

ROCKLAND COUNTY LEGISLATOR CHRISTOPHER CAREY

2014 MINORITY ADDRESS

APRIL 1, 2014

Good Evening,

Chairman Wolfe; Fellow Legislators; Ladies & Gentlemen:

Once again, I am humbled to stand before you, to deliver the Legislative Minority Address on behalf of my colleagues on the lower tier.

Since my first address just over one year ago, many changes have taken place. The voters & taxpayers elected County Executive Day. This body elected County Legislature Chairman Wolfe and, most importantly, to demonstrate to our residents, a spirit of working together, we put aside party politics and both parties unanimously voted for Leg. Kantrowitz as the appointee to fill the seat vacated by Leg. Day.

Reality and Achievement dictate that the job of governing is not an easy task. Governing requires a balancing act that is often times difficult to accomplish.

Where do we begin? There are many valid interests vying for our attention from both sides of the aisle. However, in my opinion, none so great nor more important, than the fiscal crisis, looming 'head and shoulders' over all other issues. The fiscal crisis creates a domino effect of problems on our budgets, our departments, our staff, and our programs. In order to stabilize our Rockland County, we must change current practices and implement some very painful decisions.

We have begun our share of difficult and painful decisions with the closing of the inpatient mental health unit; with the creation of an LDC and, the sale of Summit Park. I believe that these are the correct decisions for this time in our history. However, the loss of jobs and the change of delivery of services to our residents are no less of a heavy burden to bear even when you are convinced you are doing the correct thing. And, these are only the beginning decisions. What comes next in our future?

We often hear the phrase – “the County must be run like a business”. We often hear candidates proclaim, “If elected, we will run the County as if it were our own business”.

I have heard those phrases so often in my life, and I have most recently read similar objectives in the recent RBA, Patterns for Progress white paper.

We all know and agree, that together this County Exec and Legislature must craft an operating budget not based on gimmicks or pie in the sky hopes – but on implementing a budget based on practical realities.

We have moved the budget process to begin earlier and to use “real numbers” to project the actual fiscal realities we face. Accurate and reliable budgets can initiate understanding, assist in coping with the issues facing us and, permit necessary re-planning throughout the year, rather than reacting to the dreaded “September surprise”, that there’s little or no money in the till. Plan ahead – a good philosophy!

Everyone asks, and we ask ourselves, “How do we erase the monumental Rockland deficit that has accumulated over so many years?” We have momentarily caught our breath by bonding a large portion of the deficit. But it is not a real, final or complete answer to solving our problem.

Just as the #1 problem to me is the fiscal crisis, the #1 answer to me is that we must stop spending. If you do not have money, you cannot spend money. Simple. But so much easier said than done!

The most interesting and important query of the Rockland Business Association’s white paper is “How can local governments in Rockland work more collaboratively to ensure effective delivery of services at the lowest possible cost?”

The answer is obviously shared services and coordinated collaboration. These solutions have been introduced ‘ad nauseum’ over and over again without many, if any, practical applications. Municipalities, school districts, hospitals, etc., aren’t we all facing economical nightmares? Isn’t it time to do more than talk? Isn’t it time to come together? Isn’t it time to spend less, corroborate more and coordinate more? No more fooling around, we have to get results for the residents.

I could suggest to County Executive Day, Chairman Wolfe the Legislature to form a bipartisan group consisting of legislators, local elected government officials, representatives from the business community and citizens to examine quickly the situation in Rockland and make recommendations on shared services and collaboration so that we can act. But, committees are the straws that break the camel’s back. Let’s just have our Purchasers, our Department heads, our non-profits, our attorneys, etc. work together and make a dent in our spending and a step forward in returning to good, stable, sensible government.

It is indeed remarkable, and never too late, for business groups and our state leaders to join together in reducing redundancy in local government. I have had discussions on shared services with local elected leaders in two of the towns my district covers. We all agree opportunities exist for shared services that will save taxpayer dollars. These forums will require trust, cooperation and newly devised processes.

The County can be the leader in bringing towns and villages together to find potential areas for savings. We are at a point in time where we must take purposeful steps coupled with a dialogue within the larger community on shared services and more importantly we must take action.

In addition to working harder and smarter, we have to be more vigilant in seeking mandate relief from the Governor and our state lawmakers. Mandates are huge line items in the County Budget and I understand that State mandate relief is not something that we can depend upon; yet, we must continue to present our case. And, if we are to ever realize relief from state mandates that does not justify an increase in county spending. We have to continue streamlining every line item.

A very serious focus area must be Economic Development. I am heartened that the County Executive has also taken steps by naming Mr. Monel, Director for Economic Development and the Legislature looks forward to hearing his plans to motivate and sustain business growth and increase tax rateables in Rockland County. Again, working with the County and local Planning Boards, we must streamline the time frame of obtaining business permits. Without businesses we cannot survive or provide so many services to our residents.

I pledge to all of you and our residents that I will always be as transparent as possible, and work in a bipartisan manner to address the critical issues facing Rockland. I may not agree on all things but I will not just “go along to get along”. I will be available to brainstorm and collaborate and work tirelessly for the best possible future results.

Thank you. May God bless all of those who place themselves in harm’s way especially our troops and first responders. May God continue to Bless America!

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