



JOHN R. PARETE
CHAIRMAN
ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE

CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS

MARCH 18, 2014

Alright, thank you very much. This is a new experience for me so we'll do the best we can anyway. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity even make this speech or have this conversation, let's put it that way.

I would like to start off just by talking about building consensus and not partisanship but why not partnerships, not partisanship, partnerships through consensus. You know partnerships should be a goal. And I would like to look at the most successful integrating force in American history, professional sports. The Yankees, the Red Sox, the Dodgers, the Mets – all strive to win within a framework of a partnership called Major League Baseball, NFL Football, hockey. They all have a partnership that breeds stability but they all do want to win their points or their goals. They want to draw their customers. Our job is not to attract customers, our job is to serve our customers.

I try, and I think we all should try, not to make issues out of little things. Important issues require thoughtfulness and compromise. And try to remember, in our own lives, people with different political views are friends, neighbors and colleagues. We volunteer. We participate in the community, in community activities, and solve problems together. Because we all share interests and goals that keep our differences in perspective. I would like to point out to myself, if not to everyone of you, that our system of government, you know the three separate branches of Executive, Judicial, and Legislative, offers some interesting functions. The Judicial branch, that we are involved with through the DA's office, the Sheriff's office, they generally look backwards. They look backwards at things that have happened, that have occurred, and may have consequences. The Legislative branch has to look forward. They have to have ideas, imagination, make policy but they also have to reflect on things that they have already done. The Executive has to deal with the boots on the ground. They've got the tough job. They have to deal with the realities of everyday life. But our function, is to look ahead as best we can while reflecting on the past.

Now, I have a couple of observations of the years that I was party chair and then last year and the year before. By definition, the Legislature is suppose to enact, amend and rescind laws, - this is by the Charter definition - to conduct studies and investigations of its legislative functions. By definition, legislative oversight is the scrutiny of the executive programs and the performance of the Legislature. Appropriations are a set aside by legislation for specific purposes.

And going down this line of thinking, I try to use a couple of modestly simple examples. My own job, you know if the folks that work with me said, "You know we would like to hire a band every weekend, it is going to cost a \$1,000 for the band and staff and the little security you are going to need and whatever else you might feel is necessary but we would like to do it for two years or a year to get a trend." Now, at a \$1,000 a week how long would it take me to realize that we were not taking in \$2,000 a week, we were taking in 500 bucks a week. We don't do that folks. I think about appropriations and what we all do as a banker. Voila, a banker. [Gesturing toward Legislator Mary

Beth Maio.] What do bankers require? They require projections, insurance certificates, tax forms, tax liabilities, tax assessments and quarterly reports. You don't produce them, they call their loan. The County's programs and projects must be monitored and reported for compliance with the original statement of intent, the results and the cost reflect the promises. In Washington, they call that trust but verify.

Now, I have a few little things that I have been working on to give to our Counsel here. And one of them is a sort of a draft of privatization cost analysis where any legislation that comes before this body that privatizes any part of our operation has to reflect in essence a cost benefit analysis to tell us where we are, where we want to go and what the results should be and what the projections are so that the appropriate folks in oversight can go back and review it to verify its accuracy. This is not anything particularly unusual and I might add, when I keep using the word appropriations, you know, in Congress Appropriations is the largest committee there is. We do not hear about it much. Ways and Means sets the budget. Appropriations sets the money and there is about 50-60 members of that committee and they are not on any other committee. All they do is checks to make sure things are being done right and that the objectives of the legislation are hopefully being met.

I have a couple of other ones that call the private contract disclosure form which means that somewhere down the road we might want to publish it, or you might want to for your consideration now, publish it on the website for folks that are having contracts with the County to give some of those folks who are responsible for the oversight an opportunity to review them. And you know, it essence everything I am talking about is not much more than when we pass legislation that places upon local governments or private companies that we obtain an estimate of whatever it is going to cost, what it will entitle and how it affects the citizens of our community.

One of the proposals that I have been thinking about for a while, and I am going to present it to you and I will give it to our counsel, has come about through conversations with Jeff Kaplan and Joe Stoeckler. It's to make whole the villages – New Paltz, Saugerties and Ellenville – make whole when there are delinquent taxes. Right now, in every township in the County, if someone does not pay their taxes and at a given time, the County makes them whole for school and land taxes; and the folks then have the process to go with through a formalized operation here in the County. New Paltz and Saugerties don't have the same problem that [Ellenville] does by the luck of the draw and the luck of location. [Ellenville], I understand it, has approximately \$900,000 in delinquent taxes. I think this is a policy that Mary Sheeley asked me to talk about, as the former manager. I don't see any downside to it. I see it as part of the cooperative effort of the County and the Towns working together and I will give this to Cappy.

One of the ideas that we were talking about and I discussed it with the Sheriff is for some of his vehicles that are very mileage specific - taking the people under their care, custody control to court appearances. And that would be an alternative fuel policy. In

Ulster County, there are two compressed gas fueling station; one in New Paltz and one in the quarry. The Sheriff has indicated he would certainly be very interested in running a project to see if this is a good idea, to see if it is workable. I have here a clean cities alternative fuel report from the EPA and Jay has found other things for us to read. I think a policy could be that if this was worked out by 2020 or 2025 maybe 30% of our fleet could have an alternative fuel policy.

