



DONALD J. GREGORIUS
MAJORITY LEADER
ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE

MAJORITY PLATFORM ADDRESS

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Christopher Allen

Peter M Loughran

Lynn Archer

John R. Parete, Chairman

Tracey A. Bartels

Richard A. Parete

Thomas J. Briggs, Majority Whip

Jeanette Provenzano

David B. Donaldson, Vice Chairman

Hector S. Rodriguez

Manna Jo Greene

Kenneth Wishnick

Legislative Majority Report 2014

Donald Gregorius Ulster County Legislature 3/18/2014

Mr. Chairman, Fellow Legislators, Members of the Press, and respectfully, everyone else that has taken their time to be with us tonight -

Good evening –

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you objectives and goals from the Legislative Majority, and a brief look at pertinent issues impacting Ulster County.

The Democratic Majority is functioning well, even though we started this session with some controversy. This is an unusual situation, and we have been diligent in finding a way to work together for the betterment of the people of Ulster County. In this process we have found common ground and are building on that.

The Legislature is moving ahead with full Committees passing Resolutions and meeting on a regular basis. Discussions and debates are lively and producing results. The meetings I have attended, in addition to my own, show a concerned Legislature that takes our responsibilities seriously and works well in a Bipartisan manner.

As the Majority we have a talented and diverse group of Legislators that are goal oriented and committed to issues in their Districts and Ulster County.

Recently it became known that Ulster County was to be included in a “New Capacity Zone” as determined by The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. Legislator Manna Jo Greene attended an informational meeting presented by Rochester Town Supervisor and President of the Ulster County Supervisors Association Carl Chipman, and Rosendale Town Board member Jen Metzger regarding the proposed New Capacity Zone for electric rates. This new zone will have serious impacts in significantly raising electric rates for all of Ulster County. Legislator Greene and Chair of the Energy and Environment Committee Tracey

Bartels, created a Resolution that passed in Committee, and with the help of Rich Parete , Chair of the Laws and Rules Committee, moved it forward for a vote at our February Monthly Meeting. Thanks to all the Legislators in each Committee for quick and important votes. The Resolution (**Urging The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission To Postpone Indefinitely Its Order Issued August 13, 2013, And Halt The Creation Of The New Capacity Zone**) was time sensitive to reach the NYS Public Service Commission for their own important vote. The Resolution passed unanimously and was sent to the Public Service Commission.

This is just one example of how the Legislature is working together with other elected officials and the public for the betterment of Ulster County.

As the Majority we are creating an Agenda that will be added to, enhanced, examined, and amended as the session moves forward.

I believe it is fair to say Economic Development is high on most Government Agendas. We need jobs, and the Economic Development that provides them, without negative impacts to the Communities where they locate.

As a Legislature we need to advocate for a business climate that encourages job growth. With that in mind, The Daily Freeman had an article in their February 9th 2014 edition titled "Ulster County leads State in job growth". The article states "Ulster County had the strongest job growth rate in the Hudson Valley Catskills region from January 2013 to January 2014 as well as the best rate among all 14 of the states metropolitan statistical areas". While ratings and numbers can fluctuate it shows that we are moving forward and producing positive results. We need to examine the basis of this success and build on it for the future.

A common concern in our Agenda, as moved forward by Legislator Lynn Archer, is the need for development of Broad Band Internet Service for all of Ulster County.

It is difficult for people and businesses to succeed in an online world with inferior access to the internet. We need to find a way to encourage companies to invest in Ulster County and provide countywide Broad Band Service.

This will take imagination and persistence. Additionally, we will need to be creative in developing incentives for providers to supply this much needed service.

We also need to make sure the S.T.R.I.V.E. project gets completed and provides educational opportunities for students that may not have had them before. A college education is virtually mandatory in a competitive world. We are fortunate to have two quality Colleges, SUNY New Paltz and SUNY Ulster, right here in Ulster County. A while back we did a quick Survey of how many Legislators were students at UCCC now known as SUNY Ulster. The results were gratifying as many replied yes. I was among the yes responders and I believe SUNY Ulster helped me continue my education and move on to graduate from a 4 year college. I, and a substantial number of alumni are grateful for our educations and the part SUNY Ulster has played in the successes we have in our collective careers.

