



ALBANY COUNTY STATE OF THE COUNTY

Daniel P. McCoy, Albany County Executive

Monday, March 7, 2022

Good evening ladies and gentlemen and thank you for watching remotely my 11th annual State of the County Address.

Last year, I delivered the State of the County Address remotely, as I am doing now. However, we are in a far different place today than we were twelve months ago. As I sit before you, know that the ship is steady, the course is certain and the strength of our County is STRONG!!!

Today, I will provide an update on the various programs and achievements over the past year and outline the tremendous path upon which we have already embarked.

During this health crisis, we were forced to focus on RIGHT NOW to respond to the deadly COVID virus. We needed all “hands on deck” to learn, to shift, to pivot and to redirect resources as we needed to combat this global health crisis and save lives.

A year ago, we had hoped that the vaccine represented the light at the end of this dark COVID tunnel. It’s taken longer than we anticipated and tragically, during this time, we have lost over 500 Albany County citizens to COVID-19. These are our mothers, our fathers, our sons and daughters, our neighbors and our frontline workers. My thoughts and prayers go out to the families and loved ones of all those who have passed. Please let us take a moment of silence to remember them all.

Over the last year, we worked hard with so many partners to get the shots in the arms of every citizen, regardless of race, age or socio-economic status. We know that vaccine saves lives and is the best weapon in the arsenal for our battle against this deadly virus.

We called upon the 900 plus members of the Albany County Medical Reserve Corps to administer shots inside our arena; we partnered to schedule vaccine appointments and outreach to communities with the Alliance for Better Health and the Helgerson Solutions Group.

These partners were instrumental in establishing an online pre-registration system for vaccination which helped over 45,000 county residents get pre-registered on the site.

These partnerships also assisted our efforts in outreach to minority communities to provide equal, if not greater access of vaccine to disadvantaged neighborhoods. We did this by creating 50 pop-up clinics that brought vaccine directly to neighborhoods where people live, work, worships and go to school. In total nearly 10,000 vaccines were administered at these sites.

Our Department of the Health performed and continues to perform exceptionally in our efforts to get out vaccine and to keep our citizens healthy and safe. In 2021, our DOH operated 320 PODs, coordinated over 80,000 doses

of vaccine by administering over 48,000 and reallocating nearly 32,000 to community partners.

Our Health Department partnered with local schools to provide over 2,000 doses of vaccine to our children; and also, to distribute nearly 40,000 tests and masks for our students and teachers. It is important to note that all of this COVID response work was being performed simultaneously as the normal operations of the Health Department.

And, we continue to offer COVID vaccine doses and booster shots daily at our Health Department.

While we were making valiant efforts at vaccinating our entire population, there were challenges and barriers. Throughout many minority communities, we saw disparities.

We also saw cultural and generational mistrust of government. In response, we created a public service announcement campaign through many forms of media, including television networks stations. We engaged local leaders, members of the clergy, cultural organizations and community based non-profit organizations to get out the facts, to dispel disinformation, to promote vaccination and to provide access.

We set up smaller PODS within communities in partnership with neighborhood churches. We set up PODs at senior housing apartments and

public housing units. We also worked with our partner Mohawk Ambulance and Sheriff Apple to reach homebound residents.

Our Department for Aging was very active in the vaccine effort by partnering with Rite Aid pharmacy to set up PODs at Beth Emeth which resulted in the vaccination of 2,000 seniors.

We have accomplished a great deal. To date, nearly 90% of our 18+ population has rolled up their sleeve for vaccine. I thank each and every county employee and volunteer who helped in this effort!

As County Executive and leader of government, I have pledged my commitment to be a strong and steady hand at the helm as we forge new paths. My vision is for inclusivity, to break down barriers and to dedicate resources to making equity in health and wellness for all citizens a reality and not just a catch phrase. It's a vision that recognizes the changing landscape of our industries and commits to an economic development plan that spurs job growth, fosters partnerships with labor and develops opportunities for training and education to members of our historically disadvantaged communities. And, a vision that sets us on the path to ensure that we severely decrease our carbon footprint by implementing policies that remove reliance on fossil fuels, including a commitment to a passenger vehicle fleet that is 100% electric within the next 5 years.

