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MINORITY LEADER  
ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE**

**MINORITY LEADER'S ADDRESS**

**MARCH 20, 2018**

Lynn Archer

Lynn Eckert

Tracey Bartels

Manna Jo Greene

Julius Collins

Jonathan Heppner, Minority Whip

James Delaune

Kathy Nolan

David Donaldson

Laura Petit

Good evening Mr. Chair, Madame Majority Leader, our whips Mr. Lopez and Mr. Heppner. My fellow legislators, I stand here to deliver the Democratic Agenda for 2018. It is to date, our most ambitious agenda yet. I make no apologies for that as it has been this ambition that's transformed this government.

Whether it was a Green Fleet policy, our Broadband policy, or even the Ulster County Charter, there have been Democrats dreaming big and changing Ulster County. We have created tangible policies and lent our voice to national and state issues. That's not to say that we've accomplished all we set out to do. We have plenty of work ahead of us if we are to Protect our Environment, Grow our Communities Fairly, Reform Our Government, Create Healthy Communities and Make Ulster County Safer.

And work we shall. Already Democrats have brought forward proposals dealing with Plastic Bags, by Legislators Donaldson and Bartels; on Term Limits by Legislator Petit and newly independent Joseph Maloney and we will push to raise the age on cigarettes led by legislators Nolan and Bartels. There is also legislation to be introduced this year. I'll get to that in a min.

I would be remiss to not mention that the Democratic Caucus does more than just introduce policies and legislation. We have also come to bring our moral voice to bear on important issues. In the past year we've raised issues of civil rights, on protecting the Affordable Care Act, and protecting the undocumented. A local issue dealing with transgendered individuals, led directly to the Ulster County Human Rights Law, which I hope we pass this year.

Another local issue has come to the forefront. I sat this morning in a court room in Kingston. Don't worry, I wasn't under arrest. I was there to support a community activist, targeted by a local company that we as a legislature do business with. Callie Jayne, with Rise Up Kingston, was targeted by Seven21 Media at a Faso Friday protest. Ironically, we are being streamed by Ellenbogen Media, an affiliated company. I, for one, will be looking at who we as a legislature do business with going forward.

We will be challenged this year to use our voice on a host of issues. The aforementioned Human Rights Law, reported out by the citizen's committee last December, has yet to make it to the full legislature. A true compromise bill, it would protect previously unprotected individuals in this county and begin to put real teeth into the Human Rights Commission.

It is also my hope, working with all legislators, to restore memorializing resolutions for this body. It is hugely important for us to use our voice to help our constituents. I call upon this legislature to act on this next month. It's too important to wait any longer.

With all of that said, the Democratic Caucus has a host of issues to bring forward this year, items that will Protect our Environment, Grow our Communities Fairly, Create Healthy Communities, Reform Our Government and Make Ulster County Safer.

#### *Protect Our Environment*

Legislators Bartels and Donaldson are advancing legislation to deal with Plastic Bags. This legislature has a long history on this subject, starting with Gary Bischoff back in 2008-2009. I am confident a sensible and environmentally sustainable solution will be forthcoming from the Environmental Committee.

Our environmental conscious Legislator Greene, has perhaps the most ambitious policy of us all. Her program to get 100% of municipalities and 100 businesses to make solar or energy upgrades. This will take a total effort to implement but the environmental crisis we face requires it. I know Manna will also be looking at energy planning and as part of this effort.

My partner from New Paltz, Legislator Delaune will be pushing for a true farmland preservation partnership, bringing together government, non-profits and farmers. Just as was shown in the successful effort to preserve Talifarro Farm, Ulster County cannot continue to ignore the need to keep farms as active open spaces. It must be done in coordination with our Open Space Plan to target the most vulnerable farms, not just what's convenient. Farming is also still one of our economic engines.

#### *Grow Our Communities*

Legislators Archer, Delaune and I will continue to advocate for a fairer way to grow our communities. Linking the importance of wages to economic development benefits are important if we are to create real and sustainable growth for our citizens.

We note with concern the attitude of the IDA to induce any project that's "investing" in Ulster County. Giving tax breaks for projects that create little to no jobs, that create low wage jobs, and that do not incorporate sustainability is not economic development. That's called corporate welfare and we will fight that with every fiber of our being.