Charter Reform, there has been a few issues that has come up in the last four or five months where there is conflicts within the Charter. I can think of a few things that I'd like to see corrected. For instance, this body, not to long ago, specifically rejected the right of the voters to have a say in the ballot box on the legislative districts that were drawn. Now, along with my good friend Legislator Gerentine, we accomplished that a few years ago. The voters had a right to vote on it and they voted to have single seat districts and to reduce the size of the districts. That was taken away from the voters. I think that was wrong and I think it is something we should discuss.

Also, maybe we should be talking about term limits. Time has come. Term limits and continuing the prospect and the promise to reduce the size of government. We could easily go to twenty-one (21) Legislators or nineteen (19) Legislators; not tomorrow, not next week, after the next census. Nobody wants to vote themselves out of a job but by opening up the Charter to some of the concerns on its co-mingling of legislative and executive functions, we can discuss some of these other issues.

Campaign Finance, the Executive, in his speech, spoke about campaign finance reform. I couldn't agree with him more. When I was with the Board of Elections, it was at the time when the Charter was coming to fruition and the elections were taking place. It's a worrisome issue. Especially in rural communities, people tend to see donations differently than they do, let's say, in metropolitan areas. Where I differ from the Executive, where he did not want to allow contractors or people doing business with the County to make contributions. I disagree with that completely. It is up to the candidate, the elected official, to turn it down. And it's not quite so simple as to say, "Let's check contributions." First, you have to build a database. You have to build a database and go back three (3) or four (4) years because a contribution three (3) or four (4) years ago could make a difference in an appointment today or tomorrow; or in a contract today or tomorrow.

We have twenty-three (23) of us and five (5) other elected officials. If somebody is doing business with the County Executive, it should not have an effect on somebody in the Sheriff's race, the DA's race, the Clerk's race; they are different races. That is why somebody should be allowed to make a contribution and the candidate, the onus in on the candidate, not on the citizen who wants to contribute to a particular candidate.

I think the public is ready for some campaign reform. We can't change state law. Anybody who thinks you can is blowing smoke. Who will enforce this? Where are we going to hire the people, one to buy the software and two to enforce it and two to do

the research? This could cost \$30-, \$40-, \$50-, \$60,000. And I am very interested in working with the Executive to have him find the money; we could hire the people, buy the software. Who is going to enforce it? Whoever we hire, I suppose or maybe the Comptroller, maybe the DA. These are all issues that you all have to solve if it gets that far. But I support his intention. I think it is a good idea.

These are my props, folks. I know Richie is getting antsy over there. Just hang out.

You may have read the Comptroller report on tax-exempt properties. \$20 billion dollars in assessed valuation; only \$15 billion is taxed. Now, Legislator Donaldson here came across a seminar that is being had, that can be online in here where we all can watch it, that is on these Special Benefit Assessment Districts. Now, I brought it up when we talked about the RRA. It was distorted. It was said to be illegal. It is not illegal. It is a legitimate system recognized by state law. I saw the Executive mention the aging communication system. Well, if you could expand from \$15 billion to \$19 or \$20 billion dollars in who has to pay for these services, as in a lighting district, as in a water district, it could be a significant amount of money that could be raised. And I think some Legislators may want to be involved. I think we will have to go outside and get some advice from people around the community as to their thoughts on these special benefit districts. And I have talked to a few of these people, Louie Klein, Rich Matthews, Dr. Gerry Benjamin [gesturing to Dr. Benjamin's portrait on the Former Chairmen wall], as well as others, other former chairmen and we have two former chairmen here. So, that is a proposal that is on the books to help reduce the cost to our taxpayers.

I want to talk about housing for a moment. You know housing is jobs. Now, there is a report out this past week [holding up report] that I can get emailed to anybody or get can get it yourself. Housing Affordability in New York State, it is basically an indictment folks. It's an indictment. Ulster County is doing terrible. Terrible, terrible, terrible.

There is not a week goes by that one (1) or two (2) people, especially seniors, more seniors, come in and we chat. And we just talk; "My mom's past away and my husband and I can not afford the house anymore, mentally, physically, economically, emotionally but there is no place to go. There is no place to go. What are we going to do. Well, you can sell it and move to Kingston or move to Poughkeepsie. I don't want to do that. I like to live here." But we've got to start thinking about that.

But there is another issue I want to bring up. You know my wife and I often talk about when we grew up around here. There was no rural atmosphere. There was no rural flavor. There was no rural character. It was rural. And there were always people, especially sixty (60) years ago, who were struggling. They were just below the radar line but they were struggling. But I can tell you that the people who were in charge of the community then, the business people, the older families, never, never made it difficult for those folks to survive and never made it difficult for them to have a place to live. It was a wonderful place and time to grow up.

