

NASSAU COUNTY LEGISLATURE

NORMA GONSLAVES,  
PRESIDING OFFICER

GOVERNMENT SERVICES &  
OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

HOWARD KOPEL,  
CHAIRMAN

1550 Franklin Avenue  
Mineola, New York

June 30, 2014  
1:51 p.m.

REGAL REPORTING SERVICES  
516-747-7353

A P P E A R A N C E S :

HOWARD KOPEL  
Chair

DENISE FORD  
Vice-Chair

FRANCIS BECKER

LAURA SCHAEFER

JUDY JACOBS  
Ranking

DAVID DENENBERG

SIELA A. BYNOE

WILLIAM J. MULLER, III  
Clerk

LIST OF SPEAKERS

KENNETH SAUNDERS. . . . . 6

2 CHAIRMAN KOPEL: Government Services.  
3 Legislator Ford?

4 LEGISLATOR FORD: Here.

5 CHAIRMAN KOPEL: Legislator Becker?

6 LEGISLATOR BECKER: Present.

7 CHAIRMAN KOPEL: Legislator Schaefer is  
8 here.

9 Legislator Jacobs?

10 LEGISLATOR JACOBS: Here.

11 CHAIRMAN KOPEL: Legislator Denenberg?  
12 Denenberg is not here.

13 Legislator Bynoe?

14 We have a quorum.

15 LEGISLATOR GONSALVES: I think it's in  
16 order for all committees to sit at the same time,  
17 just to expedite this item.

18 Now we shall begin with the presentation.  
19 Who do we have here?

20 MR. MAY: We have --

21 LEGISLATOR GONSALVES: First of all.  
22 Wait a minute. Hold on. Government Services  
23 introduce the item.

2 CHAIRMAN KOPEL: Here we go. This is an  
3 ordinance to adopt the Nassau County budget for  
4 Nassau Community College for the fiscal year  
5 commencing September 1, 2014, and to appropriate  
6 revenues to be raised by taxation for the  
7 purposes of the College for that year, pursuant  
8 to the provisions of the Education Law, County  
9 Law, General Municipal Law, County Government  
10 Law, and the Nassau County Administrative Code.

11 Motion, please?

12 LEGISLATOR BECKER: So moved.

13 LEGISLATOR SCHAEFER: Second.

14 CHAIRMAN KOPEL: Motion made by  
15 Legislator Becker, seconded by Legislator  
16 Schaefer.

17 LEGISLATOR ABRAHAMS: Legislator  
18 Denenberg is here for the Finance and Government  
19 Services Committee.

20 LEGISLATOR GONSALVES: Now, again,  
21 in the interest of time, I'm asking that we  
22 listen to the presentation by the College. This  
23 will go to the Full Leg very shortly. It was  
24 agreed upon that we will hear the presentation  
25 made by Dr. Saunders and his administration to

2 give us the information that we can dwell upon  
3 for the next Full Leg meeting.

4 Dr. Saunders, it's time. He's got three  
5 committees all at once.

6 DR. SAUNDERS: Good afternoon. I'm not  
7 exactly sure what just happened, but I can say  
8 that I thank you.

9 LEGISLATOR GONSALVES: It's a little  
10 confusing to I think each and every one of us up  
11 here. But I have recessed rules. I have to  
12 unecess it so that you can speak. So it's  
13 unecessed.

14 DR. SAUNDERS: Let me just start by  
15 saying thank you for making the necessary  
16 adjustments to allow me to present my statement  
17 at this point.

18 Presiding Officer Gonsalves, Minority  
19 Leader Abrahams and members of the committees, I  
20 would like to thank you for providing me with  
21 this opportunity to discuss the Nassau Community  
22 College budget for fiscal year 2014/2015.

23 Once again, I believe that the budget for  
24 the upcoming year successfully balances the need  
25 to fulfill the College's mission by maintaining

the affordable high quality education that we offer to our students while, at the same time, achieving this objective in a fiscally responsible manner.

I thought I would start off my remarks by referencing the latest issue of the College's newsletter, *Nexus*. What has just been distributed to you is a pre-production copy. The actual publication, which has a higher print resolution to it, should be available in a few days. I believe that just perusing some of the headlines will give you a real sense of the breadth and depth of NCC's commitment to its students and to the community, as well as the accomplishments of our students and our dedicated faculty. These headlines include: NCC's Day of Service: Educating the Mind - Benefitting the Community; Thirteen NCC Students Win SUNY Student Chancellor's Awards for Excellence; Putting Words Into Action: NCC Vets Go to Washington and Storm the Hill; The Performing Arts at Nassau Community College: Putting on a Show, and so much more; NCC Speech & Debate Team: Award Winners at World Championships; NCC's Men's Tennis Team: National

2 Champions; and Professor Lisa Bastiaans Named  
3 Distinguished Professor by the State University  
4 of New York Board of Trustees.

