Ava, I really appreciate that you went to all this trouble to invite me. It’s really an honor.

She hasn’t said the one thing that I think is fun: We would have been neighbors years ago because I grew up in College Point and she grew up in Little Neck. You go over two bays to the east from College Point on the north shore of Long Island in Queens County and just before you get to Nassau County you get to Little Neck. We’re a little bit west, between LaGuardia Airport and the Bronx Whitestone Bridge. So we were neighbors. We didn’t know each other, of course.

This evening I’ll be talking about “The Common Ground of the Adirondacks.” So you can ask me questions at the end, lots of them, and I’m going to see if this talk holds together and flows into one logical whole.

But I want to ask a question. How many people here have lived here since they were born? Are you an old-timer? How many people have lived here their whole life? This general area? (About twelve) Well, we moved here in April ’73.

Right before we moved here the Adirondack Land Use and Development Plan came out — the big map on display tonight in the back of the room. I wanted to see it because we were moving here and there was going to be a hearing on it. And I just wanted to see it in general. I found out by asking questions and questions that I should go to a certain office. It was the office of the Sierra Club in Manhattan and they had nothing. The room was completely empty. I went in there anyway. They had the map and they let me sit on the floor and stretch the map out. A young man came over who was about my age. I was thirtyish. And he said “Why are you looking at this?” I said “Well, I’m moving up here. I want to look at the map.” You can’t live there.” So that was a little warning. But we moved here.

I prepared for that hearing. The hearing was also at the beginning of the year 1973. It was in this grand room of the Chamber of Commerce in Manhattan and all around the room, which was all in velvet and purple, were these large framed photographs about this wide and about as high as I am of these dignified men going way back in time to colonial days… very, very impressive. There was a man chairing the meeting, whose name was Richard Lawrence and obviously he was somebody who was well to do and well established. He picked up the podium and he carried it over from where it was smack in the middle of the room and said “Put it over here.” And then he looked up over his shoulder and said, “I feel much more comfortable now that my granddaddy is over me.”

So the hearing continued and at the very end of the hearing he turned to certain people on one side and he said “Bill Rockefeller, do you have any comments you want to add, on the property? Any comments you want to add?” And, of course, everybody knows who a Rockefeller is. And everybody knows that it was under Nelson Rockefeller that we got the APA law and that a couple of years before that his brother Laurance had submitted a proposal for the Adirondack National Park. So, that’s kind of common knowledge. But this Crocker, whom he named, I didn’t know until relatively recently. He was the one who had funded the Sierra Club’s new office. So all these players were there and that’s how it started; don’t ever have anyone convince you that it was environmentalists. It’s nothing to do with it. So there you are.

I kind of had intimations of what we had moved into. So in 1990 comes the report of the Twenty-First Century Commission on the Adirondacks under Governor Mario Cuomo. It was a big report, with major recommendations — 2,000 acres per house zoning for about 87 percent of the land. They are going to hide the houses retroactively from roads and from what are called navigable waterways, which meant navigable by canoe, and they’re going to form an APA super
agency, combine the DEC and the APA in a certain way. They call it the Adirondack Park Service, kind of sinisterly. There is the Indian Reservation proposal; I bring this up because it’s coming up again. I call it the Indian Reservation proposal because it was to combine every state agency that would have an office that would serve the people, from the Welfare Department to the State Police to the Real Property Assessment so that they’d all have their headquarters in Ray Brook where the APA is located and all have a boundary of the Blue Line. So we would be an Indian Reservation where we have no contact with any state agency except one honing its services to suit the Adirondack Park goal.

Then there was this bond act — two billion dollars to buy land up here. I personally talked to the comptroller. He said, yes, that’s all for the Adirondacks. And there was a map. It was a map that was the biggest thing in making it possible to defeat this because the map was of what land was going to be acquired. People could see their property on the map. Well, we, people like Fred Monroe and ourselves, we defeated everything. We defeated the bond act bill; it lost in the vote by 0.7 percent in a statewide referendum, and Mario Cuomo put his whole effort into that. And all of the legislation, which was written by the executive director of the Adirondack Park Agency and then the next version and the next version all were thrown out, never even got to a vote in the Legislature. Our opposition was a one hundred percent success.