I never thought about a youngster getting free lunch at school but I hear it in Boiceville now. Someone will say, "They get free lunch." What has changed? Well, I am going to tell you what I think has changed. From those days until now, the nouveau riche members of our community do not want those folks around. They don't mind the seniors, that's easy. But the low income, middle income, workfair housing, they do not want them around them. I believe the County has to get involved. Get involved, whether it be a Housing Authority, a public-private partnership, and move into the communities because right below the level that we see every day, it is like a nice corn field with dirt and crops. It is very broad but very thin. A good wind would blow it away. And I have talked to people in my family who are in the education business in particular. There are a lot of kids out there, a lot of people who are struggling. It just doesn't compute that a guy and a gal working and making \$20-\$30,000 each. You know they are not all from New York and making \$100-\$200,000 or \$300,000. They can't buy a house. They can't afford a house. And their kids struggle and they struggle. Housing projects around Ulster County would be the greatest and the easiest job creation opportunities right now. The skill labor is here. You can't outsource it because it is done right here with the bulldozer operators, the carpenters, the brick layers, and everybody else. Senior housing offers jobs for the health care industry. Those jobs would manufacture themselves. I do not think anyone of us can deny that the communities out there, out here, redline housing by what they think are folks that are successful or their appearance through job applications. Read that report and you will find out how serious it really is.

The other thing I want to talk about is folks like first responders, in particular rescue squad folks. I know [gesturing to Legislator Briggs] Tom, you are big into this stuff. You know these guys are all the locals. They are the locals that go out there and save lives seven days a week. They live in our community. They spend their sales taxes here seven days a week. And they shop locally, not just on weekends.

Those folks have more continuing education requirements than any of us here [gesturing to the legislative body]. And most professionals don't have the continuing education requirements that they do. And yet, they have to go raise money through bake sales. Sometimes they have to go on rescue missions where they don't have the necessary medicine or equipment.

And I am thinking about one right now, that I probably can't say, Nalaoxydone, or something like that. It can save the life of a heroin addict, if they have it. And I was doing some research the other day folks. If you are wondering about where the epidemics are, and where the problems are, and how the best of intentions can go astray. A tab of heroin costs \$5; easy to get. Can't buy cigarettes anymore – you need seven ID's, fingerprinted, and giving you an eye scan. But they can go out and get that. One mistake, one mistake by somebody and they might be addicted for life. So one of the things I want to work on is maybe figuring out a way in the budget [gesturing to Ways and Means Chairman Gerentine] to establish a dedicated funding for our police departments and our EMTs to get the necessary equipment that they need.

Equipment and medicines. And one more thing, that I did talk to our Sheriff about was the possibility, through negotiations, where his officers, the people on the street, would become paramedics, EMTs, whatever you call them. They'd have to be paid for it, obviously. But just like the paramedics or the EMS people. Our population, one-third of our population, is sixty-three (63) or over, folks. And not only that, they are getting older. There is going to be more of this [holding hand over heart], "I can't get up." And somebody better be around to do it. And if the Sheriff's Department, if the staff, are willing to do it or it's part of the job, and we have to pay for it, so what. Everybody says, "Let's go to Albany and get more money from them." Maybe sometimes we have to step up to the plate ourselves.

Just in finishing up, Rich. People talk about shovel ready stuff and I am aware of that. You know up in the mountains we made some arrangements, and some accommodations, and some negotiations, and had two opportunities to build sewer districts up by us. One in Boiceville and one in Phoenicia. The one in Phoenicia failed, was voted down. \$20 million, we don't want it. The one in Boiceville, \$12 million, passed 86-16. Now, just think about what it would pass 86-16. The wind's the same. It's people who understand it's a public health issue, it's a clean water issue. And right now, I have been chatting with the DEC folks, and the Watershed Commission folks, and they are doing some tests in Shokan for the same reasons to possibility build a sewer treatment facility in Shokan.

So I would just like to say this, the things we are talking about right now, we are all going to be judged on it by society. Society is going to judge us on how we take care of those folks who went before us and what we offer through jobs and housing and medical care, what we do to make sure the people following us have the same life opportunities that we did.

We have to re-invest in our seniors, invest in our youth and I think there is a lot of public-private partnerships that can be done. I would like to say one more thing that I think could put it all in perspective.

You know, when I was a kid there was three (3) things you never bet against: Joe Lewis, Notre Dame and the NY Yankees. You know the NY Yankees were having problems but they always won. Notre Dame got in trouble. They weren't winning anymore. And the subway alumni was upset. Francis Cardinal Spellman was upset. Pope Pius was upset. Got to have a winner at Notre Dame. So the Monsignor out there at Notre Dame called in the very successful coach, by the name of Ara Parseghian, and he interviewed him. He was taking notes. Ara Parseghian was asking a lot of questions right. But Monsignor was writing and stopping and looking up. Ara Parseghian asked, "Are you having trouble spelling Parseghian?" He said, "No, not at all. The only problem I am having is Presbyterian."

Well, I think we tried to get past the Presbyterian part a little bit this year. We know to stop putting too much emphasis on labels and try to work with whoever we think is going to do the right job.

Thanks a lot.