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ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE



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MARCH 18, 2014

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Craig V. Lopez

2. Golden Hill – The Legislature and Executive worked long and hard in a bipartisan and cooperative manner to provide a “compassionate alternative to closure” of our County run nursing home. After looking for many years at a plethora of options, the Legislature transferred Golden Hill Healthcare Center to a Local Development Corporation. While this decision was a contentious one, after the transfer was complete Legislators on both sides of the aisle who were once on opposing sides of the decision rolled up their sleeves and worked not only to free the county from its funding burden, but to protect the residents of the facility and continue the legacy of compassionate care that Golden Hill had been known for. For their hard work and dedication to both the residents of Golden Hill and County taxpayers I would at this time like to recognize Legislators Richard Gerentine and Jeanette Provenzano for their leadership and hard work in this effort.
3. Charter Revision – This past term the Ulster County Legislature went through our first Charter revision process. The Charter Revision Commission worked for months to generate their report, recommending revisions to our founding document, which is still in its infancy. After receiving this report the members of the legislature and specifically the Laws and Rules Committee began to do our due diligence. We recommended many changes to the full body. The most important of which, I believe, was the change in the appointment of the Ulster County Board of Ethics. Previous to our alteration, the members of the Ethics Board served at the pleasure of the County Executive. It is NEVER a good idea to have any Ethics Board serve at the pleasure of one person or one body, and therefore we gave the Ethics Board members a set term. Today, tomorrow and for all of Ulster County’s tomorrows, ethics will be protected. For this I would like to commend Legislator Kevin Roberts and Vice Chairman Dave Donaldson.
4. The fourth and final bipartisan achievement I would like to highlight is less exciting, but does not nearly lack importance of mention. In 2012-2013, the Ulster County Legislature completely re-wrote the rules we operate under. For years we had been conducting our business more on precedent and reaction than with a proper set of written by-laws to follow. After much thought, consideration, discussion, compromise, and yes, bipartisanship, we have a set of rules that we can clearly follow, that is fair to the Minority without trampling on the rights of the Majority and which, above all else, puts an emphasis on the committee work that is the backbone of a functional legislature. For this I would like to give special consideration to Legislative Counsel Erica Guerin, and Chris Ragucci for all their hard work and dedication during that arduous, yet successful process.

enacted the Charter for Ulster County, they envisioned a government where the Legislature would have the power to hold the Executive and other branches accountable and vice versa. Again, I would like to clarify that I am not speaking about individual people or personalities, but offices themselves. When thinking about a founding document it is healthy, and I dare say necessary, to think only of the office and not the individuals serving. When considering increases or decreases to powers and duties of a branch of government, envision the worst possible individual in that office and then decide if it is a power that you would be comfortable with them having. That having been said, I call on all my fellow Legislators regardless of your party affiliation, when you believe an Elected Official has overstepped his or her authority, vote your conscience, and not simply what is politically or personally expedient. The drafters of the Charter and the people of Ulster County are counting on you.

4. Economic Development – The Nevele project in Wawarsing is the best hope for that economically depressed area of our County. The Nevele Hotel as it stands is a constant reminder of the hay-day the region saw, and also how fast the fall from grace occurred. Wawarsing boasts the highest unemployment rate in Ulster County, as well as the highest recent increase in social services consumption. We now have an opportunity that may change all of that. The Constitutional amendment to allow for full scale casino gaming passed with flying colors last November and we don't have a moment to lose! The siting process begins this summer for the first 3 casinos, and the Catskill region (our Region) has a possibility of 2 in the first wave. In addition to all of the obvious benefits of a casino at the Nevele, there are a number of ancillary benefits as well. It would be a boost to the Community College where we would site our County's first hospitality college. We would have a huge new income generator in the County, providing the possibility of millions of dollars in new sales tax generation, and our County would be the beneficiary of a great deal of school tax relief from the State as well! I pledge my whole support and the support of my entire caucus to help to make the dream of the Nevele a reality. It is my hope that all of my colleagues will stand together with Legislator Craig Lopez and Majority Whip TJ Briggs who have led the charge for this important project.

I know it may sound cliché, but I truly believe we are all here to do the same thing: to serve the residents of our districts and the people of Ulster County to the best of our ability. We may have different ways to get there but the destination remains the same.