Tonight, I ask all of you to join me in this commitment as we blaze a new trail, one that is full of light, full of hope and full of endless opportunities. As President Barack Obama said, “Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change we seek.”

One of our biggest highlights is a new partnership and has resulted in the newly named MVP Arena. The naming rights agreement with MVP Health Care began at the beginning of this year. We’d held an opening bidding process in which I made it an absolute necessity that all vendors understand that we were seeking a true partner with Albany County and the arena, and not just a company to put their name on a building. We had an opportunity to do more. We needed a sincere commitment from a partner in the community. And, indeed, we found one in MVP Health Care. I would like to thank Chris Del Vecchio, his team and the MVP Board of Directors for their commitment to Albany County. In addition to the annual naming rights fee, there is an annual innovation fund commitment. Through the lifetime of the agreement (with extensions) this means \$21 million in funds to promote and support ideas and programs that assist Albany County in our commitment to breaking down barriers, creating a healthier community and providing education, training and wellness programs for our youth, our seniors and our residents as a whole.

I also look forward to using the MVP Arena to jumpstart economic development and to bridge the downtown neighborhood with the South End neighborhood. This year, through our partnership with MVP and ASM management, we will begin hosting farmer's markets to provide fresh food opportunities to the community, as well as hosting job fairs and workforce development groups that break down barriers and create opportunities, particularly for those living in historically disadvantaged neighborhoods. The time is now to make these changes, be bold, build partnerships and truly make a difference in the lives of our young, the lives of our aging, and the lives of everyone in our community who needs us. Again, thank you MVP Health Care.

We know differences and disparities exist in our health care system and we must break down barriers and remove stereotypes to allow for true health equity and provide necessary health and wellness services to all our citizens. The inequities are not isolated to race or the culture, but also exist in some rural communities. There needs to be access to health care. And, the health care that is accessed needs to be equal. Further, we must do a better job with our education of our communities in health and wellness, for the young and aging alike. And then, we must also ensure that our citizens have the means. A person can be given access and they can be imparted knowledge, but if the tangible item or service is beyond their financial needs, then we have provided nothing.

Living healthy is a God given right and making sure we have access to maintain good health should not be determined by the size of a person's bank account. But we know equal access doesn't exist, not just here but throughout our Country. Those communities with higher rates of poverty receive less preventive health care; have obstacles in getting to the doctor and dentist; have higher out of pocket costs for health care; and don't have access to and/or the means to pay for healthy food for healthy meals. The result of this leads to higher rates of disease, shorter life expectancy and higher rates of infant mortality. Children within poorer families are also at significantly higher risk for asthma and obesity.

With COVID-19 came a lightning bolt. An opportunity for a reboot. As I said earlier, the time is now to forge a new path. We must capitalize on this once in a century opportunity to turn things around, break down barriers and truly create a County where health equity is a reality. That is why I directed all Departments to make the health and the wellness of our community a priority. As we develop policy and procedures, as we create new recreation opportunities, as we deliver services, we must keep a keen eye on current disparities and make health and wellness equity a primary factor in our decisions. As I report on various departments you will notice this common theme being applied throughout our programs and services.

COVID not only caused a crisis for our physical health, but also pushed us into a mental health crisis, including a drug overdose epidemic within the pandemic. One of my first acts when COVID hit was to set up a mental health crisis hotline for individuals struggling with depression and behavioral issues. People were forced to isolate. It became forbidden for children to play together. Physical activities and team sports were impermissible. Stores were shuttered, industries ceased to exist and jobs were lost. Daycare centers became a constant turnstile of quarantined children. The toll of all of this became too much for people resulting in a precipitous rise by teenage girls in suicide attempts. Indeed, the detrimental effects of COVID-19 on our mental health is a reality and the length and lasting effects remain unknown.