In 1994 we formed the organization Property Rights Foundation of America, myself and some people I knew from the Greenway issue down on the Hudson and in the Albany County Legislature. It was then poised to help in lots of other things. You have to have an organization if you want to raise money, if you want to gain credibility and all.

There was a situation in 1998-99 that I thought was an opportunity — other people thought I was crazy — but that was to stop the state from having all the hunting camps taken down on the Champion International lands which were being acquired. It was 139,000 acres, of which 110,000 acres was to be acquired in conservation easements, which is to split the title so the state has the conservation value and the logging can continue. Along the rivers, 29,000 acres would be acquired outright for wilderness; it would become the Forest Preserve and there would just be no logging or anything. There were 300 hunting camps. And I said those camps should be saved. To make a long story short, I gave talks up north with the hunters. The reaction was, this crazy lady, she is obviously from the city. But, you know, we got five hunting clubs to join. We got St. Lawrence County to join. Howard Aubin got some funding, and he and I and made up the rest of the plaintiffs. We actually never got into court because the papers were served late. We couldn’t get to court on the merits of the lawsuit. The lawsuit was the product of all my thinking related to what the state was doing illegally by its own law on state land acquisition. The state changed some things. But the big thing that they changed was this: That was in 1999; in 2009 the state announced that it was going to allow all the hunting camps on the conservation easement lands to stay. That was 220 camps. I nearly cried when I read that, because by that time I wasn’t even involved. It had taken hold among many other people. The hunters had united, the people in DEC were working on it, they were negotiating with the enviros and so there it was: We won. Ten full years and the absolute final thing was the APA’s approval of it this very spring. So it shows you, never think you can’t beat the most far-fetched thing.

However, the Twenty-first Century Commission’s recommendations are still there. They’re all the things the enviros didn’t get in 1973, which they still want to take back. And the policy on the camps, we won on that as far as conservation easement lands. When the big International Paper conservation easement acquisition, 250,000 acres worth, came along all those camps could stay. On the Finch Pruyn land there are 90,000 acres acquired by the state in conservation easement part title; all those camps can stay. But, there are between 65,000 and 70,000 acres to be acquired for the Forest Preserve that haven’t been bought yet. All those camps, on twenty clubs that held leases from Finch Pruyn are condemned. I have not given up the idea of saving those camps even though the money, which I estimate as $40 million, is in the state budget, because, just like you say, they steal money from funds all the time. And the fault with this in my estimation is that the clubs didn’t unite. There’s one club, very upper crust had a paid lobbyist, would never fight and work with and organize the others and they had the ability to. So it was like split ’em off and you couldn’t be effective in the legislature. So that’s what we stand on that but more and more people are uniting to try to save those clubs because the publicity is getting out and there have been editorials a number of times. It’s possible we could still win on this. Haven’t given up.

The enviros are also continuing with other goals in addition to land acquisition. Like the Indian Reservation Proposal. And, believe it or not, that’s popular among some people on our side. To make all these agencies have a uniform policy within the Adirondack Park so as to primarily promote the park. This attitude is suicide. I think it’s very exciting that Governor Cuomo said that his Economic Development Council system up where the park is located will be split into the
different commercial areas where people most naturally would relate. Like the Watertown area, the Plattsburg area, the Glens Falls-Capital area. But some other people don’t agree.

And also we have our legislators sometimes talking favorably about transferable development rights, a big feature of the Twenty-First Century Commission report. You don’t want to force people to have even less rights and give them in exchange for that a sort of a piece of paper that would give them more housing units in a developed area. Like, say, the center of Chestertown. But anyway that’s the kind of thing we’re fighting.

