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MINORITY LEADER
ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE

MINORITY LEADER'S ADDRESS

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James H. Delaune

John R. Parete

Thank you Mr. Chair, Madame Majority Leader, Mr. Majority & Minority Whip. Mr. Chair, I want to thank you for this opportunity to share the views of the Democratic Caucus. On a personal note: you and I have had the pleasure of serving together in our 20s and now together in our 30s. In many ways you and I grew up in this room, this legislature. It's my hope that shared history will yield a bi-partisan vision that helps all the people of Ulster County.

The Democratic Caucus has always been the party of action, of ideas, of passion. I mean this as no offense to the other side of the aisle, but you know the Democrats will debate any point, anywhere, at anytime. We are so passionate we sometimes debate ourselves.

We are blessed with three new members in our caucus, Legislator Heppner of the "fighting" 23rd District, Legislator Delaune of the 17th District in New Paltz/Esopus and Legislator Berky of the 7th District in Kingston. Each brings valuable skills to this legislature and they have each already made impacts to this body. It's good, because each new legislator has big shoes to fill. They join a veteran caucus that includes former Chairs Donaldson and Parete, Legislators Loughran, Briggs, Bartels, Allen, Greene to create a mix of "old & new".

I want to take a brief moment to thank our County Executive Michael Hein. You might find that odd, given that we have not gotten along too well these past few months, but we often forget how well County Government runs day-to-day. Much of that credit goes to Mike. He might not always get it right, but he gets it right more often than not. It's a better track record than most.

That said this will be a year of challenge in our relationship with the Executive. This legislature has been through the crucible of the past few years. For the first time in our history, we have more legislators first elected post-Charter, than pre-Charter. Quite literally, the old rules no longer apply. While veteran legislators can remember governing in the old regime, our newer members are not bound by the old ways of doing business. There is a new energy in this room and the Executive will have to be prepared to deal with a legislature willing to assert itself and its policies.

The saying goes "You need to know where you've been before you know where you're going". Before tonight's speech, I requested copies of the Majority and Minority addresses for the past 6 years 2010-2015. You'll notice the pattern- we often talk about economic development, of fiscal discipline and reform. This is not to say that we don't do these things or that these issues can be solved in a single year or a single legislative term, however we need to do more than talk about issues. We need action. To this end, the Democratic Caucus presents one of our most ambitious agendas to date. We may have built a "better government at a better price", we may have "changed the face of government" through the charter process, but this time our caucus proposes to take a firm hand in guiding our government.

Paid Family Leave

For far too long, parents and families have made the hard choices to take care of loved ones and being at work. I do not need to explain to the mothers and fathers in this room the need to spend time with children, especially newborns. Our caucus believes it's high time for Ulster County take the lead. Currently there are proposals at the State level for a 12 week paid family leave. If that measure does not pass this session in Albany, the Democratic Caucus has asked myself and Minority Whip Loughran to craft a local version.

Energy

First I'd like to congratulate the Executive for his work in proposing 4 megawatts of solar energy in our county. It's a solid 1st step. We are now seeing proposals for other solar energy installations throughout the county. However, there are some problems with companies putting harmful language in their contracts with local landowners that hurt local interests. Legislator Manna Jo Greene will be working with local farmers and other large landowners to ensure that private companies are helping our local landowners, not making land grabs that do not benefit Ulster County residents.

Legislator Bartels will be dusting off an oldie but goodie, using the Ulster County Law Enforcement Facility as a site for solar energy. Back in her first term in the legislature, Tracey authored a resolution to do just that. Flash forward 10 years later and it still has not been done. The Jail represents one of our best opportunities to incorporate solar directly into our operations- solar hot water could work there as well as solar electric. With its flat roof the Jail could be a shining example to both sustainability and economic sense.

Finally, Legislator Heppner will be working with Legislators Bartels and Berky on a resolution to close Indian Point. As the principal author of our old resolution, and co-sponsor with former Legislator Susan Zimet, I'm glad to see a new generation of leaders take on this important issue. We continue to find new problems with an old facility. If a nuclear facility can be shut down because of birds, you know you've got a problem.

Health Care

Legislator Chris Allen continues to be our caucus expert in the areas of health care. I remain impressed with his knowledge and ability to recall important details of our very own plan. So it makes sense that he will continue to be our point person on important proposals.

Ulster County realized significant savings by managing its own prescription drug and health care plans. Estimates at the time pegged this savings around \$5 million. Legislator Allen will be working to create a sub-committee to look into what options we have regarding our health care vendors and to look into which plans the county should look into. Now before someone screams "Operations", let me be clear, Chris will be looking at what we are currently getting out of our vendors and where we can do better. I'm sure everyone can support that.

Take Home Vehicles

An issue that continues to bear examination is the county policy on take home vehicles. This includes, but is not limited to, the Department of Public Works and the Sheriffs Dept. However, those are NOT the only 2 departments that follow this practice. While not pervasive, there are several departments that also have take-home vehicles. Legislators Briggs and Bartels will be taking the lead on an overall policy for take home vehicles.

Appointments process

Appointments are always understood to be somewhat political in nature- not necessarily partisan but political. Under Legislator Briggs, the then Economic Development Committee took the rare step to interview all

candidates equally, using standard questions. Chairman Ronk and Environmental Chair Parete used a similar process for most of the recent RRA appointments.

