

**2004 Regional Agenda – Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara**  
*Presented By Erie County Executive Joel Giambra, Buffalo Mayor  
Anthony Masiello and the Buffalo Niagara Partnership*

**Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara by *Continuing Efforts in Support of Life Sciences Research and Business Development.***

The WNY state and federal delegations are to be congratulated for their success in delivering the needed resources for life sciences infrastructure, including the Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics at U.B., the Roswell Park Cancer Institute, the Hauptman-Woodward Research Institute and the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus. In 2004, this momentum must continue.

**ACTION ITEMS**

Federal funding

- \$5 million for UB Center for Excellence in Bioinformatics, as the final installment of the \$25 million that was first sought three years ago for equipment needs and salary packages for new principal investigator teams.
- \$2 million for the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus to establish, improve and enhance an extensive campus-wide landscape, architecture and streetscape improvement plan.

State funding

- \$4 million for real property acquisition, clearance and development of a mixed-use commercial facility on the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus (to come from a portion of the "Adelphia money".)
- \$4.75 million for restoring operating funding for Roswell Park Cancer Institute to the FY 2003-2004 level.

**Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara by *Improving Enforcement and Efficiency at the Canada/U.S. Border.***

The ability to quickly and efficiently move goods and people across the CanAm border is a key component of the Buffalo Niagara economy. Creating such border efficiency in an era of heightened security has been a tough challenge the last few years.

While we are pleased that some incremental progress has been made on the New York State Smart Border Coalition's 12-point plan for border management, there is still much more work to be done. Our delegation must continue to put pressure on the federal bureaucracy to resolve the outstanding issues that are preventing effective border management from taking place.

**ACTION ITEMS**

Federal policy

- Approval of "shared border management" via an International Zone for operations and processing at the Peace Bridge.
- Continued funding for additional Customs and Immigration officials at CanAm border crossings.

## **Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara by *Addressing Development Issues such as the Need for Shovel-Ready Land and Improving Incentive Programs.***

Many are surprised to learn that one of the roadblocks hindering economic development in the Buffalo Niagara region is the lack of shovel-ready, developable land. Indeed, the region lacks large land tracts that are often sought by site selectors.

One reason for this is that many of the region's best parcels are classified as brownfields. Unfortunately, New York State took a giant step backward last year by passing brownfields legislation that further hurts development in this region. Considering the unique circumstances that face our region when it comes to brownfields, special pilot legislation for the Buffalo Niagara region should be enacted.

Industry in our region is dependent on the continuation of the "replacement power" allocations from the Niagara Project, which date back as far as 1961. Any lapse in these allocations would have adverse effects to business, employment and the tax bases of our community. These allocations are essential to helping manufacturers stay competitive in national and international markets, thereby protecting thousands of jobs.

When a company does express an interest in sites in the Buffalo Niagara region, our economic delivery system must be quick and efficient to service the company's needs. To this end, we are looking for improvements to the state's Empire Zone Program and to mitigate the duplication of services and conflicts between IDAs caused by the multiplicity of state-chartered IDAs in Erie County.

### **ACTION ITEMS**

#### Federal funding

- \$10 million for acquisition, demolition, remediation, investigation and infrastructure in connection with redevelopment of three industrial brownfield sites in the cities of Buffalo, Lackawanna and Tonawanda.

#### Federal policy

- Extension of federal legislation that allows businesses to deduct the cost of cleaning up brownfields from their federal taxes.

#### State policy

- Adopt brownfields legislation for the Buffalo Niagara region that includes a Municipal Liability Exemption, soil cleanup objectives and specific timelines for DEC approvals.
- Create the category of "replacement power" in state legislation that would protect four hundred and forty five megawatts of firm hydroelectric power that is currently allocated to manufacturers within 30 miles of the Niagara Power Project and provide for additional allocations of firm hydroelectric power if additional capacity is developed at the Niagara Project in the future.
- Renew and modify the Empire Zone program, refocusing the program on stimulating investment and job growth in distressed areas while also allowing some flexibility for special projects.
- Enact legislation that would reduce the duplication of programs and the competition between the six active industrial development agencies in Erie County by revamping the Erie County Industrial Development Agency to make it the primary IDA for the region.

## Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara by *Improving the Long-Term Fiscal Stability of Local Governments.*

While the state imposed a financial control board on the City of Buffalo in an effort to stabilize Buffalo's finances, all local governments continue to face serious budget issues. Medicaid reform has become the early buzzword in Albany this year and is the prime example of how actions at the state level impact local property taxpayers. But Medicaid reform is just one of many actions the state could take to provide relief to localities. In a year when the state cannot afford extraordinary aid to localities, policy changes that produce savings is a must.

### ACTION ITEMS

#### Federal policy

- Make permanent the recent increase in the Federal share of Medicaid from 50 percent to 53 percent.

