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MEDIA STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 16, 2012

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A Time for Action

Gregory Calls on Colleagues to Stop Postulating and Start Acting

I was glad I attended the forum last night to investigate how the County can eliminate waste and operate more efficiently. I have to commend Legislator Tom Cilmi for running the meeting as it was billed to be; an opportunity for county employees to offer suggestions. However, some of my colleagues in attendance could not yet again resist the urge to stoke partisan fires for political gain.

While they have been busy offering false hopes to employees slated to be laid off, the County's fiscal crisis is nowhere near being over. While everyone knows that the actions we take must first be debated, we are long past the point of having the luxury of endlessly postulating unrealistic ideas. We must continue taking aggressive – and even unpopular – actions if we hope to avert a total fiscal meltdown.

In the press release promoting last night's forum my counterpart Minority Leader John Kennedy stated "as Republicans we believe in smaller government comprised of core missions." Yet when the time came to cast the extremely difficult vote to shrink County government by laying-off employees, not Mr. Kennedy – nor a single member of the Republican Caucus – cast their ballot in favor of reducing the size, scope and cost of government.

If my colleagues in the Minority Caucus really want to preserve these jobs then they need to find an immediate influx of cash in the neighborhood of \$11 million in the next 45 days. And that's just to cover the salaries of these employees for the rest of the THIS year. The stark reality is that the County can barely make payroll right now.

– MORE, MORE, MORE –

I have both constituents and friends on the lay-off list. I don't expect any of the employees facing termination to care about the larger, direr concerns we are trying to address in rectifying the County's fiscal crises. But I do expect my colleagues in the minority to be truthful partners in dealing with this situation.

The disturbing reality is this...the Republicans know full well there is just no way to find that money. As insensitive as it may seem, we need to move on and focus on the even bigger problems that still are ahead of us. But instead of being honest with these workers, they are exploiting them for partisan political gain. What we Democrats did by voting for these lay-offs might well have been harsh, but at least it was honest.

Many suggestions were offered at last night's forum, but the theme — by far — was a call to raise the general fund property tax and sales tax. First, increasing both of these taxes will not make a single difference in funding the 315 positions, because the revenue just will not be realized in time. Besides, increasing the sales tax is the purview of State Government. And Albany has already indicated that won't happen this election cycle. So that leaves us with raising property taxes.

During this process my Republican colleagues have been chastising the Majority Caucus for taking heartless votes to address the budget deficit. I challenge them then to heed the call of the 200 or so employees in attendance last night and do this; make a public commitment to their constituents that they are willing raise their general fund property taxes just to save county jobs.

Of course they won't.

Instead, it seems so far as if Republican lawmakers are content with pandering and forcing us to quibble over proposals that sound popular and painless, but are totally unrealistic and way too time consuming to remedy the magnitude of the immediate monetary problems Suffolk County faces. Worse still, all this postulating wastes what precious time we do have to get this crises under control. And the longer we wait, the worse it gets. That is what the people of Suffolk need to understand.

When the time came to make tough decisions to correct the course of County finances, it was Democrats who took responsibility. And that really is the definition of leadership, a willingness to put yourself out there and make the tough decisions. It's definitely not easy — it's certainly not popular — but it is necessary. And it's what the Majority Caucus has been doing, taking action.