And I think we still really can win on the Finch Pruyn lands. I used the term “multi-generational hunting culture” when I spoke about saving the Champion camps and I think that had impact because when the DEC published their environmental impact statement on the Champion lands when they went for this change in policy on the conservation easements they spoke about the fact that they were respecting the multi-generational hunting culture. So that was a phrase that was successful.

Well, I never will say anything good about the APA. I am the recalcitrant, uncompromising edge of things. I think today the APA is still lousy, it is inherently lousy, it was a lousy law, and you can’t make anything good out of anything that started out that way and the people they put in have only made it worse. The DEC and the enviros still want more land, they got three million acres of land, they’ve got 700,000 acres of conservation easements on top of that, and, as Fred will probably tell you because his organization worked out all the statistics about all the other land you can’t use, there’s very little left that you can use for anything. But the point of this talk is that our people are sometimes, I think, drawn into this idea that you can work with the Adirondack Council, the Adirondack Mountain Club, and so on because you can find common ground. And I want to disprove that. You see, we have to draw a line.

Back in 1990 we did a lot of research. We found out what the Champlain-Adirondack Biosphere Reserve was. Peter was able to find that by doing research at the UN headquarters in Manhattan and by working with my brother who’s a professor. The library at Penn State got all these key papers from Australia and England. We found out that the purpose of biosphere reserves was to restore everything to pre-human conditions so there would be no inhabitants, with just a few population centers. We really dug this out. This was a secret designation that went through the National Park Service, U.S. Department of State, to UNESCO in Paris. The designation has no power, as it does not have treaty status. The designation application was written by the APA’s planner, Ed Hood. The application was written by him, signed by the governor. And this is the kind of thing we face. Now the Adirondack Council is starting a push now to make the Adirondack Park into a UNESCO World Heritage Site. That is a treaty, OK? The World Heritage Site is much nastier than the biosphere reserve in the sense that if the entity met the world heritage site criteria it will be eligible for National Park status, to make it very, very simple. That’s my judgment on that. So the Adirondack Council is mentioning that in their fund-raising letters. They never, never quit.

So, consider this myth of the common ground: I think the time when it gained preeminence was when Governor Paterson put up that executive order he was going to issue to freeze the state payments of taxes on the Adirondack land that the state owns, as a budgetary measure. If you look at it, just draw a curve about the way land values go up, the way taxes go up, and you freeze the state tax payments over say ten, twenty, thirty years, probably closer to twenty or ten, you have virtually the same thing as directly cutting state payments: a smaller and smaller and very small proportion of the taxes to local towns. Towns would start to go under even worse than now.

The enviro groups joined with the local officials and the public on that and it was trumpeted at the time that they had found a real “common ground” and that some insipid movement (insipid I guess is a good word) or insidious movement they started toward a common ground kind of had a triumph. But there was one great quote among of all these environmentalists. There is one man, I think, who is very intelligent and he slips and says honest things. His name is Neal Woodworth, OK? He’s the executive director of the Adirondack Mountain Club. He made this great remark: He said if the cap of the state payments of taxes had gone through, the towns would not want to sell any more land to the state. So there you go. That was quoted in the papers.

So, why can’t you say; make common ground with the APA, that’s our great opponent, right? Well, I think the APA is still pretty lousy.
I have been talking to the Wechslers. A pretty house up on Loon Lake which used to be a cabin when there was Loon Lake Hotel. They fixed it up nice as a quaint little cottage. It’s not a big place or anything and what they did was they put a retaining wall at the shorefront. They made some pretty walkways going down to it because their son when he was thirty had a stroke and he’s disabled. And they’re very nice level walkways he can go down with his wheelchair. They built a little stone wall about yea high. You see a photo of it, it’s pretty as a picture. Like a little European building and with quaint little walkways. Well, the APA prosecuted them. The case just went through the New York State Supreme Court Appellate Division and the Wechslers lost. How did the APA get them? They got the Wechslers by saying that all their little walkways and the stone walls were a continuous new structure, so it went over the square foot threshold that triggered APA jurisdiction. Stairways, a gravel walkway, little bitty walls.

