



TOWN OF RIVERHEAD NEWS

Office of the Supervisor
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STATE OF THE TOWN ADDRESS 2013

[Video Stream](#)

I want to thank Lion Kozakiewicz and the Riverhead Lions Club for sponsoring this address along with my friends in both Riverhead Rotary and Riverhead Kiwanis Club.

This is my fourth "State of the Town" message. In writing my speech, I am reminded of what it must have felt like to be Elizabeth Taylor's fourth husband on the honeymoon: I know what to do, I just need to make it interesting!

The "State of the Town" is an outline of where we have been and where Riverhead is going. Tonight we measure our progress, we outline the coming agenda, we state our priorities and we look ahead.

The "State of the Town" is about issues, not politics, but I could not be truthful with you about the past twelve months if I didn't talk a bit about my own personal journey over the past year.

For any elected official, there are ups and downs; high, highs and low, lows. In public service, at times, the road can be lonely but the walk is always rewarding. A few weeks ago, we lost Ed Koch. I was young when he was Mayor, but as a kid growing up, you heard his name so often and for so long that I thought his first name was "Mayor." You come to admire from afar those that serve the public - we all have our own style, our own way. We are all different people, with different ideas and values. You had to love Mayor Koch's pluck and drive and his use of the word "chutzpa." When he spoke of his tough fights he said, "I don't get ulcers, I give them." Mayor Koch said, "If you agree with me on 9 out of 12 issues, vote for me. If you agree with me on 12 out of 12 issues, see a psychiatrist." The Mayor had a way about him.

The past year has been tough. Our Town Board, at times, can *give* ulcers. Even when we agree, we do it disagreeably. I have not always been proud of my own words. In my passion to get results, at times I have said the wrong thing, in the wrong way.

You may have heard I ran for County Legislator this winter. On the other hand you may not have heard. It was a hard fought election but a very quick election night. Let's just say that we didn't need to wait for them to count the absentee ballots and we didn't wear out the plus key on the calculator! I lost that race convincingly. You could say God has a sense of humor because I truly believe God wanted to humble me by the experience in order to make me a better Town Supervisor. I make no apologies for running and let's just say humility is not my strong suit, but I AM working on it.

I have reflected on that result and let me say this...



I could not be happier. You may not remember but Ed Koch ran for Governor. There is something in the eye of the voter, something innate, something that can spot what is genuine and what is not, and cuts through the clutter and gives thumbs up or down to what we have to say about ourselves as politicians. Ed Koch didn't belong as Governor... and I wouldn't have fit-in in Hauppauge. Ed Koch was New York. He ate, drank and slept the City. The public could tell Koch in Albany would be like pastrami with mayonnaise.

I realize Riverhead is where I belong. I love this job. I love the give and the take. I love to put the pieces together to form the playing field that will finally give rise to EPCAL. I love the energy of our downtown. It thrills me today like it did that first day to see the commitment of the people that work for Town Hall. I love every minute of what I get to do as Supervisor and I could not be more excited about the coming year and about where this town is headed.

By all measures the town is better off today than it was four years ago. Some may be critical of my methods, but no one can argue about our success; whether it is town finances, Riverhead's Main Street or EPCAL, we are moving in the right direction on all fronts. The town is on the precipice of greatness, but the hard work is yet to be done. We have been here before as a town only to see the town backslide. We cannot allow any backslide - we must remain vigilant.

Riverhead has truly been blessed by God. If I may be so bold as to quote a little scripture here, I would like to turn to Romans 5, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

Now, I, and this Town, have faced many tribulations in 2012. On a very personal note; I lost four family members in 2012. There was a point that both my mother AND grandmother lived one floor apart in the same nursing home. This was a difficult year for me on all levels. We lost my Grandmother in February, my mother in April and then very suddenly, we lost my sister-in-law, Denise, early on in August and my Aunt, soon after that. Most of you did not know Denise Morano. Denise was here for my inaugurations in both 2010 and 2012. During my speech, I thanked many people but neglected to thank Denise. A point not lost on her. A point she quickly advised me of after the speech. After the death of my Mother, one of the most difficult of my personal losses last year, was that of Denise. So tonight, I want to acknowledge and thank Denise for her ever optimistic view of life and her endless love of me and her family.