5 At a time when the default function in  
6 the public debate on so many issues is skepticism  
7 and cynicism, Nassau Community College will  
8 continue to follow the exhortation of the Chair  
9 of the NCC Board of Trustees, Dr. Jorge Gardyn,  
10 who, in his remarks at the graduation of over  
11 3,400 students last month, urged the graduates to  
12 make the good, better and to make the better,  
13 best. With your support over the years, we have  
14 been able to accomplish this, even amidst trying  
15 times, and, with your continued support, we will  
16 successfully persist on into the future.

17 In particular, I would like to thank you  
18 for your support of the College's capital  
19 projects that have enabled us to enhance the  
20 educational offerings that we can provide to our  
21 students as well as to upgrade the safety and  
22 quality of campus life for all of the members of  
23 the college community and for those who visit the  
24 campus. It is because of this support from the  
25 County that we have been able to access an equal

1 amount of state capital funding. These upgrades  
2 do not end with the millions of dollars that have  
3 been spent in improving our parking facilities.  
4 But the reality is that for many students,  
5 faculty, staff and visitors, they do, as a  
6 practical matter, begin their day at these  
7 parking facilities every day. It is very much  
8 appreciated.  
9

10 I know that you know are interested in  
11 the budget basics, and here they are.

12 First, for the sixth consecutive year,  
13 the budget does not assume an increase in the  
14 property tax allocated to the College. As the  
15 county executive and members of the legislature  
16 know, several months ago I took soundings as to  
17 the receptivity for a tax increase. The message  
18 I received back was pretty clear, and this budget  
19 reflects that message. Certainly, a case could  
20 be made that the current tax burden per household  
21 for the College is relatively modest and that an  
22 increase on top of that would not be  
23 unreasonable. But I am also aware of the  
24 substance of the course, Reality 101, and this  
25 budget reflects that reality. Having said that,

2 there is nevertheless, the competing reality that  
3 the issue of a tax increase needs to be revisited  
4 in the coming years for the College's long-term  
5 fiscal sustainability.

6 Second, the level of spending called for  
7 in the upcoming budget is \$216.6 million, which  
8 is an increase of 1.3 percent from the current  
9 budget as adopted last year. This increase in  
10 spending consists largely of increases for health  
11 benefits, pension contributions, the contract  
12 with the CSEA, and it assumes the approval by  
13 this Legislature of the recently negotiated  
14 contract with the full-time union, the NCCFT.

15 Third, the budget calls for an annual  
16 tuition increase of \$146 for an annual total of  
17 \$4,234. Of course, no one likes a tuition  
18 increase. However, to put this issue in context,  
19 I have also asked that there be distributed to  
20 the members of the committee a listing of the  
21 tuitions and tuition increases in area colleges.  
22 As you can see, Nassau Community College has the  
23 lowest tuition of any of these institutions,  
24 including Suffolk County Community College and  
25 the community colleges of the City University of

1  
2 New York.

3 I would also note that in this budget  
4 there are no fee increases or new fees for the  
5 students. As such, I believe that this budget  
6 allows us to continue to fulfill our mission as  
7 affordable, high quality institution of higher  
8 education.

9 Fourth, the budget calls for using  
10 approximately \$2.5 million in fund balance. This  
11 is a matter of concern because although our  
12 remaining fund balance is still almost \$7.9  
13 million, that amount is a relatively small amount  
14 for an institution with an operating budget of  
15 \$216.6 million. A large part of the reason for  
16 the reduction this year is that it will fund the  
17 first year of the proposed agreement with NCCFT.  
18 At the time the budget was being constructed, we  
19 did not know the parameters of the settlement,  
20 and so the decision was made to look to fund  
21 balance for that first year. However, it is our  
22 intent to fund the subsequent years of that  
23 contract out of normal operating revenues.

24 Before closing, I would like to address  
25 two other issues that are likely to be on your

1 minds.