In addition to providing quality educations to those that may not have other advanced educational opportunities, a vacant Kingston school building will be repurposed to an educational center for SUNY Ulster. This also creates an educational Hub in the center of Kingston. The relocation of current services by SUNY Ulster to the newly refurbished site creates an opportunity to consolidate County Departments and put buildings back on the tax rolls. This is a triple win for- the City of Kingston, SUNY Ulster, and Ulster County. I want to thank Ulster County Executive Mike Hein for bringing this concept forward and moving it toward completion.

Another important initiative brought forward to the Legislature is the Patriot Project. This project is in response to needs faced by Veterans for temporary housing and medical services required for their successful reintegration into society, from military duty that compromised their physical and emotional health. It is our responsibility and privilege to provide the assistance they need in coping with post traumatic stress disorders and other medical and social issues.

Our Agenda also includes efforts to deal with unfunded mandates such as Safety Net. This has been controversial and a thorn for all of us. Tonight's Resolution # 82 brought forward by Legislator Jeanette Provenzano **(Calling On The Ulster**

County Senate and Assembly Delegation To Support The State Takeover Of The Safety Net Program) keeps alive our concerns for the people of Ulster County and continues the dialogue that surrounds this and the many other unfunded mandates passed on to the Counties as the State moves to balance its budget.

Speaking of Budgets – There is a new challenge to keep our finances healthy. We have recently been advised of a substantial loss in Sales Tax revenue for the months of December 2013 and January 2014. Compared to the same period a year ago the current sales tax is alarmingly lower.

This is due to the loss of the extra 1% that we have included in our Budgets for many years. We need to keep a watchful eye on our Fund Balance and measure carefully the impact of unbudgeted large expenses, including any new unfunded mandates and County programs.

The Catskill Mountain Rail Trail is another opportunity for Tourism and Economic Development. We need to make sure the process moves forward and the entire Rail Trail completed and functioning. We recognize and understand that there are issues with the Catskill Mountain Railroad, and we hope a solution that works both for the County and the Railroad can be found.

The Resource Recovery Agency is an autonomous entity and an important part of Ulster County Government. We understand their autonomy and it is important that they remain independent in their operations and decisions. It is also important that Legislators have the ability to comment and ask questions at meetings. Dialogue and discussion can lead to new opportunities, and I encourage the inclusion of all opinions and ideas.

Regarding the RRA, it is gratifying they have a fund balance for 2013 instead of a net service fee. It is clear to me that the reason for the substantial difference in the financial outcome for 2013 is due to the passage of the Ulster County Flow Control Law. This was a Bipartisan effort in the Legislature, and from my point of view - an excellent example of working together for the benefit of the public.

Another Agenda item, brought forward by Legislator Ken Wishnick, is to explore a “Multi- County” solution to increase the efficacy of recycling and managing waste.

This may enable us to seek a Multi-County bid for landfill disposal fees and examine possible economies of scale for recycling.

Recently the Fire Advisory Board has presented a comprehensive proposal for an integrated communications system. It is clear that the existing system is problematic and will cause serious consequences if unaddressed. The price for the proposed system is a major financial commitment and the participation of local Fire Districts must be confirmed. I believe we should have a special committee established to examine the issues contained in the proposal and the associated costs.

We have talked about Leadership meetings with the County Executive and I agree it should be included in our Agenda for 2014. There are many issues to discuss, and communication is essential to finding solutions. Some if not many of these Agenda issues will need the approval of the Executive. It makes sense to have his office be informed regarding the development of ideas and how they can be implemented.

Health Insurance is a significant part of local government Budgets. There may or may not be advantages for municipalities to combine with Ulster County for Health Insurance. We should explore the possibility of reducing costs by pooling our Health insurance with local governments. This would be on an "opt in" basis and each municipality would decide for themselves.

This presentation covers a variety of issues but does not include everything we are working on. I can say with certainty that all of the Majority Legislators are taking an active and substantial role in our Committees. The Democratic Caucus looks forward to continue providing leadership and working for the best interests for the people of Ulster County.

Thank you