I think we can all agree that I am not a poker player. I wear my heart on my sleeve. If I am happy, you know it! Heck, I might even give you a hug. If I am upset, you know it as well. I have always been honest with residents throughout the past four years. But I know that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character and character, hope. Despite all of my tribulations in 2012 it is time to rejoice. It is time to have hope. It is not a time to change course. It is a time to have hope for the future of this town.



Faith triumphs in trouble. As a Town we were very fortunate not to have been devastated by the effects of Hurricane Sandy as were places like the Villages of Mastic Beach and Long Beach. That is not to say that we did not have residents suffer tremendous losses. Our hearts go out to those both in the Town and in the State that suffered any type of loss. As a Town, we were blessed not to have any major injuries or fatalities. The Town was well prepared from the police department to the various fire departments, the Riverhead Ambulance, the Highway Department, Buildings and Grounds and all of the other town employees involved in this emergency response.

Nothing brings you to your knees in prayer like an impending storm on the order of magnitude of Hurricane Sandy. One of the most difficult decisions in the storm was the decision to open the emergency shelter at Riverhead High School. To know that you may be responsible for the lives and safety of hundreds of people, really does bring you to your knees. As difficult a decision as opening the shelter was, the burden was shared by many people and once again, the Town of Riverhead had one of the most well run shelters on Long Island. I cannot let this opportunity pass without recognizing four people and their organizations, for without their help, we would have been in trouble. I mention these names in no particular order: the Riverhead Chief of Police, David Hegermiller and the entire Riverhead Police Department. The Chief provided a steady hand during this storm. I want to thank our Riverhead School Superintendent, Nancy Carney and the Riverhead School District that provided not only the shelter, but the employees to staff the shelter. We need to thank Judy Doll and the entire staff of the town's senior division for preparing three meals a day for over 400 people. They prepared 1200 meals in a little more than 24 hours. Finally, I want to thank Pastor Jerry Halpin and the entire congregation of North Shore Christian for helping to staff the shelter, feed the people and entertain both young and old.

Yes, the community really came together - from pillows donated by Walmart and Target to water being donated by Riverhead Beverage. Our faith triumphed in trouble and we as a town are better for the experience. That being said, let us hope that 2013 brings us nothing but smooth sailing!

The Town has had its tribulations over the years. The character of this town is strong because we have persevered through troubling times at EPCAL where bad projects came to die. We have persevered through a Main Street with a seventy percent vacancy rate. We have persevered through spending that was double the rate of inflation and financial audits that were in some cases 25 years overdue. This perseverance has produced an indomitable character; a character that understands that we are on the precipice of greatness; a greatness that still requires work, but this work is exciting. This work has set the town aflame with hope!

This year, we enter what is perhaps the most critical phase of our near term future. We begin the brickwork that rebuilds this town. This, in many ways, is our most important moment in generations. This year, we begin the heavy lifting. Four years ago, I stood before you and I spoke in soaring rhetoric. I painted a vision. We outlined a future. Four short years later, the focus of this speech is about detail, concrete and foundations.

It is fun and inspiring to paint a vision - we are here as a people to be bold ... but the next few years will be more about "follow through" than new ideas and the upcoming year will be about the slow methodical work of completing a "to do" list.



A few days ago, renewal began as it always does on opening day of the baseball season. There is something magical about the start of spring baseball. Opening day cries out for nostalgia and old memories. On the day that the old Yankee Stadium opened in 1923, Babe Ruth hit a long heroic homer to christen the stadium and name it forever: "the House that Ruth built." When the new Yankee Stadium opened this season, the press was about who won the game and how it was played. It wasn't about the nuts and bolts that hold the stadium together or the job the electricians had to do to get the scoreboard in working order after a long winter and the news wasn't about the sod on the field which, by the way, is now grown here at DeLea sod farms.

In the near term, Riverhead's governance is less about swinging for the fences, home runs and heroics... it's more about fundamental baseball, solid play, base hits and execution.

