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## David R. Roefaro, Mayor

City of Utica, New York

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### 2/28/08 - Mayor Roefaro; Advocating for Utica

Questions: Angelo Roefaro

Office: 792.0100

Yesterday, Mayor David Roefaro was in Albany to advocate for Utica's economic development needs. He was joined by Commissioner of Economic Development, Robert Sullivan, Grant Writer, Pam Jardieu, and his Assistant, Angelo Roefaro.

The Mayor spoke to the Assembly for roughly twenty minutes about Utica and its needs. He touched on specific areas of need within the city. The Mayor and staff also answered questions by the Assembly. Restore NY and the ESDC (Empire State Development Corporation) were specifically mentioned by the mayor as being catalysts for change in our city.

This was the first time a Mayor from Utica has ever advocated on behalf of our city through direct testimony at the New York State Assembly. He was one of just a few New York State Mayors in attendance.

RoAnn Destito was also there to meet with the Mayor. Mayor Roefaro noted her efforts on behalf of Utica, NY, and credited her as being an example of what we can achieve when working together.

Below is the Mayor's testimony:

TESTIMONY

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Municipal Participation in the  
Restore New York's Communities Initiative  
(Restore NY)

The Honorable David R. Roefaro  
Mayor, City of Utica

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Wednesday, February 27, 2008  
10:30 a.m.  
Roosevelt Hearing Room C  
Legislative Office Building, 2nd Floor  
Albany, NY

Testimony presented before The New York State Assembly Standing  
Committee on Economic Development, Job Creation, Commerce and  
Industry,  
The Assembly Standing Committee on Cities and  
The Assembly Standing Committee on Local Governments

James Brennan  
Member of Assembly- Chair, Committee on Cities

Sam Hoyt  
Member of Assembly- Chair, Committee on Local Governments

Robin Schimminger  
Member of Assembly- Chair, Committee on Economic Development, Job  
Creation, Commerce and Industry

Hello. My name is David Roefaro, and I am the Mayor of the City of  
Utica. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today. The  
demands on your time are numerous but holding hearings like this to

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speaking directly to those "in the trenches" sends an important message that the legislature IS listening and IS doing the work of ALL of the citizens of New York State.

I would also like to thank the Senate, the Assembly and ESDC for their efforts to create the Restore NY program. This important funding stream, along with Governor Spitzer's focus on revitalizing the Upstate economy shows a true commitment to our future.

Finally, I would like to especially thank my sponsor, Assemblywoman RoAnn Destito, who my administration enjoys an outstanding working relationship with. As a Mayor, I do not take this kind of open and supportive relationship for granted, and I would like to use this opportunity to publicly thank the Assemblywoman for her tireless work on behalf of Utica and the entire Mohawk Valley region.

Winston Churchill said it best: "*We shape our buildings; thereafter, our buildings shape us.*" The reuse of our historic buildings CAN and SHOULD be a means to "shape" the quality of life in our communities. These links to our common past can also be used to create measurable economic development, while at the same time stimulating private investment.

Which is good news, because Upstate New York is in serious trouble. As you already know, the Upstate economy ranks far behind Downstate AND the rest of the United States. Our job growth was only 3 percent in the past 15 years, compared to 21 percent for the rest of the nation. Our cities have lost more people than they have gained – especially young, educated ones.

You can add this to the fact that when adjusted for inflation, we are receiving less unrestricted aid than we did 15 years ago. This has made it nearly impossible for local governments to balance the growing cost of providing services AND programs – let alone help to finance preservation or redevelopment projects.

We all know that the State of New York and the nation face a budget crisis of huge proportions. But, we also know that growing our economy is key to the future of this state.

Ironically, our future is tied to preserving our past.

New York's remarkable history as one of the most progressive and rapidly

NEW YORK'S REMARKABLE HISTORY AS ONE OF THE MOST PROGRESSIVE AND RAPIDLY growing states in the 19th and early 20th centuries can be seen in the buildings that still line many of her streets. An increasing number are being used as effective sources of community pride and spark plugs for economic revitalization. And on that count, I can proudly say that in Utica, we have seen Restore NY pay its own way – and more.

In last year's round of funding, Utica successfully submitted the Stanley Theatre Expansion project. When complete, the Stanley Expansion will provide facilities for a much wider range of arts, education, and community events. The project includes expanding and modernizing the stage; providing access throughout the facility for all members of our community; building a workable loading dock with direct access to the stage; restoring the Downtown main street façade and developing new Downtown green space.

**So far, the Restore NY investment of \$2.2 Million has leveraged over \$18 Million dollars in additional project funds from private donations, corporations, foundations, tax credits, and other governmental support.** The Stanley project itself will continue to generate millions of dollars of revenue each year, and the excitement and hope generated by the high profile of the theatre expansion has helped to inspire other area projects to go forward as well.