The Democratic Caucus supports the idea of interviewing all candidates equally; indeed, we think it should go further. Legislators Bartels, Berky and Greene will be working on a new policy to rank and score appointments in a similar fashion that we score RfPs. In addition they will be looking at how we advertise appointments to county boards and commissions. This could revolutionize how we view appointments and can provide the public with a better sense of why a candidate is appointed.

Finance

Tourism has always been one of the most important industries. When the county re-imposed the bed tax, we knew it to be a way to help our taxpayers. However, new technology and new ideas create new problems and new opportunities. Air BnB is one of the most successful of online housing options for visitors to our county. It is however, unregulated and creating an unfair market for our traditional hotels. We have asked Legislator Jon Heppner to take the lead on the Air BnB issue, to ensure that we restore balance in the market place and ensure the county receives this valuable revenue stream.

I would be remiss to not mention the issue of sales tax, probably the most polarizing issue facing this legislature in 2016. While our caucus has not taken a position on this issue, I will say with some confidence that the Democratic Caucus will not support any significant change to the agreement for 2016 or 2017. As we continue to work with the Towns and the City of Kingston on an equitable agreement that ALL parties can agree to, it is my hope we can find the proverbial “win-win” scenario.

Environment

I could probably dedicate 2 hours to this subject alone, but I won't bore you with details.

The Municipal Solid Waste Commission, which I co-chair with my friend Supervisor Chipman of the Town of Rochester, inches closer to completion. I cannot tell you how much I appreciate the work of my fellow commissioners, including Mr. Briggs, Ms. Bartels and Ms. Greene. We have before us a resolution tonight, to appoint new representatives from the RRA, the City of Kingston and our Legislative Chair, Mr. Ronk to our ranks. Our commission has logged numerous weeks travelling around the state to come up with what we view as the best short term and long term solutions to our solid waste issue. After our report is finalized, it will be sent to the RRA and the Legislature for action. It is my hope we will have the political will to see its findings through to fruition.

Part of our charge as legislators, is to protect the public health of our citizens. In bi-partisan fashion, Legislator Wawro and Bartels worked so diligently on the issue of Polystyrene, one of the most impressive pieces of legislation I've ever had the pleasure of voting for. I'm pleased this partnership has spawned a new piece of legislation, a proposal regarding so called “Toxic Toys”. It is my hope that this legislation, which other counties have also passed, makes its way to the floor in the coming months. I hope all legislators join us in making sure the word “Toxic” is never associated with the word “Toy” in this county ever again. Our children should never be placed in such obvious risk.

Housing

Former chair John Parete has been an advocate for housing, indeed housing of the less fortunate. So I am pleased to say he will be working on the possibility of an Ulster County Housing Authority. I look forward to his Government Reform committee's findings on the matter.

It is our hope that housing for all income groups is promoted. Exclusionary zoning hurts the appropriate growth in our communities. Our caucus of course respects home rule, but recognizes that municipalities have to become more receptive to housing for all income groups. So this coming term we will look for the county to renew the Ulster County Housing Strategies report. Issued 10 years ago by the Planning Department, our caucus hopes to work with the Executive and the Planning Department on updating this valuable tool.

Economic Development

As I previously mentioned, the subject of economic development get mentioned year after year in both Majority and Minority addresses. It is one of the few areas the legislature truly has equal footing with the executive and some might argue we have more tools within our purview.

Our caucus will do whatever is necessary to support the county's efforts in economic development, but to be clear; we will assert our role in this process. The new make-up of the Economic Development committee shows that we will be more assertive than in previous years. Legislator Berky previously served this county admirably as Deputy Planning Commissioner and Legislator Delaune previously managed the City of Newburgh Industrial Development Agency. Oddly Jim and I are the only two legislators I know of who can make the claim of having worked for an economic development agency.

As part of this new spirit, we will be asking more questions of the Executive. While we can support his initiatives to bring in so called "tech-prenuers" or a film studio, what will this mean for the bread and butter industries of Ulster County? What does this mean for business expansion? For infrastructure? Establishing the priorities for both the Executive and the Legislature as an EQUAL partnership must happen now, or we will encounter conflict that hurts our very efforts to improve people's lives. Our committee will be examining all of the tools available for economic development, whether it's our revolving loan fund, the shovel ready fund, the IDA, how we allocate CDBG or even our relationship to the UCEDA.

I want to take a moment to thank former Legislator Archer for keeping the issue of broadband access alive and well. At a recent meeting of the Supervisor's Association, Chairman Ronk and I received a clear and strong message from our partners- hold Time Warner Cable accountable. To that end the Democratic Caucus stands ready to work with the Executive to push for access for all- whether for the rural town or for affordable broadband for our poorest communities. However it needs to be noted, we also plan to take an active role in this process.

Closing

During my 12.5 years here, I have seen this legislature accomplish amazing things. During former Chairman Donaldson's tenure, we passed more local laws, cut government spending, tackled government corruption, finished a jail, and passed a charter form of government. That was just 4 years.

President John F. Kennedy often talked “vigor” in government. That’s exactly what is needed at this point and time for this Legislature. It is our choice to work together on these issues, our choice to assert ourselves as an equal branch of government, and our choice to either succeed or fail. You have just heard the agenda of the Democratic Caucus. That’s not to say that other issues won’t come to the fore during this session, but it will be a choice as to whether the Republican caucus chooses to join with us to make real changes for our citizens. And it will be the choice of the Executive if he chooses to meet this legislature as an equal partner. I guess the question shall be whether there is courage in this room to take the next step forward?

Thank you.