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**CHAIRMAN**  
**ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE**

**CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS**

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In Ireland, the County you're from is the most important geographic identifying mark of who you are. From County Donegal to County Cork each has its Hurling Team and each citizen knows their team members.

I am from County Ulster and proud to have Ulster County, New York to be one of my most important identifying marks and we need to work towards others to think the same.

## TEAM ULSTER COUNTY

As we begin this new Legislative Session, let's embrace an atmosphere of team Ulster County among our caucuses and with all elected officials. Collectively, with our combined intelligence and experience, we have a far better chance of creating a better Ulster County, than any one of us would individually. We will have differences in opinion and approach, but we must listen to each other and be willing to change our position when presented with new information and ideas. We must let go of the small differences for the greater good.

We have a unique opportunity before us that I have not seen prior. We have a new Comptroller that understands the need to be our partner and to help us with our fiduciary responsibilities, we have a new Executive, we have a set of new Legislators with skills that are impressive by any standard, and we have the wealth of knowledge and experience of our returning members that can make this session of the Legislature a truly exciting time for us and our County.

It wasn't long ago that my friend John Parete stood before this body and used a tailor's tape as an analogy of our life line, acknowledging that his tape isn't as long as it used to be. I can use that same analogy for myself. I have little time for the politics, petty bickering, personal agendas and highlighting our differences. I can't afford it, we can't afford it, Ulster County can't afford it. We have too many issues we must address for the good of our constituents and our future.

## HOUSING

We are facing a housing crisis that stretches across many demographics; lower income, working middle class, seniors, and empty nesters looking to downsize. We have had out-of-area corporations buying up apartment complexes only to increase rents as much as 50% because the market will bear it. They have no ties to our communities and have little empathy for what their greed brings.

This beautiful place, where the Hudson River meets the Catskills, loses its attractiveness when housing needs can't be met at an affordable price. It makes it difficult to attract development, create jobs, and provide our children and grandchildren the chance to raise their families here.

Our Economic Development Committee will be addressing this issue over the next several months keep in mind:

1. The culture of the towns need to be changed to embrace affordable and workforce housing. Let's look into if we can establish incentives without stepping on local rule.
2. We should examine the use of a Land Bank for pulling out tax sale properties where added housing may be an option. We may offer tax sale properties to organizations like Youth Build or Habitat for

Humanity to create more workforce homeownership. Each rehabilitated a home within a block of my home. The homes were sold without down payment with the help of a local bank to local blue collar working mothers that demonstrated their ability to pay the mortgage. Both properties have been well kept and enhanced by the proud owners over the past several years.

3. We need to rethink the IDA's charge and policies to give them an ability to help increase the housing stock and bring more livable wages to Ulster County while keeping in mind that pilots or other incentives must not be welfare to the wealthy, but function to truly address our needs.

4. Although we all know there is a housing problem, first we need concise information to understand the true nature of this crisis so we can create policies and incentives that increase our housing stock.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

The Criminal Justice Reform Task Force has been created and will begin its work to help us explore policies and procedures. The task force of Legislators, the DA, Public Defender, Sheriff, and other stake holders will address implementing bail reform laws, the shrinking use of our jail, pretrial services, including help with court appearance, and how we may create restorative justice policies and programs to reinvent our criminal justice model.

If closing a pod at the Jail becomes a reality we must intelligently repurpose the space to ensure flexibility, and availability to surrounding counties should they decide they would be better off boarding inmates in our facility. If staff reduction is called for it must be done through attrition and incentives

## OPIOIDS

Almost six years ago, John Parete created a task force to study the depth of the opioid crisis and to recommend actions we could take. As a result, we understand the problem in a more comprehensive way. NARCAN kits were put in every emergency responder's tool box and kits are placed in all county owned building. Despite the fact that I and other members of this body have been trained to administer a dose to save a life, I am confident saying that most members of this body continue to be affected by the suffering or loss of a friend or family member from opioids.

The County Executive has made it a priority to reduce overdose deaths by one half. To lend to that goal our Legislative Programs Committee helped SUNY Ulster create a new opioid educational poster program in our high school art classes with the winning poster to be tagged on one of our UCAT busses. The involvement of these young adult artists in this creative awareness program without expanding on an overburdened curriculum in High Schools is a win we need to duplicate wherever possible.

## Solid Waste

Last year the Legislature voted unanimously to establish a Solid Waste Planning Commission, the first of its kind. The commission that included membership representing the Legislature and the UCRRRA worked to review and create a draft Local Solid Waste Management Plan will soon be in the hands of the NYSDEC and then back for legislative approval. A commitment to implement the plan to invest in our sustainable future will require political courage and financial capital.

We have made great strides at expanding efforts to reduce, reuse and recycle, but our practice of shipping the remaining waste to the present site will run its course within the next five years. The issue is quickly moving towards a crisis and we need a solution by the end of this term. This may be our most difficult task this Legislative Session.

#### Legislative Organization & Budgets

This past year the Ways & Means Committee has been working on the creation of a financial team by developing relevant reports and conducting in-depth analyses to better control the costs of county government. In the coming months, we will work with the Executive and Comptroller to move to a more data driven decision-making process including performance based requirements. We owe our constituents a transparent and tax-payer friendly spending plan that requires mission statements, service delivery goals, objectives, and performance measures at the program level.

This year we will continue to upgrade our Ethics Law to create a more inclusive appointment process that will in turn create more trust in that board. Rather than making it a territorial issue, the new Executive has embraced the need for change. The Laws & Rules Committee will soon complete this as well as review, evaluate, and improve on a Code of Conduct for the Legislature. Our Code may be similar to those of other organizations but there is a unique challenge when understanding and recognizing the nature and power of elective office. Regardless, we must be held to a higher standard for our conduct both in the Legislature and within our communities.

Last year we ran out of time addressing the reduction of the Legislature to 21 members. This is a common-sense size that doesn't change the workings or nature of the body, but empowers it within the model of checks and balances. Let us move this forward for implementation with the new census data so it can be completed with the next redistricting.

#### COUNTY ULSTER

We are from County Ulster and the only way we will be able to solve our many problems and build on our many successes is to work as a team and to trust that each of us has the County's best interest at heart.

I know that you all join me in the pride and privilege of having Ulster County, New York being one of your most important identifying marks.