What is known, is that we need to do more for the mental health and wellbeing of our community as a whole. Again, we need to turn things around – all of us. We can't continue along and provide a way to jump hurdles. We must permanently remove all obstacles to receiving mental health services. This starts culturally. WE must remove the stereotypes associated with behavioral issues. We must obliterate any and all stigma and negative connotation. Asking for help should not be considered a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength. I am pleading with everyone to embrace, not alienate those persons seeking services. This is not a decision or action of government or

health care providers, but rather, must be a concerted and collective effort of all citizens to come together and accept opening eyes, opening our hearts and the opening our minds to recognize the state of affairs around us each day and commit to healing our neighbors and loved ones through all means. As I said earlier, be brave and engage.

We need earlier engagement and prevention strategies. Mental health services should not be limited to reactionary response to a behavioral issue. We teach our kids about physical fitness, we teach our kids about physical health, but we do not provide the same level of education about behavioral issues. People get annual physicals, but not for their mental health, even though the need for the assessment is just as great. Why is this? Limited access to providers, negative stereotypes and cultural inequalities. We need to do more and we will. I am directing the Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health, Dr. Giordano along with the Commissioner of Children, Youth and Families, Moira Manning to lead a task force with community leaders, stakeholders and educational institutions to devise a comprehensive plan, together with a roadmap for implementation of the plan with specific metrics that use data analytics to track the success and provide for specific changes dependent upon the continued analysis and tracking patterns.

We also have a crisis with the limited amount of professionals in the industry to provide mental health services, for both preventative and remedial care. I am encouraged by the announcement from Governor Hochul in her State of the State address that provides funding to promote and educate people to enter the health care industry. My hope is that this program includes behavioral sciences, or is expanded to incorporate behavioral sciences.

Through the past year, our Mental Health department engaged in many programs and provided services to thousands of residents. In 2021, our Mental Health Court opened. This unique diversion program was five years in the making and addresses a long history of the persons with mental health issues being processed through the criminal justice system, instead of finding solutions through treatment and supporting services. The new approach will address the underlying behavioral issues and severely reduce the risk of recidivism while allowing for the person to reconnect with and continue to be positively engaged with society. This success of this endeavor is due to a partnership with Our Department of Mental Health, New York State Office of Court Administration, the Public Defender's Office, the District Attorney's Office, our Probation Department and Albany City Court Judge John Reilly. Congratulations to all those involved.

This past year, we launched our ACCORD program. This is a collaborative effort with the County Legislature and Sheriff's Office to provide an alternative crisis response in our hill towns. Albany County Crisis Officials Responding and Diverting or ACCORD pairs social workers from our Mobile Crisis Team with paramedics from the Sheriff's EMS Division to respond to non-violent situations where a law enforcement presence isn't required. The key point to the program is having trained mental health and medical professionals respond to calls involving non-violent individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. Historically, it would be police responding. However, the need is not law enforcement, the need is clinical. This program diffuses and deescalates situations, and pairs the right people together, while preserving public safety resources that allow officers to be available to respond to police matters. As a result of the success of this pilot program, we are now expanding it to other communities.

These two programs are prime examples of how we are changing, adapting and shifting resources to address the challenges of mental health. In addition, in 2021, our Department of Mental Health responded to 1,002 crisis calls and assisted with 513 hospital diversions through our Mobile Crisis Team. Our COVID Mental Health Support Line, which I launched in the first few

weeks of the pandemic to help deal with isolation-related anxiety and depression, answered 475 phone calls between March 2020 and July 2021.

Additionally, our mental health teams conducted 2,008 visits with patients through our Adult Out-Patient Clinic for Integrated Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders, which is up from the 1,972 individuals were served in 2020. In 2021 alone, over 7,000 individuals received some kind of service provided by the Department of Mental Health through over 40,600 separate interactions with residents of Albany County. I sincerely applaud the efforts of Dr. G and his entire team of dedicated employees that provided such needed care to our residents.

Now, I would like to turn our attention to our nursing home, Shaker Place Rehabilitation and Nursing Center. Our new nursing home opened two years ago and is ranked by Newsweek as one of the best nursing homes in New York State and has received a five star rating from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. During the health care crisis, our staff came into work every day and provided exceptional care for our residents to the keep them safe. In 2021, there were no COVID deaths among the 400 residents we cared for and only 1 positive case all year. This is truly a remarkable feat and testament to the vigilance and dedication of our Director, Larry Slatky and the entire team of professional men and women who serve our residents.

