

NYS DIVISION OF THE BUDGET - TOWN HALL MEETING – November 17, 2007  
TOPIC: "Achieving Balance through Prioritization"

Statement from Lynda Stephens, 266 Hartwell Road, NY 14216

Thank you for this opportunity to share my views on budget prioritizing. Please consider my recommendations during development of the 2008-09 State Budget. I am aware of fiscal challenges facing NYS. This is not a new occurrence.

**1. Support for cities is essential.** Substantial research confirms that the economic well-being of a region is directly tied to the economic well-being of its central city. New York State's past spending policies have directed monies towards towns at the expense of urban areas; specifically, expansion of suburban schools, and road, water and sewer infrastructure expansion in towns. New York's spending policies have facilitated sprawl, racial segregation, economic segregation and concentration of poverty in cities.

Erie County and Buffalo presents a textbook case. The United States 1970 Census shows median household income for the City of Buffalo in the middle of the list of the 25 towns and three cities in Erie County. The range was \$8,581 lowest (Town of Tonawanda) to \$13,212 (Town of Grand Island); Buffalo was \$10,430. In 1970, the highest median household income was 54% higher than the lowest. The 2000 Census showed Buffalo with the lowest median household income, \$24,536, and the Town of Clarence at \$68,003 – that is 177% higher than Buffalo's, more than triple the percentage difference compared with 1970 data. I have attached a Census data chart for you to review.

**2. Education spending should be driven by goals of equal opportunity and economic and social justice.** Please continue education financing reform.

**3. Provide strong support for arts and cultural organizations.** Recent studies show that the return on investment in arts organizations is \$9 back for each \$1 spent by government. Strong support makes good economic sense and also promotes good quality of life, a factor in attracting new businesses.

**4. Make tourism promotion a priority.** The budget should include substantial increases for all aspects of tourism, including cultural tourism. New York State should support its second largest industry. Other states with lots less to offer (no bias here) have much more funding dedicated to tourism promotion. Making tourism a priority will increase state revenues generated by visitors, many from outside of NYS, and will help create tourism-related jobs for state residents. This one is a real "no-brainer".

**5. Reform New York's Medicaid program away from being a middle class program.**

Here I refer to the practice, legal in NYS, of affluent children making their parents prematurely indigent to qualify for Medicaid nursing home support, and we all pay for the rainy days. This is an enormous cost to stat taxpayers. If these well-to-do people want Mom's money, let them take care of Mom. I continue to hear about this from my friends who are social workers.

Thank you. Good luck in your deliberations.

COMPARISON OF CENSUS 2000, 1990, 1980 AND 1970 MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD  
INCOMES  
NEW YORK STATE, ERIE COUNTY, TOWNS AND CITIES OF ERIE COUNTY

	2000	1990	1980	1970
New York State	43,393	32,965	16,647	10,617
Erie County	38,567*	28,005	17,119	10,482
Buffalo, City	24,536	18,482	11,593	10,430
Alden	47,472	35,621	20,378	11,151
Amherst	55,427	41,466	23,737	11,364
Aurora	51,939	37,933	21,512	12,423
Boston	48,315	39,164	22,367	11,947
Brant	41,847	27,736	15,543	9,356
Cheektowaga	38,121	29,223	18,945	11,462
Clarence	68,003	44,740	24,340	10,933
Colden	47,230	33,790	20,636	9,848
Collins	34,444	26,348	15,226	9,875
Concord	40,891	30,759	17,925	9,451
Eden	54,940	35,040	20,858	10,527
Elma	56,334	43,780	23,982	11,612
Evans	43,142	31,484	18,697	10,222
Grand Island	60,432	42,661	24,245	13,212
Hamburg	47,888	35,066	20,494	12,801
Holland	46,708	31,341	16,408	9,657
Lackawanna, City	29,354	21,310	15,991	8,965
Lancaster	48,990	32,767	19,180	10,616
Marilla	51,868	35,386	21,104	12,083
Newstead	40,580	28,355	17,973	10,205
North Collins	43,781	30,269	17,363	9,352
Orchard Park	59,762	40,419	24,355	12,832
Sardinia	41,025	31,987	17,161	9,886
Tonawanda, City	37,523	29,483	17,460	10,852
Tonawanda, Town	41,453	31,078	20,019	8,581
Wales	51,486	36,250	20,854	10,867
West Seneca	46,278	34,383	21,079	11,550

“Median” is the middle income, not the average; half are above and half are below.

Town data includes village data.

2000 Population:

Erie County (incl. Buffalo) – 950,265

City of Buffalo – 292,648 (30.8% of county pop.)

\*Balance of Erie County without City of Buffalo Median Household Income - \$44,812