ALL economic development benefits must be linked back to jobs and wages. Otherwise we are just contributing to the growing income inequality happening all over this country. Plainly put, any business looking for tax breaks better be looking to provide Ulster County with real jobs, with real wages and do so in a way that minimizes harm to our environment.

Legislator Archer will continue where she left off, pushing the PSC, the administration and even Albany if need be, to ensure all of Ulster County has access to affordable broadband. Just as she did in her 1<sup>st</sup> term in this body, I expect her to bring accountability to this process.

Legislator Collins will be looking into the impacts of the Ellenville Million program to ensure all citizens are benefiting. I think there is no one better prepared than Rev Collins to evaluate whether this program has successfully reached all citizens of the village.

#### *Create Healthy Communities*

It was troubling when a recent article saw Ulster County's health ranking drop (the same article listed Rockland County as healthiest in the state). Some of this is out of our control, but there are some proposals that we think can help Ulster regain its status.

Our own medical doctor, Legislator Nolan, working with Legislator Bartels on raising the age on cigarette purchases to age 21. Studies show that limiting teens and pre-teens to cigarettes makes it less likely they will begin the habit.

#### *Reforming Our Government*

No issue is more important in government reform, than campaign finance reform and pay for play. Legislators Heppner, Nolan and Eckert will be working on this legislation and hopefully bring forward something our caucus can support. We can all agree that with elections in 2019 for legislature, executive and district attorney, how we proceed will be hugely important. On a personal note, it is my feeling a pay for play law must be of the highest priority.

Legislator Petit, working with Legislator Joseph Maloney, has introduced a term limit bill that we are willing to work on. While there is not agreement on 4 year terms, I think we can mostly agree that term limits are a goal we can work to make a reality. After our recent public hearing I think we should be looking at making changes, but still respect the intent behind this legislation.

Legislator Donaldson has reintroduced the Budget Modification resolution that failed by a single vote last year. While I believe he is open to compromise, I think addressing the issue has merit and we should pass a version this year.

### *Making Ulster County Safer*

Safer does not always mean law enforcement. We know from experience that is only one part of making residents of our county safer.

Legislator Petit will be bringing forward a contractor licensing law that will increase safety, but not be onerous to our contractors. I will bring forward an electrical licensing law modeled after that “socialist” government in Orange County, NY. I hope we can have a real conversation about consumer safety and protection, not just dollars and cents.

Our new appointees on Law Enforcement Dr. Eckert and Rev Collins, will be keeping a close look on the Sheriff’s Department. While the Sheriff is an independently elected official, we believe this legislature needs a stronger voice in setting policy in this area.

### *A new kind of Legislature*

I noted last year there were more post-Charter legislators than pre-Charter. We have now doubled that, as there are only 8 pre-Charter legislators remaining. That shows that our body truly has the people’s voice. It’s a changing voice in Ulster County. For the 1<sup>st</sup> time a caucus is made up of a majority of women (hint it’s the Democratic Caucus). We have 3 people of color serving in our legislature. The age difference is more representative of our county.

We are seeing more interest in the county legislature than ever before. That means there are higher expectations to deliver. Much of our agenda will take the full 2 years of this term, but that does not mean we won’t try to move quickly. There is energy now and a spirit of accountability in our body. The old answers don’t ring true anymore.

If we are to truly embrace our role as policy makers, this will inevitably mean conflict. Conflict is not bad in and of itself. I believe it's how we handle this conflict that will define us. It means we must not shy away from it, even if it means we end up on different sides of an issue. It is too important that we stand up the rights of this legislature. If we are in conflict with the Executive or the Sheriff or the Comptroller, so be it. We must, for the good of this body, be willing to set aside our differences and work towards solutions. This does not mean we abandon our values, and I believe this is perhaps the most progressive caucus I have ever had the pleasure of serving in, let alone lead. My friends, we must produce results in this term, we must build on the great history in this room. Many of you have heard me talk about the times back in 2006 to 2009 of all the local laws passed, issues debated, issues resolved. I say we have a chance to surpass that illustrious period if we work together.

As always, it is my honor to be your spokesman and an honor to be your friend. Thank you.