We all like the bold headlines, but 2013 and beyond will be more about the quiet work of making dreams reality; less about new initiative and more about "crossing the t's" and "dotting the i's." I came into office promising three things: To begin to revitalize downtown, block-by-block; to get EPCAL on the market and make it a place that will create jobs and tax base; and to finally get this town on firm financial footing. Four years later, the script is the same. The goals are within reach. The foundation is being poured, we continue the construction.

Anyone who is objective sees that we are better off downtown today versus where we were four years ago. Four years ago, it was bleak. It was grey. Windows were dark. Today, downtown is illuminated by the neon lights of the Suffolk Theater - there is light and hope and promise. In the past four years, we have attracted a bike store, two clothing stores, we opened Dark Horse restaurant to anchor our critical corner at Peconic and Main, we have a brewery beginning and opening soon, Cody's came; The Red Collection opened and remained. The Riverhead Project rose and The Hyatt anchors East Main as Suffolk's only downtown hotel.

The Summerwind is about to bring new residents as well as a restaurant and a bank. The Community Garden and its adjacent playground brings greenery and life to the river. Four years ago, these were dreams - today they are reality. Now we must fill in and build. We have an emerging parking problem. Four years ago, I prayed to speak those words. Those words have become a reality. A parking plan is currently being devised by Nelson Pope and Voorhis under a grant given to the Town by New York State. This plan will also address traffic flow issues on East and West Main Streets as well as Peconic Avenue.

Four years ago, downtown was dead. Through the leadership of the BID and East End Arts and the Vail Leavitt, Main Street has become a hotbed of activity. Car shows and art shows and concerts and music and fun have all come to Main Street. At my first swearing in, I hoped that we could see that kind of activity. Now, we have and so the next phase brings with it the challenges of parking and logistics and planning - problems we want to have. Problems we will solve.

We have movement downtown on the North side. The Woolworth building has been sold and with that sale comes a new downtown gym, new stores and 16 new apartments, all within the revitalized shell of the existing building.



Now our efforts have to turn to the South side of East and West Main. These efforts commence with a new proposal by Riverhead Enterprises for a mixed-use building on the east end of East Main Street and they culminate in a new proposal for market rate housing by Raffe Weiss on the south side of West Main Street. Heavy lifting - yes. Exciting- yes and vital to continuing our momentum as these proposals give us hope that the vision painted four years ago will become reality.

Speaking of baseball, EPCAL has always been our "Field of Broken Dreams"; the place where bad ideas came to fail. After what has now been two years of nose to the grindstone labor, study and talk we are finally poised to tap the potential of EPCAL. This is not another "coming soon" speech. We are here. We have spent the better part of last year developing a subdivision map with the Department of Environmental Conservation that insures both economic development and environmental protection at EPCAL. We are almost ready to open for business and we are ready to grow. The environmental impact statement and final subdivision should be completed within the next year. It has been a long road to get to here but the land feels good under our feet.

EPCAL cannot be developed without the help of our partners in Albany. As some of you may know, Senator LaValle was successful in having the Senate pass the EPCAL District Board legislation which would enable approval of projects in EPCAL within 90 days. Unfortunately, we were not successful in the 2012 Assembly. This was a minor tribulation, but fear not: we are back in full force lobbying the New York State Assembly and I have a very good feeling for 2013. We are now seasoned veterans of the lobby circuit. We know the players, we have their stats and in this case, my friends, we are going to swing for the fences. Passage of this legislation will not only revolutionize economic development in EPCAL, it has the potential to do the same for all of New York State!

The die is cast and there can be no turning back from what the town should have done 15 years ago. We have to now begin the process of designing roads and infrastructure to make construction at EPCAL a reality. I will continue my quests to Albany to find this much needed infrastructure money and get the EPCAL District Board legislation passed. Heavy lifting, yes ...but it is the work necessary to bring EPCAL online. Four years after I swore the oath of office, the Town will finally begin to reap the benefits promised by EPCAL so long ago.

When it comes to the finances of this town we have come far in four years. When I took office, we were 2 years behind in our annual audits, 10 years behind in our capital projects audits and as much as 25 years behind in auditing our trust and agency accounts. We were running out of money to fund the day to day operations of the town because we had not sold 20 million dollars in bonds for debt run-up prior to 2010. Thankfully all of that is behind us. Our audits are done. Our credit rating was affirmed and we sold the 20 million dollars of debt for an average rate of 3% and then in 2012 refinanced the towns remaining debt for 2%. I am also happy to report that we have not accumulated any additional debt and our spending increase averaged over 3 years was just 1.07% less than half the rate of inflation. All this in spite of a tremendous increase in the town's debt burden from the town landfill and with double digit increases in retirement and health insurance premiums.