#### State policy

- This must be the year that the state finally devises a plan to takeover the county portion of Medicaid costs, as Medicaid is now eating up every single dollar in property tax revenue collected by the counties. Coupled with this takeover must be a serious effort to control the costs that have made New York's program more expensive than Texas and California combined.
- Adopt an early retirement bill for Erie County to reduce the size of local government workforces.
- Enact a meaningful pension reform legislation to help ease the burden on local governments.
- Provide Mandate Relief by:
  - Creating a new, contributory pension tier for police and fire retirees.
  - Removing the residency exemption for city police, fire and streets employees
  - Capping salaries for 207a firefighters on injured-on-duty status.
  - Reworking binding arbitration so that an arbiter must give first priority to a municipality's "ability to pay without raising taxes cutting services, causing budget deficits, causing layoffs of employees, impacting cash flow, causing undue harm to taxpayers."

## Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara by *Investing in our Region's Transportation Infrastructure*

The Buffalo Niagara region is fortunate to have quality infrastructure for the movement of both people and products. However, maintaining that infrastructure, especially at a time when local governments are cash-strapped, is an increasingly serious problem. A fully funded, on-time program must be developed to improve deteriorating road and bridge infrastructure. At the same time, the community must reach consensus on what major projects should be funded, which will shape our region for years to come.

### ACTION ITEMS

#### Federal funding

- Maximize the amount of funding available through the six-year transportation reauthorization legislation (TEA-3). In this context, the Buffalo Niagara region must then receive our fair share of funds through TEA programs.

- Earmarks for specific projects are also a key component of TEA-3. The business community, the city and the county all have priorities for earmarks that could include better rail links between Niagara Falls and Buffalo to encourage longer tourism stays, tourism related infrastructure improvements in Niagara Falls, the return of cars to Main Street in Buffalo and Outer Harbor funding.

#### Federal policy

- Lower the dollar threshold on the category of “projects of national significance” as specified in the H.R. 3550 so the Peace Bridge project and the Continental 1 corridor will qualify for funding.
- Create a pilot program that allows Erie County to issue Garvee bonds by having transportation dollars bypass the state and flow directly to the county.
- Grant forgiveness on the period of usefulness for investments in the Main Street pedestrian mall, which is necessary to the Cars on Main Street project.

#### State funding

- Ensure that any earmarks the region receives come off the top of the state allocation and not at the expense of programmatic money for the region.
- Encourage the State Comptroller, as sole trustee of the State Pension Fund, to consider investment in major infrastructure projects like the Peace Bridge and Niagara Falls International Airport.

#### State policy

- Secure state approval for innovative financing techniques, such as Garvee bonds, that allow funds to be leveraged in order to fund more projects in the short term.

## **Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara by *Focusing on our Waterfront and Urban Centers.***

Efforts to revitalize the Buffalo Niagara region significantly entail redevelopment of the vast waterfront lands along Lake Erie, the Niagara River and Lake Ontario and urban cores in Buffalo and Niagara Falls which boast many cultural and tourist attractions.

While the community has had many plans to accomplish this over the years, it has been short of the necessary resources to complete them. There has also been inconsistency over what projects are top priorities. The latter has been addressed through the creation of this priority agenda, but the former still remains. Resources from state and federal sources are needed to fund these projects, which should include the money the state originally set aside for the Adelpia project.

### **ACTION ITEMS**

#### Federal funding

- \$10 million for the infrastructure improvements (off-ramp from the I-190) necessary for the Bass Pro retail project, which can be a 2005 appropriation or a TEA earmark.
- \$2 million for the design work for the Rain Forest exhibit at the Buffalo Zoo which will be completed in 2003-2004 (construction to be completed late 2005)
- \$1.5 million for the new Burchfield-Penney Art Museum on the Buffalo State campus.
- \$2 million to fund waterfront access improvements at Porter Avenue, Cotter Point and LaSalle Park.

- \$1.5 million for the Olcott Harbor Breakwater project, which is key to revitalizing this asset on Lake Ontario.
- Release \$16 million in Army Corps of Engineers funds for seawall repairs at Erie Basin Marina and LaSalle Park and the dredging of Scajaquada Creek to complement access improvements.

#### Federal policy

- Support the expansion of the Niagara Falls and Buffalo/Lackawanna Renewal Communities by passing legislation that allows the use of 2000 census data.

#### Federal and state policy regarding government offices

- GSA and OGS office space RFP's should encourage the use of existing office buildings in the central business districts of Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Lackawanna and Tonawanda.
- GSA must fulfill its funding commitment to the new federal courthouse in downtown Buffalo.
- OGS should demolish the Donovan Building to make room for a mixed used development project.

#### State funding

- \$35 million for Erie Canal Harbor commercial and tourism development, including the Bass Pro retail project.
- \$2 million for cultural tourism development projects in Erie County, including Shea's Performing Arts Center, and the Frank Loyd Wright Graycliff House and Estate.
- \$2.5 million for a downtown development site demolition fund.
- Dedication of state sales tax to an Erie Canal Harbor Tax Increment Financing and Development District.
- Passage of the Governor's proposed \$1.8 billion SUNY Capital Construction Fund, which will direct more than \$300 million to projects in our community.