Then there’s the Tim Jones case. That’s the most egregious one if you want to talk about it. Eighteen years trying to get around the APA, and finally after eighteen years our lawyer Jim Morgan took Tim Jones’ case and Tim Jones got encouraged somehow, he went and talked to Governor Paterson. Governor Paterson ordered the APA to give a permit. So he got a permit after eighteen years for his lousy cabin. The adjacent cabins on the other side had already gotten APA permits but they wouldn’t give one to Tim Jones.

**Audience:** What was he accused of?

The cabin is on a water body. They just said that he wasn’t set back right. It’s one of those Wild and Scenic Rivers. He didn’t know about it. But the others were allowed to build. See? Then he built it without knowing that there was a rule like that. Then there’s the Beldens. It was just in the *Post Star* — The Beldens had the house in the family for generations, a little camp up by Dannemora on Lake Chazy, and they were told by the prison they could build a house there. And so they legitimately built their little camp there. APA tells them to tear it down. State Assemblyman Chris Ortloff helped them. He got it put off for a long, long time.

**Audience:** They just tore it down this week.

Well, they just tore it down. He had a great remark and this is where our side doesn’t put out for us. Mrs. Belden, I think, said this, that Betty Little and Teresa Sayward helped but help was too little too late. See? They don’t put out. They don’t go on the line and I think that’s a mistake. I’ve had Jerry Solomon pass laws for me just because I told him about a problem. Go into the conference committee. Sit and fight for three hours to get something passed. You know, they really put it on the line. But here we don’t do that. Then there’s the McHugh’s camp on Lens Lake in Stony Creek. I did a lot of work on it. That was eight years ago. Bill Hutchins wanted to get that property. McHugh wanted to build a house on it. Well, he never did get to build. He just couldn’t get through the process, all the hearings, all the lawyers’ fees, all the distortions, false witnesses, lies. It was impossible. So he built a little non-jurisdictional hunting camp. But I studied so thoroughly through the Freedom of Information Act that I’ve got a loose-leaf full of material where I can prove the conspiracy between Bill Hutchins and the APA.

Then as you mentioned, the Lewis family farm. The Lewis family farm — this was the most asinine case of all. The APA was incalculably dumb. The APA was wrong on two fronts. First of all, the APA Act rules out any APA power over agriculture. Period. And these were agricultural buildings for the workers. They were nice ones, but so what? Out in western New York there was a predecessor case where the town’s zoning wouldn’t allow the buildings because they weren’t nice enough. And the second reason was exactly parallel to that case out there in western New York which obviously wasn’t the APA. Why did the farmers think they were exempt? Because of New York State’s Right to Farm law. You can’t make zoning to impede farming in the State of New York. There you go.

**Audience:** I’ve heard of that case, but I’m not familiar with it.

Lewis is up there in Essex County, a wealthy man, he wants to build a big organic farm and he’s doing it. And he built some fancy housing for his workers, really nice. And he has people come. He gets student volunteers in the summer. He really has a professional, heavy duty operation. All organic. He had an easy clearcut case but the APA took it right through court and the APA’s abuse was so egregious that the court in the end awarded $70,000 in legal fees that the APA had to shell out. This was kind of nice. Except that, although it hurt the APA’s cause, it doesn’t come out of their pocket, it comes out of yours and mine. But the idea was there.
There’s a lot more to the APA that deserves more scrutiny. The enviros always get standing when they sue the APA. The latest one is the Lows Lake. The Adirondack Mountain Club sued the APA because the APA, after Fred Monroe did some good work, had not classified Lows Lake as wilderness. Somebody came in there. I understand that the Governor may have even intervened, but I can’t prove that, and the designees from the Department of State, Department of Economic Development, DEC, changed their vote when the vote was taken a second time because the first vote included a person who wasn’t any longer a commissioner, who had come back to fill in for a man who was absent.

