



JOHN R. PARETE

**LEGISLATIVE CHAIRMAN
ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE**

CHAIRMAN ADDRESS

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2015 Chairman Address

Ulster County Legislature – Chairman John R. Parete

I just want to mention, as I start some of these comments, that you know, one of the reasons I am here - my Christian upbringing, my Judeo upbringing - taught me to take care of my family, my friends, my neighbors, those I don't know, those that are having difficult times and those that are struggling. And some people say those kinds of attitudes, we can't afford – that'll bankrupt us. I say we can't afford not to take care of those that are having difficulty.

Andrew Jackson, one of our Presidents, said, "We should measure the health of our society, not at it's apex but at it's base." Not where the numbers come out of Wall Street but at the living conditions that exists on Main Street. Some of the things that I am sort of looking forward to, trying to implement, trying to promote this year. Brianne left. Brianne is a young lady that is with us through some help from the challenged community. She taught us more that we have taught her.

One thing now that I am interested in moving forward is, downstairs in our lobby, I think there is room for either a disabled veteran or a member of the disabled community to be able to start a little business. Whether that be a perfume business or a cigar business (well, no I can't say cigar, sorry), candy, flowers, whatever it might be. I think we know there a lot of people who are having difficulty. Some of their difficulty were by protecting us so we can have the life we have. Others have other reasons for their difficulties. But we have to show them that we are on their side, that we understand as best we can what their concerns are.

I am going to be asking the folks that I work with up here, and anyone else that might be interested, to check the law, draft some legislation and see if we can open up a shop. There's plenty of room down there and some of the doors are locked. I know there are things behind the door but they are locked right now.

I want to thank Brianne. She is not here right now but she did teach us an awful lot.

Another part of that whole project would be a concerted effort by the legislature to promote, more than just a link to the website, but promote minority and women owned businesses. The one thing about those sort of businesses - they are small businesses you can't outsource. They are here. They are here to serve the community. The minority members of the community and the women who would like to have a business and maybe sometimes do not have the opportunity to have one, I think if we, as the Legislature, develop some programs to go out into the community and let them know that we are interested, as a body, in promoting business. Now, all those businesses would be local.

Another thing, you know sometime with my little granddaughter over here, I sit on the front stoop at about 2:00 – 2:10 – 2:20. I watch the school buses go by and count the busses, count the trucks. I see a lot of really good kids going by. A lot of good kids. Some are going a little faster than they should but most of them aren't. But they are having a good time. You know when the weather is right - they've got their feet out the window, they've got the boom boxes going, and they are doing everything kids do and should do, except they are not paying attention. I had planned, after last year's comments, to ask the Sheriff, in conjunction with the State Police and the other local

police agencies to try to dedicate some time during that period – it is off campus, when the bullies might be roaming around, some of the reckless youngsters might be feeling their oats or when others are just plain not paying attention and they can hurt themselves. Ironically, I did not come up with this today but there were two articles in the Middletown Record, I think today, about the State Police campaigning to keep teens safe on the road.

Now, I have to tell you, last year, when I came up with a couple of these proposals, I was told, “Well, how are you going to pay for it?” I actually planned to pay for this with the money they save with our pilot project on LP gas. I am asking the Sheriff to find it in his budget somehow to patrol those areas.

I want to talk just ever so briefly about flow control. We have got to do something folks. It is an abject failure. Take a look at the communities around you. The Supervisors. None of the projections were realized and all the failures were accomplished.

You know there is an increasingly widening gap in Ulster County, folks. Between the rich and the poor. Course, it is all over the State and really all over the nation.

Financing of your public schools is so important. Financing of the Community College is a gateway for the middle class to recognize the opportunities they should have. Last year, my sidekick up here [gestures toward Vice Chairman David Donaldson] introduced a resolution to invest money enough so that students would not have a tuition increase. It was voted down. But it happened and I thank you Dave for that. Suddenly, it happened. We have to invest more money in our Community College. I see the State has upped the anti by two (2) or three (3) percent. We have

not invested any extra money in what six (6) years. I think it is time we think about our obligation to our local kids. The number of local kids in this school are diminishing folks. There are less children than the elderly folks. In the public schools, less children available to go to the Community College and it is probably the number one economic development tool that we have in our entire county.