2  
3 First, there has been a significant  
4 amount of attention given to the County  
5 Comptroller's recent report on graduation and  
6 transfer rates. As you know, I have communicated  
7 my concerns to the county executive and the  
8 legislature regarding the methodology of this  
9 report and the comptroller's conclusions. This  
10 is not to say that I disagree with every  
11 statement in the comptroller's report. I  
12 certainly agree with the portion that states,  
13 "NCC Provides an invaluable service to thousands  
14 of Nassau County residents, offering an  
15 affordable higher education at a time when  
16 tuition at private institutions is soaring." But  
17 I believe that it is impossible to reconcile his  
18 more negative comments about the quality of the  
19 educational experience offered by NCC when you  
20 consider the initiatives and the accomplishments  
21 of our students and faculty, such as those that I  
22 highlighted in the beginning of my remarks when I  
23 referenced to the subjects covered in the  
24 College's most recent newsletter.

25 It is not my intent to go over in detail

1 my concerns about the methodology underpinning  
2 the comptroller's report. And let me say from  
3 the outset that the issues of graduation and  
4 transfer rates being below our hopes and  
5 expectations is a real one, which we have  
6 directed our attention to and brought to the  
7 county's attention before the comptroller issued  
8 his report. This is an issue that is, in fact, a  
9 concern of all community colleges, even those  
10 with graduation and transfer rates higher than  
11 NCC's. We are exploring the reasons behind the  
12 decline, and it will take the commitment of all  
13 members of the campus community to diagnose the  
14 causes and support meaningful and concrete  
15 solutions. I believe that the commitment is  
16 there and will be sustained.

17  
18 I do, however, have to take note that the  
19 comptroller's suggestion that the primary causes  
20 for the decline in these rates is campus turmoil,  
21 does seem to fly in the face of the data in his  
22 own report. Suffolk County Community College and  
23 Westchester Community College also experienced  
24 declines in the graduation and transfer rates,  
25 but the comptroller's report does not discuss any

2 campus turmoil that they might have experienced.  
3 Also, the comptroller's report sets out a  
4 timeline of the campus turmoil that includes the  
5 period from 2011 to 2012 when Nassau Community  
6 College's graduation and transfer rates actually  
7 rebounded by approximately 20 percent. I would  
8 also note that, according to the comptroller's  
9 report, Suffolk and Westchester did not  
10 experience a similar rebound during that same  
11 period. So, I stand by earlier statements that  
12 the comptroller's linking any decline in Nassau  
13 Community College's graduation and transfer rates  
14 at NCC to campus turmoil is overstated and  
15 unsubstantiated. Nevertheless, let me reiterate,  
16 work to improve the graduation and transfer rates  
17 does need to be done, and members of the campus  
18 community are prepared to roll up their  
19 collective sleeves to do it.

20 Second, I also want to report on an item  
21 that was mentioned by the comptroller last year  
22 dealing with the accounts receivable at NCC.

23 These are monies owed to the College,  
24 including from unpaid tuition from students. At  
25 the time, the comptroller reported that from 2007

1 to 2011, Nassau Community College had \$14.2  
2 million in account receivables. Last year, we  
3 pointed out that the number had been reduced by  
4 approximately \$4 million from the time period the  
5 comptroller reviewed to July of 2013. That  
6 reduction in the accounts receivable can be  
7 attributed to the steps that had been instituted  
8 by the College during the subsequent time period  
9 of the comptroller's report. These steps,  
10 including not allowing a student to register if  
11 he or she has bills in arrears and the increased  
12 use of collection agencies as a matter of last  
13 resort continue to bear fruit. As a result, the  
14 current level of the accounts receivable for the  
15 time period included in the comptroller's audit  
16 is \$9.7 million. We anticipate making further  
17 progress in dealing with the accounts receivable.  
18 Currently, we are collecting 95 percent of the  
19 overall receivables owed to us at the beginning  
20 of each semester. Again, we are committed to  
21 exploring ways to make additional progress in  
22 this area, and we are confident based on the  
23 experience of our current efforts that we will.  
24

25 In conclusion, I would like to thank the

2 members of this committee and of the legislature  
3 as a whole for your continued support of Nassau  
4 Community College. Yes, challenges remain ahead  
5 of us which will require ingenuity and  
6 persistence to overcome. But I believe that the  
7 College is up to the task for the benefit of our  
8 students, their aspirations, and the communities  
9 in which they live.

10 Thank you very much.

11 LEGISLATOR JACOBS: I hope I'm on it.  
12 I'm a little confused as to which we're committee  
13 we're doing.

14 Let me just say this to you. I'm one of  
15 these people that believes in and has always  
16 backed and obviously has been a great friend to  
17 Nassau Community College, just as Nassau  
18 Community College, in my mind, has been a great  
19 friend, a tremendous help, and a terrific  
20 backbone for so many students in our communities,  
21 in the county, throughout the county, throughout  
22 all communities that really desperately need a  
23 two year point where they could get their  
24 finances together to perhaps to then be able to  
25 go to the next step. I have never diminished

2 that in my mind. I have always appreciated that.

