

FROM THE CHAIR...

A Monthly Roundup of News from the Chair of the Sullivan County Legislature

FOCUSING ON THE RIGHT PRIORITIES - PART TWO



BY ROBERT A. DOHERTY, CHAIRMAN, SULLIVAN COUNTY LEGISLATURE

I trust our management team, especially when it comes to properly and responsibly budgeting for the needs of Sullivan County. I also trust my own fiscal judgment as a successful local businessman, focused on prudent planning.

Those are key reasons why I voted to direct our entire \$7.5 million from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to our roads and college.

Could we have allocated that elsewhere, as some are asking? Yes, but not for the right reasons.

The Legislature's decision constitutes smart economic strategy that avoids an estimated \$2 million in interest we would otherwise pay to bond monies for repaving County roads and replacing SUNY Sullivan's critical but failing heating/ventilation system.

Ask any legislator, and they'll agree: we are overtaxed in Sullivan County and New York State. The goal of this Legislature is to do something about that, and one of the very few areas we have control over are the kinds

of initiatives we fund.

If we had to bond for these necessary projects with our roads and the college, I guarantee you we'd be looking at tax hikes just to afford the interest payments. And those hikes would solely fall on the taxpayers of this County.

ARPA funds may be so-called "free money," but they're also one-time cash infusions (2021 and 2022). Anything we invest them into has to be one-time as well, or we'll need to find major new revenue sources to sustain the programs.

We did agree to give hazard pay to our County workers who were on the front lines in the COVID-19 pandemic, but we decided to pay it out of our in-house contingency fund, because the federal government requires arduous, in-depth audits when its money is used.

Even if you disagree with our priorities, you can see we're looking out for taxpayers. That's what you hired us to do by voting for us.

Oh, and one more thing: calling the college project a simple replacement of boilers is incredibly inaccurate. Take a look at the full scope on page 3...

SUNY Sullivan's campus in Loch Sheldrake



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Yes, the Energy Tax is **GONE** ... almost

We hated enacting it.

You hated paying it.

Now it's just about eliminated.

Last summer, your Legislature agreed unanimously to expand the 45-year-old Energy Tax beyond commercial properties to residential ones - meaning anyone who used electricity and/or purchased home heating fuel had to pay a 4% surcharge on those bills.

Four percent typically sounds pretty small, but for you and for us, it was a big deal. You, of course, thought it was one tax too far, and you told us so, many times over. We anticipated getting \$2 million or more from the tax, which at the time we thought might pull us through the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Turns out it wasn't so bad for any of us. We all saw stimulus monies, and the feared fallout of the economy didn't happen.

I acknowledge I was in favor of hanging on to a portion of that tax for at least a few more months, until we were certain we're on stable financial footing.

But the majority of my colleagues decided now was the time to get rid of this loathed tax, and on August 19, 2021, they restored the exemption on residential properties. (Commercial properties have always paid the tax and will continue doing so.)

Due to the State's processes, the 4% Energy Tax won't actually disappear until December 1, 2021, but that's not far away. And we have no



intention of bringing it back (unless, of course, a fiscal disaster really does hit us). Trust me when I say your current Legislature hates - HATES - raising or adding taxes. The majority of us are fiscally conservative people who feel prior Legislatures were way too lax with spending taxpayers' monies. But we also believe in responsible budgeting, and at the time this tax was enacted, we were looking at a revenue loss of as much as \$26 million and an ongoing drop in State aid. We couldn't have absorbed that without a tax hike somewhere, and we chose one that could be spread out over as many people as possible. Listen, I don't blame you for being mad - I just want to give you some understanding of the tough choices we have to make ... and the fact that we can change our minds when a better solution arrives.

As this entire newsletter illustrates, we want to do right by taxpayers. Yes, we can't please everyone all the time, and our priorities will not always match up with yours, but we are definitely keeping an eye on how and what we spend your money on.

The Energy Tax can be and has been confusing to understand. However, you can find a simple, two-page fact sheet at www.sullivanny.us. Look for it under the "Helpful Links" sidebar.

A lot more than just boilers at the college

Those who question the Legislature's unanimous decision to put federal funds towards our roads and our community college derisively refer to the SUNY Sullivan project as a replacement of mere "boilers."

