



ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATIVE NEWS

ULSTER COUNTY NEWS INFORMATION

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Honorable Members of the Ulster County Legislature, Majority Leader Uchitelle, Minority Leader Roberts, esteemed guests, and community members,

I stand before you today honored and humbled by the trust you have placed in me as your newly elected Chair. I want to take a moment to acknowledge the hard work the legislators in the past session have done. They passed ambitious legislation that will have long-term positive impact on Ulster County. I especially want to thank Chair Bartels for her leadership as well as Majority Leader Heppner and Minority Leader Ronk.

I welcome back returning legislators and note that, with this upcoming session, we have more new legislators than ever before in the history of the Ulster County Legislature.

I also want to recognize some other historic firsts. Three women now chair committees, marking a significant milestone in gender representation. Our body is more racially diverse than ever before. Additionally, the minority caucus chairs three committees. And, for the first time in Ulster County history, an openly gay person holds the role of Chair. These milestones underscore our dedication to equitable representation and progress and reflect the diversity of our county.

At this moment, the continuation of a long journey, we have the chance to examine the way we govern, and the opportunity to influence the narrative on how politics are done in Ulster County.

Our primary focus must remain steadfast: our constituents and the delivery of exemplary community services. Let us keep our eyes on the ball, recognizing that every decision we make, every action we take, must serve the greater good of those we represent.

As we navigate the road ahead, I see two possible paths: the path of collaboration or the path of altercation. The former leads to a future where we work in partnership with elected officials — the County Executive, Comptroller, District Attorney, Sheriff, Town Supervisors, and Village and City Mayors — as well as with our dedicated county staff. It's a path illuminated by principles of respect, cooperation, and mutual understanding. Conversely, the latter path, characterized by discord and division, serves only to hinder our county's progress and to obstruct its prosperity.

Our task is clear: to strengthen our already robust check-and-balances system that fosters governmental transparency, accountability, and effectiveness. We've been presented with an opportunity to do government differently, to transcend the divisiveness that plagues our politics and to come together around the table. Let's listen to each other's visions, identify our common challenges, and collaboratively forge solutions that can benefit everyone.

At the end of this year, I want our constituents to see us as a legislature that creates not problems but solutions. This will require us to engage in difficult discussions with a spirit of mutual respect, collaboration, and dignity. Together, we can find common ground on many of the key issues facing our county—from infrastructure to health care, from housing to climate solutions, from transportation to economic development. As we begin our year I am eager to collaborate with both Majority Leader Uchitelle and Minority Leader Roberts on advancing projects that have a positive impact on our community.

There are common-sense solutions to many of our toughest challenges. But we can only reach them when we work together, transcending the gridlock and partisanship that plague modern politics. I want to assure you all that I am committed to upholding the principles of fairness and accountability within our legislative process. Should I become aware of any actions that deviate from these principles, I will take decisive steps to address the situation. My commitment lies not in serving any individual agenda, but rather in safeguarding the health and well-being of this legislative body as a whole and its individual members.

I have already initiated structural changes aimed at enhancing communication and streamlining our processes. Working closely with County Executive Metzger and her Deputies, as well as with Clerk Fabella, we have revised the Resolution Deadline schedule to allow legislators more time to review resolutions and pose questions to Deputies before committee meetings. Additionally, I have collaborated with the Clerk to move committee meetings away from session days, creating a less stressful environment for both staff and legislators. Furthermore, I've worked with Amanda Norton, my new Confidential Secretary, to develop a Committee Action Report that provides a comprehensive summary of all committee meetings and resolutions. Your feedback on this initiative is crucial to ensure its effectiveness.

As a legislature, we face many critical challenges, including finding long-term solutions to solid waste management, creating supportive and affordable housing, addressing mental health initiatives, shoring up aging infrastructure and sustainable fleet management practices, and examining salary equity within the county workforce. However, alongside these challenges, we also embrace significant opportunities, such as building the critically needed Government Operations Center, opening the Crisis Stabilization Center, and developing a Workforce Development Center. Additionally, completing the ARPA projects, supporting our ever-growing tourism industry, and implementing the upcoming Arts and Culture Master Plan present opportunities to enrich our community and foster economic growth. I invite each of you to join me in these endeavors. Let us communicate openly and keep our doors perpetually ajar.

Let me be clear: I am human, and new to the job, and I will make mistakes. But I promise to approach every decision with humility, patience, openness, generosity, and strength. Channeling empathy and compassion, we can build bridges over our divisions, fostering goodwill and understanding among us all.

Together, we possess the power to shape the future of Ulster County—to create a community that thrives on inclusivity, resilience, and progress. Let's seize this moment, united in purpose and unwavering in our commitment to serve.

Thank you.