### **Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara by *Providing More Employer-driven, Workplace-based Training for Employees and more Effective Recruiting and Retaining of Employees***

Some of the most underrated issues for employers in the Buffalo Niagara region involve workforce development such as the need for more employer-driven, workplace-based training and a system that identifies employer needs and assists in effectively recruiting and retaining employees. While government has attempted to respond to these needs over the years, the dollars provided never quite seem to match up with the training desired by employers.

#### **ACTION ITEMS**

##### Federal policy

- Passage of the House version of the rewrite to the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which focuses more funding on workplace based/employer driven training and retraining and provides greater flexibility to channel that funding.

## Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara by *Ensuring the Future Viability of Our Region's Federal Installations.*

Buffalo Niagara is home to two very important federal installations – the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station and the West Valley Demonstration Project. Current budget constraints continue to put pressure on both of these institutions.

The Niagara Air Reserve Station is the last U.S. Air Force Installation in the State of New York and is the second largest employer in Niagara County with an overall economic impact of \$100 million. It is vital that a high level of community support continue so that appropriate federal military investments are made in the facility to support the overall mission of the Air Station. The process for the next round of base closings begins this year with decisions to be made in 2005, so support for the airbase is particularly crucial in the coming year.

The West Valley Demonstration Project is important to this region for both the need for the environmental cleanup and because it provides several hundred high tech jobs for the local economy. After much lobbying the project's 2004 budget was established at \$102 million. Four months into the 2004 fiscal year, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is planning on cutting that budget by \$6 million. Worse yet, the President's proposed 2005 budget would reduce funding for West Valley to \$75 million, a \$27 million decrease from the previous year. This, coupled with the fact that DOE and New York State still cannot reach a consensus on the long-term stewardship of the project is very disturbing.

### ACTION ITEMS

#### Federal funding

- Work to ensure that military construction funds continue to flow to the Niagara Air Reserve Station. Such funds were included in the Senate's 2004 appropriation bill, but did not make it through the House.
- Restore the \$6 million cut from West Valley's 2004 budget.
- Restore West Valley's funding for 2005 to original 2004 level of \$102 million.

#### Federal policy

- Given the strategic importance of the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station with its relation to both an international border and the Niagara Power Project, consideration should be given to locating additional missions at the facility.
- All efforts must be made to keep the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station off of the list of potential bases to be closed as part of the BRAC in 2005.

#### Federal and state policy

- Congress needs to initiate legislation that will direct DOE and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) to resolve their differences over long-term site stewardship for West Valley. Such legislation must provide a clear path for closure and establish a stable funding source to complete the environmental cleanup.

## Rebuilding Buffalo Niagara *by Improving Homeland Security*

Homeland Security remains a critical area of concern for the Buffalo Niagara region. The Homeland Security funds delivered to this area, while greatly appreciated, remain unequal to the task at hand. Local governments, already facing tough budget constraints, need federal reimbursement for such items as the cost of police and fire who serve as one of the region's "first responders" to potential terrorist threats. There are also significant infrastructure needs to meet the demands of homeland security.

### ACTION ITEM

#### Federal funding

- \$5 million for the Erie County Public Safety Radio Communication System. Funding for a modern and reliable communication system is the top priority of police and fire departments across the region.
- \$15 million for water system security improvements.
- \$3.75 million to fund construction improvements for disinfection systems at the County's three Advanced Wastewater Treatment Facilities – Lackawanna (\$750,000), Big Sister Creek (\$2 million) and Southtowns Plant (\$1 million.)
- Continue and increase the third year funding for the Urban Area Security Grant for the City of Buffalo, and Erie and Niagara Counties, which provided \$10 million in Homeland Security funding last year. This grant is the only source of funding, which provides flexible homeland security funds to meet local identified needs. The formula used to distribute the UASI fund helps to insure that local public safety providers do not turn into competitors for Homeland security funds.
- \$600,000 for Erie County's Public Health Laboratory, which provides services to 17 WNY counties as part of the federal laboratory response network for bio-terrorism. This important Lab is a first line of security for our community and direct federal funding should be provided.

#### Federal policy

- Direct increased homeland security dollars to areas like Buffalo Niagara that are already identified and designated as "high risk" using a "threat and risk based" allocation.
- Allocate dollars directly to municipalities for funding Citizen Corps Programs to make the public aware of their role in crime prevention, mitigation and emergency preparedness for any type of homeland security and/or community emergency response.

#### State policy

- Continue sharing with local governments funding from the 911 Wireless Surcharge. This "sharing provision" will expire in 2004. In Erie County these funds are being dedicated to enhancing the public safety communication system.