MARY BETH MAIO
MAJORITY LEADER
ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE

MAJORTIY LEADER'S ADDRESS

March 15, 2015

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Kenneth J. Ronk, Jr., Chairman

Mary Wawro

Chairman, Friends and Colleagues,

Having heard the Chairman's and the Executive's vision for 2016, I am excited to be your Majority Leader at a time of great potential and opportunity. I feel blessed to be part of the growing success of Ulster County as we continue to fulfill our role – helping people, protecting the public, building the economy and ensuring that Ulster County is a great place to live, work and flourish.

A key asset at the disposal of the Legislature in carrying out our role is the collective wisdom of our members. Looking at my colleagues in the Republican caucus, the diversity of talent is quite impressive. We have expertise in: technology and communication, finance and planning, public works and construction, law enforcement and economic development, farming and education. We have members who work with the very young and then we have others who work with the seniors. We have some who run small businesses and others who oversee billion dollar projects. Equal in value to our vast experience is our mutual respect and comradery. Even when we don't agree we listen and learn and often find solutions that are better than anyone would have first considered.

As I look across the aisle, I see similar experience and talent. Working together is imperative. I support Chairman Ronk's efforts to appoint the best people to standing committees and advisory committees regardless of party affiliation in many cases. We should not worry about standing as Republican or Democrat but as the representatives of our community doing what is best for our families, neighbors, children, seniors….for all!

What are some goals to keep in view as we work through this legislative year?

First, I applaud the creation of the Government Efficiency and Review Committee. One of the stated functions of that committee is "To review past enactments including local laws and policies of the Legislature for efficacy, impact on county residents, and the presence or non-presence of enforcement." Legislation can feel good, but enforcing such at times seems to be the challenge. It is important that we look back to ensure our resolutions and local laws are working as we envisioned, still relevant, and have no unintended consequences we need to address.

Second, but just as important, is remaining vigilant in the area of capital project oversight. We need to be more proactive with our oversight of some larger projects. Previous Legislatures passed resolutions to establish a "clear, transparent and consistent process for the management of capital projects". Far too often the first time we see what is happening on some capital project is when it is at a critical stage and needs our immediate action. So far, we have been fortunate but with some recent projects like STRIVE, we were asked to approve several LATE resolutions involving thousands of dollars with sometimes only a few minutes to consider. We don't need to micromanage every capital project but we should have more oversight of projects that are of great public interest or over a certain dollar amount.

For example: With the passage of Resolution No. 488 last year, the Legislature adopted a policy for proposed uses of the U&D Corridor. We need to follow through to ensure that the cooperation and hard work of the U&D Corridor committee and various dedicated stakeholders can develop into a working relationship that guarantees this valuable asset is developed responsibly.

On that important note, I respectfully propose the Chairman create an oversight committee to monitor the future of the U&D Corridor. Clearly plans are well underway to spend millions of dollars on a capital project to build a trail across the Ashokan Reservoir. The RFP required in Resolution No. 488 for all future rail road operations is on track (if you'll pardon the pun) to go out at the end of March – yet to date, the RFP has not been shared with us. After all the hard work of the U&D Corridor Advisory Committee we need to be part of the process to develop this public asset before it comes to us for a vote.

We need to ensure the continued benefits of rail road events to businesses in uptown Kingston as well as expanding trail use throughout the corridor. It is important that the development of this asset is open and transparent. As a former colleague once said "You don't get what you expect, you get what you inspect".

Third and finally, we must renew interest in promoting more transparency in county government. To that end, I will bring forward a county policy to post all public notices and legal notices on our county web site. This is a cost effective way use an existing resource to reach the public with these important notices and I'm hoping this will

encourage increased feedback and public participation at public hearings.

In closing, I want to congratulate Chairman Ronk on the positive tone he is setting for this body. Our caucus agrees with the Chairman that economic development needs to be a priority. Today's groundbreaking technologies can happen anywhere a company has access to the internet, transportation and a motivated workforce. More and more entrepreneurs are looking at quality of life issues as they relocate and develop their business plan and Ulster County has it all. We have easy access to transportation, including three exits on the NYS Thruway, award winning schools and universities, and we are truly a four season destination. Ulster County is the county to be reckoned with but it doesn't happen by one hand and it doesn't happen overnight.

Let's face these challenging times together, because I believe from the bottom of my heart, that with all our strength, resources, capabilities, intelligence, wisdom and experience, we will not just overcome these challenges, but we will, indeed, thrive and have the best year yet.