So they had a second vote. The wilderness designation that was under the APA was thrown out but the enviros were angry. So they sued. They get standing. I don’t know why because our local officials organized a lawsuit in which Fred Monroe was very instrumental to challenge the APA’s new regulations, several of which didn’t meet the law, many of us think. The APA took powers that didn’t belong to the APA and changed well established methods of executing the APA Act as well. But the local officials couldn’t get standing. I waded through the ruling and that seems to be the crux of it.

*Audience:* They’re filing again so we can file a motion to appeal that.

Well, that will be wonderful.

*Audience:* That issue goes beyond just all the environmental issues. It’s just that good government, local government, should be able to protect their residents.

I think that the standing issue needs consideration. You know that we were allowed standing for St. Lawrence County. You could look at that decision on the hunting clubs on the Champion lands. That went through the Appellate Division. We got standing for St. Lawrence County. That’s standing for all of us. But I couldn’t get standing for the lawsuit I brought against the APA for violating its own law back in ’91. The enviros enforce and create new rules with lawsuits and somehow the APA settles them out really quickly. That’s how we got “no ATV’s” in the Adirondack Park, that’s how we’re going to get “no more float planes.” And many more things like that. They just sue and sue and sue and the APA conveniently agrees with them.

So, how can we have common ground with the environmentalists when they kill projects, when they sue the APA against things like float plane access to lakes, meaning to destroy a whole industry. You just can’t think that these policies can involve any kind of common ground at all. Those cases which I just described are just a few, a tiny fraction.

And the APA, the DEC, they’ve been closing down the forest. That would take me several evenings to begin to give you any idea of the magnitude of it. They buy land, they promise it will be open to the people, but they don’t open it. And the areas that have been open, they close. Right over here in Warrensburg, all along the shore of the Hudson, all that land that used to be Warren County land went to the state, was supposed to be a recreation area. There are a hundred beautiful campsites. There’s one left. And I was at the APA meeting where they reported they solved the problem of those camps because sometimes there was some unruliness; they said they closed them all and it’s now quite peaceful. (There’s nothing.) You go over to the Shelving Rock. Susan Allen took me over to the Shelving Rock. That was the heartbreak. A beautiful spot, several times this room with boulders this high blocking them and big “No more camping” signs. Out at the end you come to Shelving Rock area there’s a big, big parking field that had this sign, you can’t park there, and there’s a parking space big enough for three cars; if they cooperate, you can park there. So, how can you use the land? You can’t. And it goes on and on. There’s Whitehouse over in Wells, at the end of the road along the Sacandaga, they keep intimidating the town to close that town highway. There’s so many of them.

And then there’s the Moose River Plains. I didn’t understand what the DEC meant at the presentations at the APA meeting about what they were going to do at Moose River Plains. They were going to eliminate all the nice camping spots along the road, nice big ones where a few hunting clubs could park and have their time. They’re just going to make a small place to park a vehicle alone and for less of them for that matter, and you can walk in. Well, I saw that at the Shelving Rock road. It’s a parking spot where you have to squeeze your car in against the road. One car and nothing else. You have to leave your car. Park right squeezed against the road, a little narrow parking spot, like you’re parking in New York City. And then you can hike in and go up. But nothing for families now. Because how can you do that with your family, just jam your car in like that and you have to carry everything in? You can’t. So it cuts out all the family use of Moose River Plains.

*Audience:* There used to be a ranger in at the dam, wasn’t there?
Well, I was there a couple of years ago. There was no ranger. The ranger’s building looked unkempt. There was an outhouse but you can’t even describe how vile it was. Because no one had come to maintain it. That’s how they make excuses for closing things, by not doing any maintenance. So that’s another area where they’re just gradually making the lands inaccessible. They buy more, buy more, buy more. And, of course, if they get the Finch Pruyn land, in my letter you’ll see, they’ll pull out all the culverts on the logging roads and make them all wash out. You won’t be able to jump across them, so you can’t really hike if you get in. They’ll put boulders in, they’ll block the roads. They might take down the Finch Pruyn bridge, that beautiful bridge over the Hudson back there. So, there’s no real common ground.

