



# ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATIVE NEWS

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## **A Year Of Conversations and Partnerships**

(KINGSTON, NY) From day one, Ulster County Legislative Chairman John Parete dismissed partisan politics as usual and focused on partnerships. "Let's put it this way" Parete said, "It is about having conversations." At the end of the year, these productive partnerships were Chairman Parete's number one accomplishment.

"Chairman Parete has been a fair leader for the Ulster County Legislature," noted Minority Whip Mary Beth Maio. "It has been a pleasure to bring the minority caucus to the table when he leads the conversations."

Chairman Parete's emphasis on consensus building was embraced by many of his fellow legislators and opened the door to begin their own conversations in committee. While this often sparked debate, the sponsors of these initiatives found the dialogue ultimately improved their proposed laws and developed other important initiatives. Some of these include:

- A local requirement for accurate roadside gas pricing signs initiated by Legislative Vice Chairman David Donaldson and Legislator Donald Gregorius.
- A sustainable energy loan program initiated by Legislators Manna Jo Greene and Tracey Bartels.
- An Ulster County Trail Policy brought forth by Legislator Lynn Archer.
- Improvements to the Legislative website with a focus on a County Legislature accountable to the people. "Folks can track individual votes, identify sponsors and co-sponsors of specific legislation," Parete noted "and even view their elected official's attendance at meetings."
- Chairman Parete sponsored a supplemental information requirement for certain County contracts utilizing County taxpayer dollars.
- After a three-year delay, the Legislature completed the appointments to a Climate Smart Committee and finalized its commitment to a lead role in addressing climate change, energy reduction and sustainability.
- In conjunction with SUNY Ulster and the Comptroller's Office, a survey was established to determine the reasons students attend Community College in other counties in order to address the adverse imbalance in the chargeback program and develop policies, programs and capital projects moving forward.

- Economic development was the focus for Vice Chairman Donaldson's conversation to bring back the Railroad Advisory Committee and ensure a real dialogue about the future of rails with trails for Ulster County in an effort to explore innovative means in which the railroad corridor could be utilized to enhance economic development in Ulster County.
- Initiated by the Energy and Environment Committee a Solid Waste Disposal Improvement Commission was established to begin work in 2015 focused on reducing the use of taxpayer funds for solid waste disposal and developing a management plan for the future of solid waste disposal in Ulster County by the end of next year.
- Chairman Parete's conversations emphasizing the needs of the first responder community lead to the creation of an EMS Advisory Board sponsored by Legislators TJ Briggs, Carl Belfiglio, Craig Lopez and Mary Wawro. Discussions will continue to address what can be done to bring 21st Century emergency response to Ulster County.
- A dialogue started by Chairman Parete about the escalating epidemic of Heroin and Opioid abuse and overdose resulted in a partnership with Legislators Carl Belfiglio and Mary Wawro and the establishment of the Ulster Coalition Against Narcotics (UCAN).
- A policy was developed to ensure the Legislature received periodic progress reports on contract negotiations by Minority Leader Kenneth Ronk.

"Some people believe that governing through consensus is unattainable until they actually begin to listen to one another", stated Minority Leader Ken Ronk. "Through bi-partisanship, cooperation and compromise, the final product is often better than intended."

Through the same commitment to consensus, the Legislature reevaluated appointments on the Ulster County Industrial Development Agency (IDA) Board. "From the beginning, Chairman Parete provided our Committee the authority to shepherd this key economic development discussion through the committee system," commented Economic Development, Tourism, Housing, Planning, and Transit Committee Chairman and Majority Whip Thomas Briggs. "As a sitting Board Member to the Industrial Development Agency, I understand the importance of these appointments and the role of the Legislature to make sound decisions regarding our County's economic opportunities."

Throughout 2014, the Legislative conversations centered on information, not only to educate but to ensure informed decisions about public policy through continued and open communication with the County Executive.

Chairman Parete emphasized the oversight responsibilities of the Legislature to scrutinize the performance and outcomes of County programs. He believes in the adage "trust but verify" to insure that programs under the new Charter form of government deliver services as promised and in the best interest of Ulster County's taxpayers. Public Works and Capital Projects Committee Chairman Dean Fabiano concurred and appropriately slowed the process for approving some contracts, including the STRIVE project, until adequate and detailed supporting information was provided to his committee and the Legislature.

Efforts to build consensus sometimes vaulted initiatives from debate directly to enacted policy. The completion of the takeover of the Safety Net program, assuming the financial responsibility for county run election costs, one additional year of stable tuition at SUNY Ulster and developing

alternative fuel capital projects were conversations that initiated with the Legislative leadership and were eventually included in the 2015 County Budget.

"We were successful at keeping SUNY Ulster tuition costs from yet another increase", stated Legislative Programs, Education and Community Services Chairman and Legislative Vice Chairman Dave Donaldson. "It is the students and families of Ulster County that are the winners when we can come together to meet the community college's needs while not overly taxing the students."

Chairman Parete recognized that making responsible fiscal decisions through management of the county budget is one of the most important roles of the Legislature. His early decision to increase the membership of the Ways and Means committee to eight and to name Legislator Gerentine as Chairman of the Committee has been effectual. Legislator Gerentine collaborated with the independent budget consultants and his committee to move money to the county's contingency account. "It's smart financial decisions like that born of conversations and collaborations that continue to benefit Ulster County's taxpayers," Parete said.

While vigilantly working to insure no increases in property tax, the Legislature continued to support vital public-private partnerships ensuring Ulster County residents benefit from these important programs and jobs. Great organizations like Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Cornell Cooperative Extension Association, AWARENESS Inc. Program, Ulster County Community Action, Mid-Hudson Library System, UPAC, Arts Mid-Hudson Inc., continue to provide a myriad of programs and services on a daily basis.

Chairman Parete also used his position to recognize "good people doing good work". One way Parete thanks County workers is to give away his designated "Chairman" parking spot in the parking lot to a different County employee picked at random. Eighteen winners have been chosen thus far. One winner described the parking spot lottery as "a classy act," and wrote "I don't know if you realize for a period of two weeks, the winner becomes the building celebrity."

Recognition of Ulster County talent was the impetus of the 2015 County Directory Cover Photo Contest. "I am overwhelmed and touched by the response and quality of photos submitted for this contest," said Legislative Chairman John Parete at the celebration sponsored by Frank Guido's Little Italy to announce the contest winner. Coleman High School Junior Andrew Davis from Stone Ridge took home the honor as the 2015 Directory Cover Photographer.

"Our work, the people's work, never ends", concluded Chairman Parete. "The bipartisanship of the last year has been encouraging. When we partner as a County, as citizens and elected officials, to re-invest in our seniors, invest in our youth, and allow public-private partnerships to grow, I am confident that together we will leave the future with a strong basis from which continued growth and conversations can occur. I look forward to continuing to chat with the good people of Ulster County on what makes our communities great and what they think could make it better." Items to expect next year from Legislative Chairman Parete include conversations around village taxes, charter reforms, term limits, campaign finance, special benefit assessment districts, and the County's housing needs.

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