



**ABE UCHITELLE  
MAJORITY LEADER  
ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE**

**MAJORITY LEADER ADDRESS**

**APRIL 16, 2024**

Thank you Chair Criswell, Minority leader Roberts,

I would first like to thank my Democratic colleagues for putting their trust in me as Majority Leader. People will often ask me where our caucus is on an issue, and I will tell you that this is one of the hardest questions I ever have to answer.

Our diversity of thought leads to late nights, heated debate, and seemingly endless policy research. It may feel daunting, especially with caucus meetings lasting hours longer than our colleagues on the other side of the aisle, but a great deal of notable legislation has come from this approach.

Since the Democratic Caucus has had control of this chamber, some of the legislation we have enacted includes:

1. Free fares for UCAT buses, which have resulted in an unprecedented increase in ridership.
2. Providing legal representation for residents facing eviction
3. Creating the first-of-its-kind housing fund to invest in affordable housing
4. Strengthening our human rights law to protect all expressions of gender identity
5. Setting in motion a much needed Crisis Stabilization Center set to open later this year

Being the party in the majority does not *only* mean that we are able to lead the way in terms of policy setting. It also means that we must serve as a critical check on the executive. When a hardfought piece of legislation is passed by this body, for some of us it may feel like the finish line in a long saga. The fact is that when a policy is passed by our body that represents the starting line for the executive branch of government.

With so many initiatives rising to meet so many challenges in our community, this work to collaborate with the executive branch has become one of the most important roles of this body. We're fortunate to have a County Executive like Jen Metzger. In my experience Jen is very open to feedback, is supported by an incredibly talented team, and brings a passion which is very authentic and powerful.

In many ways this year marks a new generation for the legislature. A third of our members are new to the body and we have new leaders in nearly every position.

But while it's true that we've got a lot of new faces around here, the legislature has actually been the source of much stability over recent years as the county executive's seat has turned over multiple times.

Because we are a rather large body, the truth is that we're the continuity. We're the ones making sure good ideas don't get lost in the shuffle, ensuring that the legislative intent of initiatives set in motion under one administration are prioritized by the next.

In addition to all of the policies that both caucuses have set in motion, there are also the day-to-day details that the often unsung heroes of the county deliver to our community through every level of the county workforce, in every office, and in every position. In this way, so many of our goals should come down to one fundamental question: how can we support this workforce to bring forward the best possible version of county government?

The legislature can pass all the laws we want, but everything we propose will be carried forward by the county workforce. I hope that in the term ahead we keep working together on a bipartisan basis to support this workforce, to make sure that any new initiatives we press forward with are given the best shot at success, and that every county employee is granted the dignity to be the best version of themselves possible.

And on the topic of bipartisanship, I want to give a nod to my counterpart Minority Leader Kevin Roberts. I am excited to find ways to keep working together. Not a week goes by that we don't speak, and I truly value the rapport we have developed. There is much our caucuses can accomplish together.

Now, I would like to close with some advice for the new members.

First, don't ever let anyone tell you that one of your ideas is bad (not even me). One of the secrets they don't tell you about this job is that seeing problems is easy, but coming up with ideas for how to fix them is very hard. We need your new perspectives. We need your new ideas.

Second, do not get distracted by the noise. We may never escape the voice of naysayers who call us names or question our motives. We are the signal, and the noise will not stand in our way when it comes to helping our constituents.

Finally, do not lose sight of the reasons you got involved in the first place. Ulster County is an incredible place filled with incredible people, from the county workforce to the passers-by the streets of each of our communities. You'll soon learn, if you haven't already, that there is no glory for us. It all begins and ends with the people we serve.

So keep focused on what matters, always look to find common ground, ignore the noise that seeks to destabilize, and always keep helping people.