

STATE OF THE COUNTY
2009-10

JOHN M. BECKER
CHAIRMAN
MADISON COUNTY
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Fellow supervisors, employees, citizens, taxpayers:

It is with great humility and honor that I bring to you this State of the County Address for 2010. As we enter a new decade, my prediction last year that we as a county and as towns would be challenged like no other time in our history seems to be accurate.

The Board of Supervisors will rise to the challenges it faces by continuing to innovate and think outside the box to counteract some of the effects of the external influences beyond our control.

As I have said in the past, this is a work in progress and will continue to evolve throughout the new year. We will continue to try new things and see what works.

The biggest challenge to be faced by Madison County in the coming year is surviving the New York State financial and leadership crises.

We are in very uncharted waters. 2009 brought us our first full year of our new county administrator. Paul Miller is a tireless worker and has done an exemplary job for Madison County.

Every department and committee will have – and has had – its challenges.

Under **Government Operations**, a restructuring of the Personnel Department has brought cost savings, as well as a broader base of knowledge with the additions of Eileen Zehr and Ryan Alward.

The blue collar contract was finally negotiated to resolution, with a significant cost savings to the county taxpayers with one-person plowing. With the fine leadership of Joe Wisinski and his stalwart work crews, this program has been a resounding success.

The white collar contract was finally negotiated to settlement, as well, in 2009.

The year ahead will bring many challenges with pension and healthcare reform that we know little or nothing about at this time.

Social and Mental Health Services Committee...

2009 was a year of accomplishments for Public Health, turning a \$235,000 budget loss into an \$85,000-a-year money-maker.

Mental Health has outsourced the management of Cedar House, another example of how the county is saving money.

2009 was a tough year for Social Services, with the department unpleasantly coping with a 40-percent increase in need for Food Stamps, a 40-percent increase in need for Medicaid and a 30-percent increase in home heating assistance.

This situation most likely will not get better in 2010. This year, we will look at overlap and duplication of services in these three departments with an eye toward consolidation. Also, the Board of Health is looking to be certified this year.

Criminal Justice/Public Safety Committee...

The biggest highlight is probably the election of a new Madison County Sheriff. I, as well as the Board, look forward to working with Sheriff Allen Riley in 2010 and beyond.

Also in 2009, the single most expensive and most-needed project in county history got underway: our emergency radio communication system upgrade.

Karen Birch in Probation also has continued to save the county thousands of dollars annually by bringing not only alternatives to incarceration to the forefront, but also by implementing many other cutting-edge ideas in Madison County.

In 2010, work will continue on the radio project with the majority of construction to be completed this year.

Public Works and Buildings & Grounds

As I stated before, one-person plowing was implemented in 2009 and has been a resounding success. It is successful not only because of management, but also because of the hardworking employees in the Highway Department.

A flood last year in DSS highlights of the spirit of cooperation that exists at the county. When cleanup had to be done, everyone pitched in without complaint. Mike Fitzgerald, the head of DSS; Steve Chaires, his deputy commissioner; all of Kevin Loveless's crew, Dan Degear, sheriff's deputies, Lyle Malbouf's crew and myself all worked hard together to get the cleanup done. This work was completed and the department back together within three months.

These are things that can be accomplished when we all work together.

2010 challenges will be to stay on budget and take a good, hard look at the parking lot project for 2011.

Finance, Ways and Means

Finance worked very hard on spreadsheets for the communication system's finances. The hard work of Treasurer Cindy Edick and Chairman John Reinhardt and their hours spent on this resulted in not having to raid the fund balance as badly as we anticipated.

In 2010, the Finance Committee will have to keep a very close eye on the finances from the state. The state's checkbook is in the red. Ours maybe sometime, as well, if the state of New York continues to delay payment to reimburse the county and other local governments the money we have already spent on programs mandated by law to be financed by the state.

At one point in December 2009, New York owed the county \$1.5 million in general fund revenues and just more than \$1 million in highway funds. That is nearly 10 percent of the County's total property tax levy that we have loaned to New York State. We are the banker for the state, yet we get no benefits from the loans we make. New York has already collected these funds from the taxpayers, but the local governments that are closest to the taxpayers are waiting longer and longer to get reimbursed for money we've already spent.