Come February of 2016, the sales tax distribution agreement expires. I think we have to start thinking about that. Do some of the other communities deserve more money from the sales tax? Do they deserve less? Should we leave it the same? I think it is time to start discussing it now, not in November or December. I think we should start discussing it before other people start discussing it. Who knows where it could go.

One thing I would like to talk to you about is housing. Affordable housing and the fact that there is an outbreak of homelessness among our students. Onteora has four (4) to five (5) students at the high school. Rondout has five (5) to seven (7) homeless students in the high school. Kingston has a correspondingly higher number. Every school in Ulster County has homeless students. There was a recent article in the Times Herald Record about the record number of local kids, up twenty-nine percent (29%) over the few years of housing homeless kids.

RUPCO recently sent us a letter that they lost a contract to the State for funding their programs to help transition the homeless. You've got to remember that RUPCO had a very, very competitive program that would help transition people into a home especially if you realize if folks are having that type of problem, they usually do not have the money for the down payment, the security, and the last month's rent. They

had it for five years; they lost it to other communities. I understand maybe some of the thinking might have been, Ulster County has had it for five years and now it is time for us to step up to the plate. RUPCO CEO Kevin O'Connor was quoted as saying, "Homelessness exists in Ulster County." What are we going to do about it? We need more than a road map. Recommendations and reports often end up with similar language. More outreach. Better working relationships. More solutions. Better partners. But they are never a plan. Folks out there, and a lot of folks that are fortunate enough not to be homeless, want their government to say, "these are the resources that we are going to commit. These are the programs that we are going to institute and this is the staff that we are going to use." I said before, I do not think that we can afford to avoid this. You know homeless people need more than just a shelter. And I think, these youngsters, in particular, deserve a chance and they are not getting a chance. There has been a number of articles that I have seen that show that this...

We are going to be developing a program and passing it on to some of the committees, the Health & Human Services and the Economic Development Committee. I am going to be very curious to see what kind of recommendations we get because it is very easy to close our eyes to these problems.

I am going to talk about some of the things that have occurred. You know one of the major pieces of legislation, I think, that has been undertaken in Ulster County in the past was a piece of legislation that said any outsourcing of material, any outsourcing of business, any outsourcing of staff has to have a benefit analysis done. We need to know the projections. We need to know the costs. We need to know the predictions. We need to know why we should be doing it. Forget about the fact that we really

should be looking to protect our workers. But we never had that and it passed this legislature early on and I have to thank Legislature Gerentine for helping get that passed. With this, we certainly need a committee to find out if the legislation that is passed is living up to expectations. So, we certainly need a monitor review committee. We need another standing committee of two (2) or three (3) people. I mean I've got a couple of folks in mind that would certainly like to know if what was promised has been delivered. You can call it a mandate monitor committee or committee on budget and review. But we certainly have to have it or, and some folks might like this, the cost benefit analysis legislation is worthless.

Like I said before, Dave Donaldson and a couple of others, didn't want any tuition increases. It shouldn't increase again this year. I think we have to look to ask Counsel here [gestures toward Legislative Counsel Cappy Weiner] to see if there is any way to offer tax credits to Ulster County businesses or residents that might be looking to sponsor youngsters. Maybe it can't be just the top five (5) percent. Maybe it has got to be more youngsters that we give an opportunity to go to the Community College.

You know, right here, last year, we talked about our pilot project, LP gas. And it passed by the way. It passed but was vetoed as not really renewable energy. It wasn't really environmentally sound. But we also, as part of that proposal, was a green fleet proposal. Now we've got a department that has been in business for seven (7) years. They do not have a green fleet policy yet. I just saw one last week. Rich, Legislator Parete, one day, oh two (2) to three (3) weeks ago, said at the meeting, you know we are so far behind the times. His company has monitors on the trucks and

they have an idle policy. Lo and behold, there was an idle policy in this new program. So sometimes, I guess, you just got to speak out loud; things start to happen, Rich.

One of our other significant accomplishments, that you all helped, was the passage of an Ulster Coalition Against Narcotics. I specifically want to thank Legislator Wawro, Belfiglio, and Donaldson. Last year, I spoke here about a heroin epidemic that is plaguing the County, plaguing the State. And I understand that there were chuckles and laughs at some of the morning breakfasts. But three weeks later they had Chuck Schumer up here telling us that the situation was dire. "Oh, it is a terrible situation."