Not only is that inaccurate but deliberately deceiving, so

here's the truth: The County and the



SUNYSULLIVAN

college approached the New York Power Authority (NYPA) about their Energy Efficiency program as a means of addressing a large portion of facility deficiencies that, if not corrected, could shut down the Loch Sheldrake campus. After the completion of a thorough facility-wide energy audit, the following issues were identified and included in the final scope of work:

- Replacement Boilers
- Replacement Heat Pumps
- Control Upgrades
- Energy Recovery

Ventilators

- Lighting Upgrades
- Building Envelope Improvements (windows)
- Culinary Exhaust Controls
- Heat Pump Domestic Hot Water

Each of these represents an important piece of the overall energy efficiency project and will work together to ensure the continued operation of SUNY Sullivan - and the students & staff within.

Think of it this way:



If the College were to close, dozens would be out of a job, thousands of students would

be out of luck, millions in revenue would disappear, and a critical community resource would be unavailable to all of us. So anyone who tells you we don't care about the people we serve is, frankly, lying.

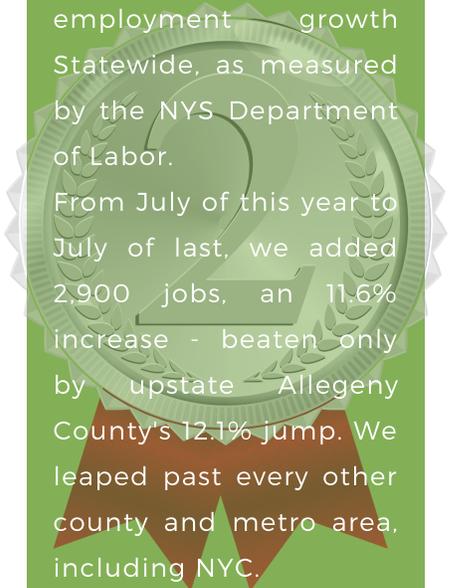
#2 in the State

You know, second place isn't that bad sometimes. What Olympian would give up their silver medal, after all? Sullivan County has earned a silver medal of sorts - one a whole lot more useful than those they dole out at the Olympics.

We're #2 in employment growth Statewide, as measured by the NYS Department of Labor.

From July of this year to July of last, we added 2,900 jobs, an 11.6% increase - beaten only by upstate Allegeny County's 12.1% jump. We leaped past every other county and metro area, including NYC.

Most of that likely comes from the reopening of our major destinations, but we've had plenty of small-town growth, too, which bodes well for our future. Now we just need more workers...



HOW TO GET IN TOUCH

- **Looking for the Chairman?**
845-807-0435 or
Robert.Doherty@sullivanny.us
- **General question?** 845-794-3000
- **Need a specific name or number?**
www.sullivanny.us/countydirectory



'Why did you do **that**?'

It's a question I get - but not often enough. Yes, you read that right: I wish more people would ask me why I voted a certain way or took a particular stance or said something that caught their ear. People tend to assume they know why I did what I did, without taking the time to find out personally. Sometimes that's because of their political agenda or plain ol' laziness, but I think a lot of folks just don't realize they can call or email me to discover what motivated me to do or say something as a legislator. Whatever the reason, though, it too often means people come up with their own rationales - and that runs a real risk of not being the truth. I have nothing to hide, and unless I'm legally obligated not to disclose something, I'm ready and willing to answer the question, "Why did you do **that**?" Go ahead - call or email me. My contact info is above.

In fact, I wish the people of Sullivan County would ask every legislator that question. Probably would be really eye-opening...

WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

While Legislature meetings are viewable online, not everyone has the time or ability. So let me fill you in on our activities in July, August & September...

- **We created** eight temporary Sheriff's deputy positions to handle the usual summer influx of visitors.
- **We approved** an up-to-\$300 performance-based incentive for participants in our Summer Youth Employment Program, which offers teens summer jobs.
- **We adopted** a policy to give existing Care Center employees a \$1,000 bonus for referring a new worker to the County who stays with us for at least 90 days.
- **We confirmed** the hiring of retired MTA Detective Tom Farney as our new Public Safety Commissioner.
- **We authorized** the distribution of hazard pay in the amount of \$500 to each employee who was identified as being on the front lines during the COVID-19 pandemic, plus the restoration of a 4% pay cut that some employees voluntarily took last year when it initially appeared our finances might be disastrously impacted by coronavirus.