As referenced earlier, there is a sincere shortage of health care professionals in the Capital Region, throughout New York State and across the country. Regardless of pay offered, there just aren't enough men and women in the field compared to the need for the amount of patients and residents we have in hospitals, rehabilitation centers and nursing homes. We have an amazing new facility and the great staff that provides first class service, and in order to maintain this level of care to our residents that deserve to live in dignity, we must continually use all efforts to recruit and retain a high quality workforce. To do so, we must be creative in our offering of benefits. Child care issues exist for many workers. Assisting our workers in alleviating this concern can truly be a game changer to keep and attract talented individuals. I am pleased to announce that we have partnered with the Colonie Youth Center to construct a day care center on our nursing home campus, on the first floor of the tower building. We have engaged the engineering and architect firm for design and the expectation is to have a grand opening in the beginning of next year. This new state of the art day care center will be operationally expanded over time to provided day care services for nursing home employees that work at all different shifts. Further, other County employees shall be offered day care participation after the nursing home worker population need has been fulfilled. Providing this access to the work location will be a big plus, as it will

allow for parents to visit their children during a break. But more is needed. Often times, traditional day care centers are too costly and a person has to choose between working and staying home. To address this sincere issue, I am announcing that we shall be offering an affordable payment schedule for our employees. This sliding scale shall have a rate and then that rate is reduced accordingly based upon an employee's household income. Women and men should not have to choose between having a career and caring for their child.

Now let me mention a few of our departments and their accomplishments over the past year.

In 2022, Our Department for Aging is moving to the newly renovated tower space at Shaker Place Rehabilitation and Nursing Center and we announced the Campus for Creative Aging. This initiative will serve as a senior center without walls offering programs and services throughout the county. They will connect seniors with arts, education, wellness, a new restaurant program, the return of "The Doctor is In" and more. The Department's move will allow for increased collaboration with nursing home staff.

During the COVID crisis, the need to help victims of crime or sexual violence was greater than ever. Children were not in school where they could talk to teachers and be seen by those trained in identifying potential abuse and tensions in homes because of the pandemic created unimaginable situations.

The Department responded in kind by reaching out to as many as possible through various media outlets, as well as tele-health counseling. I also sensed a need for a better place for victims to come to than the County Building at 112 State Street. Accordingly, I directed our Department of General Services to rehabilitate a property so that our crime victims' advocates would be able to have a comfortable and private setting to converse and interview those who are most vulnerable. This private location has been fully renovated and is currently in use by our staff members.

When I became County Executive in 2012, I made it a priority to polish one of Albany County's tarnished jewels... Lawson Lake. Over the last 10 years, it has become a haven for kids and adults alike to enjoy year round. Renovation of the Waldman Lodge, creation of a true visitor's center, the building of an amphitheater and a pavilion and so much more have attracted groups like the Boys and Girls Clubs to return for camp each summer. This past year, we expanded our partnership with CDTA to offer day camp to children in the town of Coeymans.

There is so much untapped potential at Lawson Lake. That is why there is a comprehensive plan underway to evaluate the site so we may determine the best way to use this beautiful space and create even more access for all people to enjoy.

Residents throughout the Capital Region have been getting out to breathe the fresh air and exercise on the Albany County Helderberg-Hudson Rail Trail. For the second year, we featured food trucks along the trail, providing local small businesses another opportunity to generate revenue and expand their clientele. Nearly 200,000 people use the rail trail each year and we shall continue to find ways to expand and compliment this use for all families. One such way is through our partnership with MVP Health Care. We shall be adding special fitness equipment and a court adjacent to the rail trail near the Slingerlands trailhead.

We added another annual event- the Chalk the Walk contest, in partnership with the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy and Art on the Rail Trail (ART). Working with these organizations, the County had an artist develop new murals on the surface of the Rail Trail itself that promote safety and cooperation among the visitors while beautifying the space, dubbed, “Share the Trail.” The Rail Trail... another one of our county gems!