When Ross Whaley was a commissioner a number of years back, when he first got to be commissioner, he asked me if I’d like to sit down and have lunch with him and talk about our differences. Well, I said I’d like to talk with him if he’d be interested in my viewpoint. I’d like to have my viewpoint seriously considered. He never called me. But they don’t have an interest in that. To talk about your viewpoints is so that you would learn to acquiesce to them. When you speak at their two minute, or now five minute public statement period, that was a slight generosity on the part of Commissioner Stiles, if you speak at their little public comment period at the beginning, they sit there stonelike in silence. The best reaction you get from them is angry looks in their faces, aghast and furious. No one afterwards asks to sit down with you. No one afterwards asks for a copy of your paper. Nothing.

Ava, you pointed out that maybe we should be concerned about the Agenda 21. So what I decided to write down was, as quickly as I could, who the enemies are that we face. And I’m using the word “enemies.” They’re power brokers and they all — almost all, there are a few later ones, but unrelated — precede the Agenda 21. Because I remember when that came out. OK? First we’ve got the APA itself. Then we’ve got the DEC, but I omit from that the forest rangers. They’re fine people. Then we’ve got the Adirondack Council. Then we’ve got the new group, Protect the Adirondacks, which is composed of the Residents’ Committee and the old venerable Association for Protection of the Adirondacks combined into one organization. Then we’ve got the Sierra Club. OK? I’ve barely started. We’ve got the National Park Service. You’re talking about the Biosphere Reserve, etc. Then you’ve got the USMAB — U.S. Man and Biosphere Reserve Program in the Department of State of the United States. Then we’ve got the Champlain Basin Program. In case you think I’m talking through my hat about the Champlain Basin Program, as a threat, in a publication by the USMAB about the status of various biosphere reserves in the United States, under the discussion of the Adirondack Champlain Biosphere Reserve they pointed out the ineffectiveness in establishing any management of the Adirondack Champlain Biosphere Reserve. But they said, not to worry, because we have the Northern Forest Lands Program and the Champlain Basin Program. So, that’s straight out of the horse’s mouth. So we’ve got the Champlain Basin Program on the list, the Northern Forest Lands Program. Jerry Solomon kept that under control.

Next, the Forest Legacy Program. That’s a USDA program that was to become the companion to the new Northern Forest Lands Program at the time. I could take a blackboard. I could draw how large that Northern forest program is — 26 million acres program from the Tug Hill plateau to the east end of Maine, to preserve the forests. I tried to tell Jerry Solomon about the pair of programs, but I couldn’t catch him because his staff wouldn’t believe me. So I went to one of his talks about Desert Storm. He was over at ACC, Adirondack Community College, and I said I wanted to tell him something about the Forest Legacy Program. So he took out the proverbial pad and said he’d call me back in the morning. He did at nine o’clock. And so I told him about the proposed program. He was Ranking Minority Member then in the Rules Committee. He said, well, Carol, I can’t stop a program, but I can monkeywrench it. And so what he did was — and this was a model for Sen. Stafford, because he used this with the Environmental Protection Fund — he put in a clause that no Forest Legacy money can be spent in the state of New York without local government approval. And he passed that. Ranking Minority Members can do a great deal. So never believe Teresa Sayward, OK? You can definitely pass a bill in the house where you’re in the minority.

