving the funding and Senator Akshar, Assemblywoman Lupardo, and Assemblyman Crouch for working across party lines to help save lives.

But as much good as we do, there is much more to be done. The latest numbers from the District Attorney, 66 overdose deaths in 2017. 66 too many. Nearly 600 reported overdoses to Broome County 911 last year. 600 too many.

Marissa Lamphere is with us tonight. For the first time ever, Broome County now has someone dedicated to coordinating the county's entire efforts to fight this epidemic.

After years of skyrocketing overdose deaths, 2017 saw a decrease. We will work every day to get that number to 0.

Community and School Safety

60 years ago, my parents practiced bomb drills in schools to protect against a nuclear attack from Russia.

This year, in 2018, my three sons practice lockdown drills, active shooter drills in their schools. I was talking to my son Nolan about it. He is explaining to me how it works. He says his biggest worry is being in the hallway alone, away from his classroom and the alarm sounds for a lockdown and he is by himself. This is the conversation I'm having in 2018 with my 11 year old. This is not okay.

We have to develop solutions to better protect our kids. At the local level, we're not making policies on gun control. That's not our job. Everyone is expecting the DC politicians to pass the magical bill that is going to better protect our kids. That isn't going to happen. We can't expect the DC politicians are going to do anything.

We have to take action right here in Broome County. That starts with having real conversations with real solutions. Last year, I took a small step working with the Binghamton City School District to find a cost-effective way to put caseworkers in schools to help and protect our kids and families. I just sent a letter to all school districts in Broome County offering this program to them as I know districts are working on their budgets. This is one small step but we have to do so much more.

I am announcing here tonight that I am developing a task force to start this deeper conversation about what is happening in our communities. I will bring everyone to the table including mental health professionals, school districts, law enforcement, churches, youth organizations, everyone. I don't care if you're a Democrat or a Republican. We have to start putting our differences aside and having that conversation and taking action for our kids. We did this last year with Broome

Developmental and we'll do it again this year because I know the safety and wellbeing of our children is something every person in this room wants.

Conclusion

To every member of the Broome County Legislature, I want to work with you. I want work better with you to get things done. Democrat or Republican, it doesn't matter. We have to work together. Tonight, let's commit to meeting at least once every month.

We're all working for the same thing, to better Broome County. Let's step up, put our differences aside and come together for the people of Broome County. Not left, not right. Forward for Broome County.

You heard the story tonight of Jordan Patch: his dream, his work, his vision. He made it a goal to bring a giraffe to Animal Adventure Park by year five. As we all know, that happened. Actually by year five, he didn't have just one giraffe. He had three. But that's not the end of the story. As we sit here tonight in the brand new Welcome Center, the building of a better Animal Adventure Park continues.

I've talked a lot tonight about the successes of Broome County in my first year in office but my work here is just beginning. I will build a better Broome County, but it's going to take the help of all of you. Together, we can build a better Broome County. Together, we can make it safer, healthier and stronger. Thank you and God Bless Broome County.