As I stated earlier, providing health and wellness equity is a priority and the Department of Recreation is vital to carrying out our mission. Through youth programs throughout our many communities, like basketball, flag football and karate, our children get exercise, but much more, they also learn life lessons of team work and discipline. And while these efforts of the

Department are primary, we need to do more to expand opportunities beyond traditional sports. There are so many boys and girls who have no interest and will never have an interest in traditional team sports. However, programs still need to be offered. We must expand into e-sports programming, expand our curriculum to include STEM programming that intersects with our natural resources, and expand into theater, music and art in an outdoor setting. As I stated earlier, we need to be bold. For health and wellness of everyone, we must be inclusive. As these programs expand, it is paramount that access to them is not limited by zip code or a parent's ability to provide a ride. All barriers must be brought down and we must find partners to bring these wellness opportunities to everyone.

Learning from mistakes will help prepare us for a brighter future. Our County Probation Department is offering a first of its kind program that will help those who have gotten into trouble and sent them to get the schooling necessary for a high school diploma equivalent. This will allow them to find jobs and for some, get into college, to get degrees and find reliable income, and leave crime in the rear-view mirror.

We've partnered with Capital Region BOCES and the Capital District Education Opportunity Center. Currently, 24% of those in our probation department system don't have a high school diploma and studies have shown

that median annual earnings increase by an estimated \$8,000 after you get a high school diploma. We don't want to see history keep repeating itself and this is a way to help break that cycle. Having a better paying job is a good step toward that end.

The greatest resource that we have is our people. The people that make up our workforce are thoughtful, committed and dedicated. But, much has been changing over the past two years. After the stop in time, many people are coming out of the pandemic with a different view of work and profession. With a learned understanding of remote work, and a deeper appreciation of work life balance, millions of Americans left their job, in fact over 38 Million Americans quit in 2021. For the first time in generations, the market has flipped. Demand for qualified workers is more prevalent than those seeking the positions.

With this environment occurring, at my direction, the Commissioner of Human Resources and the Director of Civil Services were tasked with creating a Comprehensive Workforce Development Plan for Albany County. This required these Commissioners to meet with all departments to get a better understanding of short term and long-term goals, as well as conducting a deeper dive into interdepartmental working and sharing of responsibilities to break down silos and work collaboratively as a single employer. The review

also included all titles and job descriptions to consider whether some became obsolete and whether the current or future needs required newly created titles. The timing of this was paramount, as we had just shrunk the workforce by implementing the Early Separation Payout (ESP) program that eliminated nearly 80 positions, saving the County 4 million dollars in 2021. In our review, we need to give careful attention to recruitment and career progression, while at the same time recognize the need for efficient and effective delivery of services.

We need this Comprehensive Workforce Development Plan to have a deeper understating of our operations, our work culture, our compensation, benefits, and mobility of the individual, including upward and horizontal growth within the entire organization, not just a department.

As a result of these efforts, we took and continue to take strategic steps to enhance our ability to retain and recruit the best and brightest individuals to join our team. This year, we implemented a change in our longevity pay schedule. This is the first revision in over 30 years, indeed long overdue. There were also adjustments made to key positions to retain staff that had distinct and abundant knowledge and experience, as a necessary measure to be competitive with similarly situated counties, as well as a state employer in our back yard.

In review of our health plan, it was realized that hearing, dental and vision benefits currently offered should be increased. Providing better dental coverage reduces emergency room costs, leads to better oral health outcomes, and lowers future medical care costs. Similar costs savings are seen with added hearing and vision benefits. This is a win-win situation, better benefits for our employees and future medical savings to Albany County and the taxpayers.

This year, we also increased our budget for training. While we are always recruiting new talent, it is vital that we provide our current employees with opportunities for personal and professional growth. This growth is not limited to a department, but should be horizontal, with opportunities throughout the County as a whole.

The plan also included suggestions for creating data positions within departments. Capturing data helps us to track employee satisfaction, as well as production and performance. Being happy has become a factor in people selecting a work place and staying, a point shown this past year with 38 million people quitting. This requires us to take serious steps to improve and maintain the culture of our workplace.