Then we’ve got OSI, the Open Space Institute. They were formerly not that active up here. They were founded by the Rockefellers to be the repository for funds that will be donated to non-profits under these enforcement actions legalized under the Clean Water Act. The Clean Water Act created citizen enforcement actions for pollution control law. And so they founded the OSI to receive the settlements. If you want to know how they get these settlements, I will tell you whether you want to know or not. They look through state permits. They don’t go out to find, say, chemicals being spewed into the Hudson. No. They look through the permits. In the permits, because it’s impossible to eliminate all pollution and still have
a factory, there are always going to be some emissions. So, because the Federal law is so ludicrous, they can sue for the two reasons. One, that they’re allowed to sue, and two, because the pollution standards are too high. And so they sue and then they get a settlement. They’re allowed to have the settlement donated to their choice and so it’s the Open Space Institute. Open Space Institute still didn’t have a lot of money, though, until the Wallaces died. This is the kind of enemies we have and the convoluted way they get their money. Laurance Rockefeller befriended Wallace and his wife, the Reader’s Digest founders, and got them to leave a lot of money as he directed in their will. The Wallace estate was one of the biggest fortunes ever amassed in the United States of America. So Laurance Rockefeller, with all the money he had, he got still more and he formed the Hudson Highlands Land Trust which was active down in the southern part of the Hudson. It’s called upstate New York when you’re down below and where we come from but it’s the southern part of the state. A lot of that money now is being used further north. So that’s why OSI is now up here. They butchered the property on the Hudson that was Warren County’s recreation area. It’s like a moonscape. I’ve been up there with Ted Galusha. Heartbreak. That’s what the environmental groups do with their land.

Then we’ve got the Conservation Fund. This is number eighteen. Then we’ve got the Trust for Public Land and then we’ve got the all-important Nature Conservancy. OK? As I was saying before, the largest environmental group in the world. And don’t forget the National Audubon Society. Then behind some of them are non-profit groups like the Pew Charitable Trusts, who conceive the projects like the Northern Forest Lands, all this convoluted stuff. We’ve got all the Rockefeller associations, all that money always available. So, those are the main enemies we face. They are a formidable array. What I did was, back over ten years ago now this quickly became rather apparent, I made a diagram to show how they kind of mobilized on an issue; that’s a centerfold in Positions on Property. This is the first time I’ve spoken on that general idea since that time.

The common ground should be sought. I couldn’t agree with the many advocates for the common ground more. But the common ground is not between us and the enemy with such clear goals to depopulate this area. You can’t have common ground with those people at all. No, the common ground should be among us.

For instance, down in the Catskills, when the New York City watershed memorandum came out, about 1998, the local officials all sold out. They dropped all their opposition to the clauses that would really be a serious issue and almost a death knell to communities. It was just about three powerful clauses. The City of New York can approve your septic system. They can approve whether you have an impervious surface too close to a body of water. And they can buy land up in developable areas. And instead local officials accepted money for infrastructure, for pollution control plans. So they got their pollution control plans, they got their money for expensive septic systems until that ran out. And now, I have a friend there, a business owner in Delaware County, he can’t get UPS deliveries, because there isn’t enough business left to warrant UPS servicing the area.

APA Chairman Curt Stiles said recently that a lot of local officials are behind him but they’re just afraid of the voters. That was partly true, but only partly true. Because the local officials, they’re human beings like everybody else. Never forget that. How can they know all about the APA? I’ve lived and breathed this almost every single day since 1990. You can’t know that amount of information well enough to see through every bit of it. And some of the enviros can act very nice, they talk sweet, and they offer a program such as smart growth grants. They say, “we’ll work together,” Well, you look at what they have to offer and there’s always that common ground stuff. That’s not what we need local grants for. We need grants for something to make jobs, not to make “smart growth jobs.” We need a united front. There’s an area to focus on.

Now, here’s something incredible. Fred Monroe was basically, I think, the momentum behind it. That new report, the Adirondack Park Regional Assessment Project, has made a big impact. This is the research report by sort of a green planning agency about the status of all the towns that got information down on paper with the data about the decline of the schools, the towns losing population, etc. It was powerful to see that done so objectively. It’s helped to mobilize the town officials and clarify people’s minds. So, with all the action that local officials are starting to take now and with this new program that Governor Cuomo’s come out with, the Regional Economic Development Councils, there’s a lot of momentum right now. I think the enviros are really scared. And that is the explanation I offer for the Adirondack Council’s latest proposal — to make an APA Economic Development Czar. In other words, they say they want to make the organization
that really knows much about the area and they would be the Economic Development Czar for the Adirondacks. I invented the use of that word “czar” here. That is, I think, a panic-stricken proposal.