This Ulster Coalition, that Lou Klein, my friend Lou Klein and a lot of your friend, has been able to put together and steer into incredible productiveness. I have to tell you, with the enthusiasm of the two legislators I mentioned, the one with Mr. Donaldson, and Sheriff Van Blarcum over here, and District Attorney, they have brought an incredible talent of dedicated and sensitive individuals. Many of them in recovery. Some have lost youngsters to this disease. And there is professionals that are volunteering their time to come in and talk to us. It is not a bunch of paid hired hands here. There are people who have real interests. Some of them are people in the EMS field and the rescue field who wept over those they could not save sometimes because they did not have the drugs, the medicines to try to help them.

One other one, well, we passed the EMS Advisory Board. You know there was a big article in the paper that was the result of this – Hudson Valley Patterns for Progress – "The Region's Not Ready For The Boom And The Elderly". Jay [gesturing toward Deputy Clerk Jay Mahler] has figured out that there could be fourteen (14) of us here that may be Baby Boomers; and some of us who might be close to being Baby

Boomers. The care and the courtesies extended to the Baby Boomers, if those folks are overworked and don't have the right equipment, is so critical. We are having very successful meetings with people from around the County that like the idea that maybe someday there may be a way to figure out that they do not have to have bake sales and hoagie sales and can shakes to raise money to save somebody's life. In the EMS community, the number of volunteers is shrinking incredibly fast. Those folks have more continuing education that we do, than most lawyers do, than many teachers or doctors do; just to volunteer to help. So, we are going to be doing what we can to help increase the numbers of the EMS Advisory Board and help get them to become a lobby for what we all are going to need one of these days.

There is one more thing I want to talk about, last month we passed a resolution on automatic recounts on elections that are closer than one-half of one percent. There appeared to be a sentence, three words or so, that we eliminated from one paragraph but did not eliminate from another paragraph. In a comment from the State Board of Elections Commissioner, he said he would change the word from one-half of one percent from the winner to the loser. I talked to the Executive about it. I said, "You know, I understand that we passed it. If it is a major problem, veto it and we will correct it. If you feel you can pass it and the Legislature will correct it, you are welcome to do that. I understand." We had a most pleasant twenty-six (26) minute conversation, on April 13, at 1:30 in the afternoon. Two days later, I see this news release about this poorly crafted, terrible piece of legislation that we only did it because we are so noble. It is not noble, it is the right thing to do. Now, I had a very nice conversation, it was a very frank conversation today, so I have modified some of what I

am going to say here today. But the one thing I got from that conversation and the one thing I got from the news release, is that “well, you need to run this stuff by us. We need to work together on it.” So, I had the staff put together a time line. This thing was introduced on October 29th; it went to the first Laws and Rules Committee on November 17th; the second time on December 15th when the Executive, and I pointed it out today, his staff were there and they got a copy of it. The Election Commissioners came to the meeting. I said we are not going to vote on it. I do not believe in pushing stuff through. I think it is just plain silly. I said I want input from anybody - the good, the bad, the ugly, the right, the wrong. December 17th. You all passed this March 17th. I never got one comment from anybody about any language being incorrect, about anything that needed to be corrected, and that is why I resented, I resented the news release, when we had a great conversation for twenty-six (26) minutes and I just said, “All right, just let me know what you are going to do.” The next thing I read this sardonic news release. I made my point as best I could today. I don’t know where it is going. It doesn’t even matter.

Just one more thing. You know, last week [month], I sat here listening to the Majority Leader yapping about some stuff. I went back over and looked at all the stuff we passed last year. Guess what, the Majority Leader voted against almost all of them. When we were talking about homelessness and jobs, the poor and the hungry, and a cost benefit analysis, think about the scales of justice. The Majority Leader was talking about a leash law, how wonderful that was. When we talked about taking over election costs, which happened by the way, and preventing a tuition increase at SUNY Ulster, the Majority Leader was talking about putting stickers on gas pumps. I do not

think homelessness and drugs and people dying quite live up to a sticker on a gas pump. The only thing I am going to say, because I am tempering my remarks, is if Helen Keller were here today - because you read his speech, you heard it – she would introduce our Majority Leader by saying, “The only thing worse than being blind is having no vision.”

Let's saddle up, folks.