We are an innovative employer that prides itself on environmental sustainability, community engagement and creative policy and programming. We are an employer that recognizes and understands the importance of work

life balance. And we are an employer that seeks the brightest to help us shape the future of communities.

Our people, our employees, they are the driving force and the key to success. We are very fortunate to have such a talented and diverse workforce that performed at exceptional levels throughout this pandemic to deliver necessary services to our residents. I sincerely thank all of you.

During the COVID crisis, we learned to work remotely. We learned the hybrid model, and we also learned that we could deliver services with a smaller workforce. This led to the question of whether we need all of our workspace. While under review, we must consider all buildings and properties that are owned by the County. Accordingly, I directed a request for proposal to be issued seeking a full feasibility study on County owned facilities.

As we make advancements in our people and our physical space, we are also making advancements in technology. Throughout the health crisis, we saw the success of a using data-driven approach to decision making and policy. We shall continue and expand this approach by the development of a “single source of truth” information model to combine and integrate data from multiple County departments into a singular unified system. The creation of this data analytics division shall be overseen by the Department of Management and Budget, and will operate interdepartmentally as it reviews and restructures

underlying data infrastructure to ensure effective and efficient delivery of services to our residents. This is accomplished through business intelligence solutions, comprehensive analysis of return on investment (ROI) and metrics-based review of high intensity and highly utilized programs. We must follow the science. We must follow the numbers. And we must strive to find the best solutions for the issues facing our community. The most effective way to be successful in this task is through our Division of Data Analytics constantly evaluating performance indicators, while coordinating with Human Resources, Management and Budget and the individual department to review feedback. This Division shall have a presence at our newly created Data Operations and Response Command Center located at the Shaker Tower.

As we talk about breaking down barriers, one thing we noticed during the pandemic was the inequity in access to broadband internet. This was particularly of concern regarding our school age children. As students entered into a remote learning setting, many were without means. Access is not limited to the question of whether a provider is in your area, but must also include whether a person has the means to pay for access. Education is a fundamental right for every child in this country, if internet access is needed for a child to go to school, then we sure as heck better make sure that every student indeed has this. That is why I have called for the “Albany County Connect Project” to

perform a study of all broadband access within the County, to include both, location and access based upon that location, together with analysis of access based upon means. This study is being conducted by two industry leaders, Insight and Tilson, in coordination with the New York State ConnectALL Initiative.

When I took office, I said that I wanted Albany County to be the greenest County in the State. We are on our way to accomplishing this and now I say that we should be the greenest county in America. All of us must do our part in reducing carbon emissions. Our old energy policies and commitments are no longer acceptable. We must be bolder, and we must push the envelope to transition earlier, rather than later. As part of our building feasibility study, we shall look at all measures available to reduce our carbon footprint by conversion to clean and renewable energy sources. Further, we are continuing to convert our entire passenger fleet to zero emissions vehicles. My pledge this evening is for this to be complete within the next 5 years. We shall also continue with efforts to convert our medium and heavy-duty vehicles within 10 and 15 years respectively. We are leading by example, and over the next 3 months we will be adding 20 new electric vehicle charging ports throughout the County to help accelerate EV adoption in our community. We are also working with

NYSERDA to make sure that our new highway garages are the greenest in New York State.

The health crisis also caused an economic crisis. But this crisis did not fall upon a County that was ill-prepared. Indeed, to the contrary, since the start of my administration, I had worked with the Department of Management and Budget to increase our reserves and fund balance in preparation of the unknown. Accordingly, when the crisis hit, we were ready. We took action and we implemented policies that shrank our budget to preserve costs and avoid any need for layoffs or furloughs.

As part of the American Rescue Plan, the County of Albany receives \$58 million. This is in two annual payments of \$29 million. For the first installment, we used the monies to stabilize the finances by replacing lost revenues. This year, we have created a task force with the legislature and fiscal representatives of the County to develop a plan for the second \$29 million. The hope is that plan and projects from these monies shall be seeds and catalysts for other projects that continue with our overall mission of health wellness and quality of life to our residents, as we break down barriers.