Well, Peter’s mother used to say, “You can’t make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear.” I quoted that in a letter to the editor. You just can’t. There’s no way the APA would ever be pro economic development. They’ll work against it and they’ll have a position to make everything important so that it just falls apart.

This shows that we’re getting somewhere. The more desperate their proposals… They don’t like any crack in the armor. You have to realize that. Nothing. So they come out with the best they can. That’s the Adirondack story.

So, you can say, “Carol, did you go overboard?” You say, “Carol, you’re a fanatic. You only see this from one side or point of view.” But here, you look at Carol LaGrasse, what’s her background? I left a very successful job to get a job as an environmental engineer before they called it environmental engineering. Took a cut in pay. We moved to the Adirondacks, not to develop it, but to live in harmony with nature. We left two engineering jobs behind. I was on the letterhead of a major engineering firm. And so you’d say I’m pretty much an environmental freak rather than anti-APA freak. I have no loyalty to this area except what I feel because I moved here. I’ve no ancestors here, no family here. We have no family, we have nothing to win or lose by this. The injustice just gets me angry.

And then when you see it going on all over the country, so many rural areas closed now with phony endangered species stuff, cities where lovely neighborhoods or quaint neighborhoods are being eradicated by big developers. It’s just an age-old thing. It’s gone on throughout time and right now it’s happening here and the people could stop it. But we have to be united.

So, that’s where the true common ground can be found. It can be found among entities whose corporate purposes are consistent with the future of the Adirondack people. I wrote this out today and just see what you think of it, OK? And first we start, of course, with the residents and the property owners, the local officials, certainly local officials. The purpose of the government is the good of the governed, not for the good of some environmental goal. You go to the state legislators. They should certainly be protecting the interests of their constituents. The schools, the churches. A really missing element in our ability to reach out has been the schools and the churches. Then we have the ones that have always been consistently united: the hunters, the camp owners—the hunting camp owners. I think that they’re potentially very, very effective because they’ve members all through the state. In fact, since I’ve been exhibiting at gun shows, we’re reaching lots of new people. We’re also working now together with the Adirondack Conservation Council. They’re the sportsmen’s alliance and part of the New York State Conservation Council. They’re fighting for the Finch Pruyn camp owners now. So, there you go. And then all the sports people that are on our side, and I hate to say this because I’m the hiker-canoer type, but the sports people on our side are the people with the ATV’s, the people with the snowmobiles, they’re on our side — the ones who have supposedly too much of an impact on the “wilderness.” And then all those businesses. Those people should be aggressively joining with hunting interests because you can take each thing one at a time and then there’s nothing left for any of the businesses. The loggers, the restaurateurs, the hotel owners, marine owners, the people with the float plane business, they’re already on our side, the store owners, and all the different industries and also the medical profession. The medical profession should be very concerned about what’s going on in the Adirondacks, because they should be concerned about the psychological health and well-being of the people. So, those are, in my mind, a great range of groups that could align effectively and have a true common ground and wouldn’t have to compromise any values for the good of their communities if they would work together. We can start small within a particular community and perhaps bring more of those groups in. It’s been a dream of mine to do that but with a dynamic taxpayers association maybe we could start and be very effective with this.

I really want to thank you, Ava. I’d like to introduce my husband Peter in case you don’t know him because he’s been chairman of the Stony Creek Board of Assessors since ’76 and he’s forced the state to pay a lot more taxes in Stony Creek than they otherwise would have. He’s also knowledgeable about conservation easements and he’d be glad to answer your questions about that. Thank you very much.