We set out on the right course to pare down spending and cut expenses, but I was not satisfied. It is my job to place this town in a better financial position than it was when I arrived. So I invited the New York State Comptroller's Office to conduct a financial audit of the town. Some say I was crazy but I



wanted someone independent to take our temperature and prescribe a cure, if necessary. Four years later, I am proud to say we have come a long way. The lines on our charts are moving in the right direction. The State Comptroller gave us a clean bill of health but asked of us certain changes in administrative chargeback. Interestingly enough I believe the Comptroller's findings for Riverhead on administrative charge-backs will set the standard for towns across New York State. That, my friends, is a great thing... and this town should be proud of our efforts in this area.

Our ship of state is drifting towards some tough times but we can see a channel to avoid the rocks. In short, we have come a long way in four years but we have a ways to go. It is exciting. The challenge we face today and how we execute tomorrow will determine how this town fares in the next few years. This is the hard work where the rubber meets the road.

Finally, for the past four years, you have heard me discuss the three major topics I work on day in and day out. These issues are important but they do not tell the whole story of the Town. We are progressing on many fronts and a few amazing things have happened or are about to happen.

Perhaps the most amazing thing that happened last year was the privatization of the Riverhead Animal Shelter through an agreement with the Town and the North Fork Animal Welfare League. The Town has been working towards this goal for 20 years. I am also quite pleased to announce that the Town is working on plans to move the current animal shelter from Young's Avenue to the Henry Pfeifer Center located on Grumman Boulevard in Calverton. Our partners at both North fork Animal Welfare League and Riverhead Move the Animal Shelter have informed the Town Board that this move will come at no cost to the taxpayers of Riverhead.

Speaking of Calverton, the grand opening of the ball fields is scheduled for April 27th! I am pleased to say that through the efforts of the Town Board we were able to reduce the cost of this project by 50%.

And how could I give a "State of the Town" speech and leave out Route 58? Not a week goes by without a resident question about new stores on Route 58. It gives me great pleasure to announce the construction of three long awaited businesses: Walmart is coming. Just to the east of the new Walmart, we have a new center already under construction which will have, among other stores, a Dicks Sporting Goods and a Christmas Tree Shop, and still heading east, the third center will be Costco. Even in a down economy this town has managed to attract major investments. This is truly a testament to the financial viability of the town.

So, in pronouncing the "State of the Town," let me say the past four years were about making plans and the next few years will be about executing them. We are constructing a solid foundation. We now have to complete the yeoman's work to execute the blueprint. There are times that call for grand speeches and new ideas. These times are not so much about being a show horse as much as a work horse - remembering that the greatest play on the field, move on the dance floor, song ever sung or words ever written were practiced and practiced many times before. There is a time to challenge us to go to the moon. There is a time to build rockets and that's where we are now as a town.

As Edward Gibbon said, we need "a heart to resolve, a head to contrive and a hand to execute."



So, let me say the State of Riverhead is sound. There is much to be pleased about. There are financial challenges ahead but we can stave them off if we execute our plans and that is the path I am committed to. The next year will require a board that is at times apart to come together for the good of the town. The next year will require all of us to stay on course, to hunker down and to get the job done. There is no mystery or surprise to our script or game plan. Our result will come from our ability to stand and deliver.

I am excited by the coming year. I like the heavy lifting. I revel in the challenge. I know I am in the right place. Four years after I took the oath of office, with fits and starts along the way, I see the plan coming together. We are getting things done here in Riverhead and that is the measure of our success.

I want to thank all of you for being here tonight and I want to personally thank all of the staff of the Town of Riverhead for enabling me to do what I do as a Supervisor. Most of all, I want to thank my wife and family. Being a Town Supervisor does not end at 4:30 when the doors to town hall close. It is a way of life that involves my wife and family and I am truly thankful that they support me as your Town Supervisor.

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