3 And I want to take my hat off to you  
4 because we all know that the state had put a cap  
5 of two percent for all school districts. Most  
6 stayed within that two percent cap. A few even  
7 were able to get their budget passed the second  
8 time around, going above the cap. But you were  
9 very wise, I believe, in the College because you  
10 knew this county has held their tax increases to  
11 zero for quite a few years now. You didn't even  
12 go with fee increases to make up that difference.  
13 And as much as I know how difficult -- I have  
14 nine grandchildren, three of them are in college,  
15 so I know what my children are going through with  
16 that. But I have to tell you that my hat goes  
17 off to you that you are the lowest in the display  
18 that you gave us of all the tuitions throughout  
19 the state.

20 I've always felt it was a jewel in our  
21 crown to have you. I always felt that in terms  
22 of being a bargain, this is a bargain. I read  
23 Mr. Maragos's report and I have to tell you that  
24 I don't think in any way, shape, or form he  
25 convinced me that the quality of education has

1 diminished. He said it. I can say anything. I  
2 can say it's raining outside and see sun and then  
3 I have to prove it to you that it's really  
4 raining. I don't see where the education, the  
5 quality of education has diminished. So I really  
6 find fault in the report with that. I'm sure Mr.  
7 Maragos felt it was a very good report.  
8

9 The reality is that you've got a great  
10 school, that you help to give people a choice  
11 when people are falling on hard times. Who knows  
12 if maybe the graduation rate has diminished  
13 because certain points of the economy have  
14 improved and maybe a lot of young people are able  
15 to leave community college and go on before they  
16 graduate from college. So I wouldn't want to  
17 attach any validity to just statements made in  
18 the air.

19 I go with the fact that you've been a big  
20 plus for us. You've always been available. It's  
21 not like -- unfortunately it's an increase in  
22 tuition; that I feel for the students very much.  
23 Obviously, throughout the country that is going  
24 on. You've stayed below levels of other colleges  
25 that are comparable and yet giving excellent

1 education.

2  
3 I wish you my best in your going forward  
4 and continuing your excellence. I hope the  
5 graduation rate increases. If the fact for the  
6 decrease isn't that students have left to go on  
7 to four year schools sooner than their graduation  
8 date. That will only take time, like you said,  
9 to process, to review, and to see if there is a  
10 problem, where it might exist.

11 In my estimation, and I was a teacher,  
12 and I am an educator. The worse thing that I  
13 could ever hear from someone is that they cannot  
14 afford to go to college. In this day and age,  
15 unfortunately, just like in prior -- many prior  
16 years ago, high school was the pivotal point to  
17 get through high school. You not only need your  
18 bachelor's, in many cases you need your master's  
19 to even go on to teach and to do anything that  
20 you really have your mindset.

21 I applaud you. I appreciate it. I like  
22 the fact that you kept tight with your budget in  
23 recognition of reality, like you said. And  
24 congratulations.

25 DR. SAUNDERS: Thank you very much.

2 LEGISLATOR JACOBS: You're welcome.

3 CHAIRMAN KOPEL: Legislator Ford.

4 LEGISLATOR FORD: I'm over here,  
5 President Saunders.

6 I concur with Legislator Jacobs. I think  
7 Nassau Community College is an absolutely jewel,  
8 especially here in Nassau County.

9 One of my sons had the pleasure of going  
10 there. Of course he stayed for four years  
11 because he needed to get his credits. It was a  
12 great education for him without incurring a lot  
13 of the cost. My other son went to a private  
14 college and that was just a mere \$47,000 a year  
15 as compared to the tuition that my Harry paid.

16 For me, I think they do get a good  
17 education. It's a great institution. And I  
18 think it helps. A lot of times, like Judy was  
19 saying, now a days it's not just a high school  
20 diploma that will get you into a lot of the jobs.  
21 Even with Civil Service, you need some college  
22 credits. For so many students, for many young  
23 people who know that they don't want to enter  
24 into professions such as a doctor, a teacher, a  
25 lawyer, for them to be able to accrue those

credits that they need for some jobs, for some positions out there, it's a great way of getting them without incurring a great cost. And I know a lot of students also use Nassau Community College as a way of getting basically what we used to refer to as liberal arts credits under their belt so that they can then afford to go away to a four year college. So I commend you.

And I also like your approach, that rather than looking at the decline in the graduation rate as just fluffing it off, you want to see what was the reason for it. And to try to do whatever you can to find the cause and to change the course with the graduation rates, and I think that you are going to find that answer.

