

Thomas Scozzafava
Town of Moriah, New York Supervisor
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"I've lived here [Moriah, New York] my entire life. It was really a heart wrenching experience when they blew that bridge up. It was like losing an old friend. I think all the times that we'd been across that bridge for either to go shopping or primarily to go to the hospital. I'd be at Porter [Hospital] or over to Burlington and so on, so when we lost the bridge, when they first closed the bridge I never realized the extent of losing that bridge how many lives it would impact and what areas that that impact would take place; everything from daycare to healthcare needs to people not being able to get to work. In this community we probably have 300 people that work in Vermont that have to cross that bridge on a daily basis for their livelihood and when the bridge first went out they were driving a couple hours out of the way to - - it was taking them four hours to get - - to get to and from work, which had an impact on daycare for working moms and families that had children. So it was just - - just extensive the amount of destruction that it caused in people's lives and the price of gasoline, the affordability. And a lot of the people that work over there are working for \$10, \$12 an hour jobs so it was very, very difficult on a lot of lives.

An "old friend"

I've been in office for 23 years and the impact that the closure of that bridge had on this community and other communities, I would have never imagined that it would have the impact that it had. It just again, created so many, so many problems. As I stated earlier, I cannot remember, most people alive today can't remember, ever looking from Fort Henry onto Lake Champlain and not seeing that bridge there. And so when that bridge, when they blew that bridge up, it was like losing an old friend and you look out onto Lake Champlain and you just see the two points; you don't see the bridge anymore. And it certainly had an emotional impact not only on myself, on many people. And like I say, most people that are around today, that's all they've ever seen in that view shed is the Lake Champlain Bridge. And at night you always looked for the lights over there on the bridge. So it had quite an impact.

The Board of Supervisors - was aware that the bridge - that the condition of the bridge was deteriorating for probably five years prior to the actual demolition of the bridge and the closure. And we -we were on record with resolutions requesting that the state come in here and make immediate repairs to the bridge, or at the very least have a plan in place where, if they had to close the bridge, that we had a plan available of what we were going to do. And obviously that never took place.

So when the bridge first closed, everybody was scrambling trying to find a way to get to work. Like I said earlier, we had 300+ people from this community that crossed that bridge for their employment. We had people that were actually rowing boats or taking boats across the bridge. This was in the fall of the year and it was cold and cold weather was setting in, so the operator of the Ticonderoga ferry went way above and beyond what

anyone could have ever expected to try to provide service to help people get across. And thank God he was there because he was a huge help throughout this entire disaster.

I have to be honest and say that that [preserving the 1929 bridge] was probably one of the farthest things on my mind. Our immediate response was look; we need to find a way to get across that lake where people's lives aren't going to be totally disrupted. We had people that lost their employment and so on. So the preservation of the bridge was not even a thought. And actually, a lot of that conversation - there were some of us still around, but most of that conversation once the bridge was closed and they determined the condition of the piers and so on, that conversation went to the wayside. At that point preservation is important; it was a historic structure, but people's lives and needs became the priority at that point.

Responding to bridge closure

I remember the day [the bridge closed] that we actually had to call Supervisor French, Supervisor [of Ticonderoga, NY] at the time. Supervisor Dietrich and myself, we were in the same vehicle actually coming back from a meeting in Elizabethtown and we received a call and - - that they had closed the bridge and we went right to the Lake Champlain Bridge and Senator Little had arrived at that point, Mary Ivy from DOT [New York State Department of Transportation]. And we were just shocked at the news as to - it had been closed - one lane had been closed for quite some time because they were doing repairs so it was totally unexpected; we didn't think that they were going to close this bridge permanently. And at that point in time it hadn't been determined that it was going to close permanently. I think that came a few days later where they had made that decision..

So we reached out to DOT, we reached out to the governor's office. And I have to say that Governor Patterson and at the time the acting commissioner [New York State Department of Transportation] Stanley Gee, those two -those two individuals there, without their compassion and assistance, we would have never had the ferry service as quickly as we had it, and Governor Douglas [Vermont] also. And Governor Patterson visited this area a couple different times. Stanley Gee actually held a public meeting, the DOT commissioner along with the Vermont V Trans [Vermont Agency of Transportation] at Moriah Central School, so all of the elected officials and commissioners stepped up to the plate. And they realized also the extent of the hardship that - - that this was impacting on so many lives. And they worked 24/7 to get the ferry slips in, to get a bridge designed and so on.

When you look back now at the timeframe, how much actually took place in a two-year period it's amazing because I've been in government most of my life and I can tell you that under normal circumstances, we'd still be talking about do we build a new bridge or do we preserve the old bridge, where are we going to locate it? It would have been years in the process. So I think probably some good, although the way it came about has come out of this, and that's the fact that we knew the bridge needed to be replaced and we do have a new bridge today.

Lifting the arch

I think when people saw the arch [to the new bridge] being lifted and the two states being connected once again, I think that was an emotional point for many, many people. As they were constructing the arch here in Port Henry there was, down in that area at the boat launch site, there were 50, 60 people there a day watching the construction of the arch, so, and it was a historical event and I think a lot of people wanted to be a part of that and they were. I was thinking as I was down there or as they were raising the arch, I was looking at the kids over there, the smaller children running around and I'm saying to myself I hope that they are not here someday having to witness the construction of another new bridge when they're our age. But it was a very emotional, emotional time."