

GUEST ESSAY

Memo to Brooks: We need solutions

A polished delivery was very much in evidence last week as Maggie Brooks presented her State of the County Address. She spoke clearly, and with conviction, about the many great attributes Monroe County has to offer those who choose to live or work here. But beneath the shine of a well presented speech is every indication that the county administration is not willing to face critical issues very much in need of attention now if our community is to flourish again.

First, the county executive estimates an annual budget shortfall of \$45 million. Unfortunately, while acknowledging that the budget deficit will "force us to make some very tough decisions," the county executive's address offers no new insight as to how the county may choose to proceed. This community deserves an open airing of how the deficit will be addressed.

Last year we learned that the county executive wanted to add .75 percent to every taxable purchase made in Monroe County – in addition to the 8.0 percent already added. That would be another \$65 to \$75 million taken out of the pockets of Monroe County taxpayers, who are already among the highest taxed people in the country.

Democrats in the County Legislature were not alone in opposing such a tax. Residents across the county, and business groups like the Rochester Business Alliance, concurred that a sales tax increase was absolutely the wrong prescription



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Democrats Ted O'Brien and Stephanie Aldersley represent Irondequoit in the Monroe County Legislature.

for a county with an ailing economic development environment.

Rather than entering into open discussion of whether our community could afford her sales tax increase, the county executive chose to sue every town, village, suburban school district and the city – at great expense to those municipalities who had to defend the suit.

Democrats in the County Legislature brought to the table a whole series of proposals for dealing with the budget deficit, our "Blueprint for Progress," but rather than engaging in discussion about these proposals, or any other ideas, the county administration tried to force a sales tax increase by starting litigation. That's not a community solution.

Other issues that the county executive must address involve the areas of governmental accountability and political partisanship. The county increasingly relies on "local development corporations" (LDCs) to con-

duct county business outside of the light of freedom of information laws; and where, like its "ugly kin" the Public Authority, there is too much opportunity for blatant cronyism and graft. Perhaps the biggest concern, however, is the lack of legislative accountability when oversight and responsibility is delegated to an LDC or Authority.

Lastly, the county executive needs to act to quell political partisanship – a partisanship that is so rampant that it puts the interests of the Republican political party ahead of the interests of the community. A recent example is the vote to delay the date by which the county is to submit its annual budget – from well in advance of Election Day until after Election Day.

Two Republican legislators joined Democrats in opposing the move. Their penance for voting their conscience? They were stripped of their legislative committee assignments. The county administration shouldn't stand for a system that allows for punishment of elected officials who dare to vote their conscience. The future of Monroe County is best provided for when members of both political parties are encouraged to participate fully, and collaboratively, in advancing the best interests of the county.

Budget solutions that do not involve additional tax increases, restoration of government accountability, and a tamping down of political partisanship are vitally important to the future success of Monroe County.