The size of government in Albany is out of control. Its regulatory and fiscal gluttony stifles business and inhibits investment while it bleeds existing businesses and taxpayers dry.

What has the state done to remedy this situation? Nothing productive. The New York State Senate is anarchy and makes our Legislature the laughingstock of the Nation. The Legislature spent a few extra weeks in Albany and more taxpayer money on a special legislative session that managed to only produce \$500 million in real savings compared to the budget deficit pegged at \$4 billion, a figure which grows each time a new estimate is made.

The Governor and the Legislature have known about this deficit since 2008 but have yet to take any significant action to change the situation. Instead, they spent a big part of federal stimulus money on increasing 2009-10 state spending by \$8 billion because it was easy.

What will they do when the stimulus money is gone?

Planning

2009 saw another new face at the helm, Scott Ingmire. Scott has grasped the reins just like a seasoned champ and has brought a renewed leadership to the Planning Department.

When I became chair in 2008, I asked Liz Moran to set out on an ambitious plan for Madison County's economic development. In 2009, the plan was almost done. We had an economic summit in December, at which we discussed many high points of Madison County, as well as the areas needing improvement.

The one thing that stands out from this meeting is that when site developers are approached by companies, the companies say, "Don't bring me New York" because of the high power costs, over-regulation, and high taxes.

Think about it: The words are "Don't bring me New York."

I hope in 2010, a final of this plan will be implemented.

Native American Affairs

As I have said earlier, the biggest disappointment of my tenure is not being able to come to terms equitable to all parties; however, I, as well as this Board, should hold our heads high, knowing that we are doing everything we can to stem the tide of Madison County is being diminished from the map.

People are right, but they need to understand, we should not have to hire lobbyists to help us make the state do what it should; however, in a culture like the one that exists in New York State and Washington, D.C., it is the only way to get things done. For every dollar we spend, the Nation spends \$10 or more to lobby the same officials who were sworn in to protect you.

The governor has ignored a bill he signed into law in December 2008 and reneged on his campaign promise to collect more than \$1 billion in revenue from taxes on tribal sales to non-Indians, of which Madison County's share is estimated to be in excess of \$5.4 million annually. New York City, Cayuga and Seneca Counties and other municipalities have been forced to take legal action aimed at getting the state to do their duty.

Instead, the Governor and his staff show no shame in openly admitting that they have not attempted to collect these funds because of the threat of violence.

The New York State Tax Department bragged about collecting millions from tax scofflaws, yet they refuse to collect the sales tax from sales to non-Native Americans. Gimmicks like throwing another \$1 per-pack tax on cigarettes will only penalize legitimate businesses, do nothing to reduce the state deficit and benefit tax scofflaws.

The double standard this shows for the general taxpaying public is this: If you owe New York State taxes, threaten a little violence, and you will not have to pay. You are right, Mr. Kinsella: Something does stink, and it is not in Madison County; it's in Albany.

In October of 2009, we came across an article that quoted Mr. Clint Hill as saying the Nation Enterprises are a tool to reclaim their homeland of 288,000 acres, one acre at a time. Who will foot the bill when they get it? Will it be Brookfield? Will it be DeRuyter, Hamilton?

After all the good real estate is purchased, the southern small towns will be footing the bill – the whole bill!

The message to the Governor should be, "Collect New York State's \$1.5 billion (included in which is our share of \$5.4 million) per year or resign," plain and simple.

You wonder why people are leaving the state, why there are tax parties, why people are disenchanted with state government? Here is a good example of the double standard and bad situations our elected officials at the state level have subjected us to.

In 2010, we will try to get the foot-dragging Second Circuit Court of Appeals to finally make a decision. How hard can it be to read and interpret the law – can we foreclose or not? – again, if we can't, the double standard applies.

I want to thank all the committee chairs from 2009 and the chairs for 2010 for all of their hard work.

Thank you.