For me, I know sitting out the audience, going out there to Nassau Community College, the parking, the parking was a big concern for me. I had many of my residents call up about it. And I have to commend you. The College did respond and took the necessary action to give better parking, better lighting, and a better parking environment for the students. And I thank you very much for everything.

2 DR. SAUNDERS: Thank you very much.

3 CHAIRMAN KOPEL: Any public comment?

4 (No verbal response.)

5 Legislator Denenberg.

6 LEGISLATOR DENENBERG: Let's talk about  
7 the tuition increase. I'm sure you're proposing  
8 this and you think it's a fair increase. But  
9 given some of the negative publicity that's come  
10 out recently, you don't think that enrollment is  
11 going to be effected by the increase because  
12 comparatively our increase is less than in other  
13 areas?

14 DR. SAUNDERS: I think that by virtue of  
15 the fact that our increase is less than other  
16 areas, it will increase the consideration for  
17 students coming to Nassau in contrast to other  
18 institutions.

19 LEGISLATOR DENENBERG: Okay. I would  
20 think if Suffolk's going up 250 and we're only  
21 going up 150 that that is a consideration. What  
22 about New York City?

23 DR. SAUNDERS: We're lower than the CUNY  
24 community colleges as well.

25 LEGISLATOR DENENBERG: How much is CUNY

1 going up?

2  
3 DR. SAUNDERS: I have a sheet that I  
4 distributed that shows the breakdown of all of  
5 the increases of the institutions.

6 LEGISLATOR DENENBERG: I see CUNY is  
7 7.1. Nassau is 3.6.

8 DR. SAUNDERS: 3.6

9 LEGISLATOR DENENBERG: Westchester is  
10 1.9 but still higher, right?

11 LEGISLATOR JACOBS: Yes.

12 LEGISLATOR DENENBERG: So what's your  
13 plan to address the issue with graduation and  
14 some of the negative publicity that was, in fact,  
15 I think even today put in *Newsday*.

16 DR. SAUNDERS: We have a rather  
17 comprehensive plan. The first that we're doing  
18 is that we are just exploring to identify what  
19 the exact problems are. We have made  
20 presentations to both the democratic and  
21 republican caucus on Nassau Community College by  
22 the numbers, which has identified what we see as  
23 some of the initial concerns that we should focus  
24 our attention on, in terms of drilling down and  
25 getting additional information to positively

2 impact what's happening to our students. We will  
3 continue that process. We will continue to look  
4 at the numbers to make sure that the numbers are  
5 accurate and to utilize all of the resources that  
6 we have available to us.

7 A component in our most recent contract  
8 from the NCCFT is the creation of a retention  
9 committee by the full time faculty to look at  
10 multiple strategies that can be employed by  
11 academic areas to impact our students more  
12 positively in terms of their experience every day  
13 in the classroom and helping them to address  
14 those deficiencies that they have in a way that  
15 will result in a higher level of success.

16 LEGISLATOR ABRAHAMS: I'm sorry. Dr.  
17 Saunders --

18 DR. SAUNDERS: Yes.

19 LEGISLATOR ABRAHAMS: Thank you for  
20 taking the time, for being here today. And we  
21 look forward to asking our more in-depth  
22 questions in two weeks, as we agreed to with the  
23 majority. But thank you.

24 DR. SAUNDERS: You're very welcome.  
25 Thank you very much.

2 CHAIRMAN KOPEL: Now, just for the  
3 Government Services Committee, all those in favor  
4 of the motion, to pass this through to the Full  
5 Leg, please say aye.

6 (Aye.)

7 Any opposed?

8 (No verbal response.)

9 The motion passes.

10 Motion to adjourn, please?

11 LEGISLATOR BECKER: So moved.

12 LEGISLATOR SCHAEFER: Second.

13 CHAIRMAN KOPEL: Seconded by Legislator  
14 Schaefer, motion by Becker.

15 All those in favor of adjourning the  
16 Government Services Committee please say aye.

17 (Aye.)

18 Any opposed?

19 (No verbal response.)

20 We are adjourned.

21 (Whereupon, the Government Services &  
22 Operations Committee adjourned at 2:20 p.m.)  
23  
24  
25

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, FRANK GRAY, a Shorthand Reporter and Notary Public in and for the State of New York, do hereby state:

THAT I attended at the time and place above mentioned and took stenographic record of the proceedings in the above-entitled matter;

THAT the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate transcript of the same and the whole thereof, according to the best of my ability and belief.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 11th day of July, 2014.

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FRANK GRAY