As we discuss health and wellness, one of the keys to success is having a community that offers people job and career opportunities that sustain families and provides growth potential for young and experienced workers.

I am very proud at the advancement that we have made in attracting and keeping growth industries.

One of the most transformational investments that we have is Plug Power coming to Vista Park and the groundbreaking is going to happen literally any minute now. The growth of this green energy company here means up to 1600 jobs in the next five years. By 2026, there will 2300 jobs in Albany County with a payroll of over \$300 million.

Having such a company and investment is sure to be a catalyst for many others, as well as supporting businesses and industries. These high paying jobs will provide opportunities for many and I look forward to our continued partnership with Plug Power. This company had the opportunity and offers to go to a few other states. However, through our efforts, we did more than keep jobs here, we have an expansion and more jobs coming here. Thank you to all those involved, including Columbia Development, Kevin O'Connor and Lucas Rogers.

Our region is well on the way to becoming an internationally recognized hub for clean energy manufacturing, including the historic offshore wind investments at the Port of Albany and Port of Coeymans. The commitment made by federal and state partners to bring this to our County cannot be overstated. Our team is actively working with local partners to develop workforce

development and training opportunities for people in our historically disadvantaged neighborhoods to begin careers in this exciting field.

Our County also has a bright future as a hub for research and development. SUNY Albany recently cut the ribbon on its state-of-the art ETEC building and I want to thank Governor Hochul for including \$750 million in her executive budget to support the construction of a new Wadsworth Laboratory on the Harriman campus. Building on this positive momentum, I am calling on the Governor to expand the state's flagship designation to SUNY Albany. I also want to recognize Senator Schumer for fighting to advance semiconductor legislation in Washington and highlighting Albany as the perfect location for the proposed National Semiconductor Technology Center.

And one more key highlight tonight. For everyone out there who has gone by the central warehouse building, and that means everyone, and has asked what is happening with that eye sore, I know you've heard we are moving forward. We prevailed in court; vetted a qualified bidder and we have a commitment from Redburn and Columbia Development to transform this building into something truly spectacular. This investment will be close to \$100 million dollars. Here is a preliminary rendering of the proposed project. No longer will the first impression of visitors to the Capital of the State of New

York be one of blight and decay; the final piece of our already impressive skyline will be complete.

This type of a project and all of the great projects mentioned earlier show the commitment and ability for our region to grow. This is all done collaboratively through partnerships and a lot of work. But with this, we can do anything and everything.

This economic development growth is being led by the Advance Albany County Alliance. The first initiative was a grant program that provided up to \$5,000 to local businesses in need due to the fiscal crisis brought on by COVID-19. Once again, thank you Kevin O'Connor, our Director of Economic Development, Alan Goldberg, Chairman of the Alliance, Linda MacFarlane from the Community Loan Fund, Chairman Joyce and all of those involved.

One other economic development project that we partnered in is of equal importance. In the South End of Albany, a food desert existed. There was no establishment to buy fresh, healthy groceries. Unfortunately, this situation occurs far too often throughout America, particularly in neighborhoods that have a higher percentage of low-income and black and brown individuals. Here in Albany, we have people that step up and find solutions. Travon Jackson from the African American Cultural Center through a collaboration with

private investors and key government officials bought the former McDonald's site on South Pearl Street to be converted into a grocery store. This will address a serious lack of options for fresh and healthy food in the neighborhood. Additionally, this location shall assist in bridging and bringing the downtown and South End communities together. Congratulations to Travon Jackson for his vision and thanks to the Albany County CRC, County Legislature, MVP Health Care, CAP COM Federal Credit Union, Key Bank, Downtown BID and the Advance Albany County Alliance for making this happen.

We are coming out of this dark and horrible period. But we must not wallow in the pain. There was much tragedy to be sure, but from this crisis we must learn, we must grow and we must be brave. Let us rise up, let us break the past habits, let us form new bonds and new partnerships, let us break down all barriers, let us be kind, let us be inclusive and let Albany County show the world what can be done with good government and the best workforce.

Thank you. May God bless you and may God bless our great County of Albany and this great Nation.