The Restore NY funding was ABSOLUTELY VITAL in going forward with the project, and in bringing tremendous benefit to Utica, the region and New York for generations to come. It has not only strengthened our Downtown, but it is serving as a powerful economic force for redevelopment throughout the region.

This same type of approach could be used quite successfully this year as a submission for the third round of Restore funding. Directly next to the Stanley target area is another neighborhood revitalization project just waiting to happen.

Rutger Park is the centerpiece of the Rutger-Steuben Park National Register Historic District. The four central mansions were built between the 1830's and 1920's at a time of great prosperity resulting from the growth of the textile mills and the opening of the Erie and Chenango Canals. Some of America's most important citizens lived in Rutger Park including political leaders, attorneys, and captains of industry.

The Philip Hooker designed 3 Rutger Park is one of the most historically

and architecturally significant structures in the northeast. Individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it was home to many notable people including political boss Roscoe Conkling, U.S. Senator Francis Kernan's family and Judge Morris Miller's family.

The A.J. Davis designed 1 Rutger Park was once the home of both Samuel Remington and John C. Devereux, and the architectural plans for the home are in the archives of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

1 and 3 Rutger Park and the surrounding homes have experienced a decline due to a long-term lack of maintenance. The mansions themselves have been vacant since 2004 and are facing demolition by neglect. There is an emergency need to stabilize both buildings, but every day that the properties remain empty INCREASES the cost of future repairs and DECREASES the potential for long-term reuse.

Due to this neglect by the public and private sectors, potential homeowners aren't investing in this neighborhood. In order to fix this, the public sector MUST take the lead. This will provide stability and encouragement to private owners and encourage folks to take another look at Downtown.

This project has everything that we seek in a potential Restore NY project:

- it is in our CDBG target area, an Empire Zone and a historic district
- it has great opportunities for public – private partnerships
- it is zoned for mixed-use already
- other funding or incentives could be leveraged
- and it is a very visible, centrally located project

Like other upstate cities, Utica has a surplus of housing stock due to years of population decline. Most of the properties in the Rutger-Steuben district are prime candidates for conversion to mixed-use buildings due to their location between the business district and government buildings. Restore NY funds would fill the gaps left by lending requirements and the expenses associated with the redevelopment of the structures. This would allow the development and marketing of commercial, retail, and restaurant space in a three to four block radius.

Other major benefits of projects like this are that they make better places to live and work; create greater pedestrian and visitor appeal; increase

property values; reuse costly municipal infrastructure like sewers and utilities and have a huge energy and environmental savings, since there is no demolition and disposal of debris in the landfills.

It has been demonstrated time and again that historic preservation projects - like the ones made possible through this program - make a positive financial impact that you can measure. For example, a recent independent audit of 2000 communities taking part in The National Trust for Historic Preservation's *Main Street Program* found that for every \$1 spent, \$25.76 in reinvestment was generated.

You have an opportunity this year to keep New York on a path that will encourage this type of economic development and neighborhood growth by providing municipalities with much needed outside financial assistance for revitalization of historic commercial and residential properties and districts.

Restored buildings can also give cities the edge in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Last year, the Brookings Institution issued *Restoring Prosperity*, which cites historic building stock as a major asset for America's older industrial cities. The typically low purchase price of these buildings, along with their unique architecture and urban location attract and retain 25-34 year olds – who are a key group in any economic development plan.

And if THAT doesn't convince you, think about this –

**there is not a SINGLE sustained success story of downtown revitalization ANYWHERE in the United States where historic preservation was not a key component of the effort.**

So why do I believe this is all very good news for Upstate New York?

Because we ALREADY HAVE the ingredients to capture this demographic, this revitalization, and this financial advantage. By targeting your efforts and investment through a third round of Restore NY funding, you will provide many of the resources, tools and flexibility necessary to allow local government leaders to bring positive results for the Upstate economy in particular, and to foster economic development and job creation statewide.

Through this program, State funding would be multiplied many times over through public-private economic partnerships and ventures. The Restore money opens the door to additional investment from a wide range

of other sources including HUD funding through the CDBG and HOME programs, community foundations and local not-for-profit organizations to name a few.

I firmly believe that this is a strong, well-planned program of support that has a very positive impact on New York's communities. But, even good programs can be fine-tuned. So, if you are considering changes to Restore NY, you might think about awarding "bonus" points for projects that aim to reuse or rehabilitate existing buildings in place of demolition, due to the economic and cultural benefits of preservation.

For cities like Utica that are trying to reinvent their economy, using our unique assets to create a sense of place, a sense of identity and a sense of community can and should be done through the rehabilitation of our built environment. Preservation has proven itself to be much more than nostalgia. It is a powerful economic engine that creates jobs, increases community reinvestment and raises property values.

With this in mind, I ask that you support a third round of Restore NY, because it is our past, it is our future and it is invaluable.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to testify at this important hearing, and I thank you for your consideration of these views. I admire the

leadership and vision that you have shown in inviting us all here today, and I look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that we take the necessary steps now for a prosperous future for the great state of New York.

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