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CHAIRMAN
ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE

CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS

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Friends, Colleagues and Guests,

Good Evening! Thank you for the opportunity to continue to serve you, and the people of Ulster County as your Chairman. Over the last two years, we have accomplished so much for our shared constituents by working **with** each other, rather than against one another. Working with our Countywide elected officials, instead of trying to beat them to the punch or grab credit. Getting our disagreements out of the way in private thereby being able to better work for the people in public without excessive strife (apologies to my friends in the 4th estate).

We have eight new legislators who have joined us this year. Public servants of purpose with a vast diversity of background and experience. 2 small business owners, Legislators Archer and Maloney. A Professor, Legislator Eckert. A Pastor, Legislator Collins. A Purchasing Director, Legislator Woltman. A recycling expert, Legislator Petit. And last but certainly not least, a NY State Senate District Office Manager, Legislator Haynes. With talent like this, joining the talent of those of us returning, imagine what we can accomplish when we put our partisanship, pettiness and preconceptions aside, and work together to move Ulster County forward.

In fact, I have written down a few ideas that I have on exactly what we can accomplish.

1. **Term Limits:** Many of you who have been here in the past few years know that I believe very strongly in both term limits and a four year term for the office of County Legislator. I have sponsored it several times, and have always seemed to come up a few votes short. I am thrilled, however that a member of the 2018 freshman class, Legislator Joe Maloney has picked up the mantle and run with it once again.

Term limits themselves provide the potential to concentrate effort. If you know that you only have 12 years to accomplish your goals, to pass your resolutions, and to serve your constituents, it's likely that you would move more quickly, work harder and compromise more often, providing the best government for the group who matters most, the residents and taxpayers of Ulster County. Legislators who serve for many, many years can also become complacent, get into a routine, and become part of what many people would call "the system." Term limits would insert more

turnover into the legislature thereby minimizing these effects. Simply put, it has the potential to bring the best government to the people of Ulster County.

Now, to the four year term. In my experience, there is a learning curve for new Legislators. With a 329 million dollar budget, countless departments and divisions, an even more individual services that we provide, the County operation can be overwhelming at first glance. But just one year after getting elected, while you are still learning, still getting your bearings, you already have to run for reelection. In a two year term, you really only get one year of governing, because politics dominates the next year (sometimes even less depending on how political the Leaders behave). With a four year term, Legislators will be able to spend more time working for their constituents and less time trying to keep to their job, and the ones who benefit from that are the people we represent.

2. Going paperless: The time has come for us to end our reliance on huge paper packets twice a month for caucus and session, along with additional packets for our eight committees. For a County like ours, with our stellar commitment to the environment that has won us countless awards, and centerfold recognition in National Geographic, it seems absurd to continue overusing paper in this day and age. Nowadays the term "going paperless" almost borders on cliché, so let me share some rough numbers with you. One tree produces roughly 17 five hundred sheet reams of paper, which is a little more than a case and a half. We use an average of 3 cases of paper each month for caucus and session packets alone. When you add the average of 27 cases that we order for the office per year, the number rises to 63 cases per year, or 315,000 individual sheets, or the paper of more than 37 trees per year.

By eliminating the dissemination of resolutions to legislators in paper form, we have the ability to drastically reduce Ulster County's contribution to deforestation. That's why I am proud to say here this evening that tablets have been ordered for the Legislature and staff and should be arriving soon. By the end of this year, paper will no longer be used as the primary medium for us to look at resolutions and laws when we are in this building. We are also working with our great information services department to research software that will allow us to interact with resolutions on the tablets, take notes, track changes, and essentially do anything that you can do on a piece of paper. I know that change can be hard, and uncomfortable at times, in fact, I know my wife would tell you that I don't take change too well either, but we need

to do our part to continue moving Ulster County to a more sustainable future. We owe that to our children. In fact, I have taken the first step toward this tonight. You will notice that there are no printed copies of this speech tonight, there will not be, but it has already been posted online for all to see.

As the Lorax famously said in Dr. Seuss "I speak for the trees. I speak for the trees for the trees have no tongues." Folks, let us be like the Lorax.

3. GUSSWA: For decades the County Legislature has struggled with the issue of solid waste management. We all know that there is a problem with spending 55 dollars a ton to export our trash, but the right answer has eluded us. The time has come for action on this issue instead of countless meetings and commissions. More than a year ago, I invited the Chairmen of the Greene and Sullivan County Legislatures to my office to discuss a regional approach. GUS, the Greene Ulster Sullivan Solid Waste Authority. We had meetings, and even a trip to the best run Solid Waste Authority in the State, Oneida Herkimer. The UCRRA has taken the bull by the horns, and commissioned a feasibility study which will be ready for our review next month. Therefore, I am calling a Special Session of the Legislature on March 13th for the UCRRA to present the findings.

In short folks, assuming nothing else changes, GUS has the potential to save all three counties a combined 3 million dollars a year. In the golden age of consolidation and efficiency that we live in, this is an opportunity that should not be missed, overlooked or underappreciated. For all their hard work on this project, I want to recognize and sincerely thank former Chairman Fred Wadnola, and Executive Director Tim Rose. I look forward to working with them, and the 22 of you to make GUS a reality.

Over the last 2 years, we have really taken strides to define our role as a Legislative body. I have made it a personal mission of mine to shepherd us toward that goal. We have been making a more accountable government by holding the other Countywide elected officials accountable, and pushing back when necessary while not playing the role of Chicken Little. That is why I removed the Government Efficiency and Review Committee, and simply placed the review function in the other standing committees.

For example, it would be up to the Health Committee to ensure that our policy on Methadone is being adhered to, and if not, why, and should it be changed to reflect feasibility. That's what we should be doing as a body, and as long as I am allowed to lead it, that's what I intend to do.

I know that you probably tire of listening to me talk about working together, but in the communications and marketing field they often talk about the rule of seven, which means that the average person needs to hear the same message seven times before it sinks in, so here goes: Last year at my request, the Legislature passed a resolution creating a Human Rights Task Force. It was composed of volunteers from different areas and experiences. Maude Bruce from the NAACP in Ellenville, Jeff Rindler, Executive Director of the LGBTQ Community Center, Rabbi Yitzhak Hecht of the Chabad of Ulster County, Angelina Burroughs a transgender woman and transgender rights advocate, David Clegg Chairman of the Human Rights Commission, and Legislators Wawro and Heppner. I'm not exaggerating when I say that this task force was one of the most rewarding experiences in my 10 years as a Legislature. Working with diverse group of community members to draft a law on something as personal, emotional and controversial as Human Rights, and seeing them work **Together** was inspirational. It really showed me what can happen when people check their personal and ideological preconceptions at the door to work on something that would work for everyone. A law that fits Ulster County, not some cookie cutter solution from another County or Jurisdiction. I don't agree with everything in it, nor do I think that all the other task force members did either, but what did happen was we all compromised without compromising our beliefs.

Friends, that what I would like us all to do here. There is not a Republican or Democrat way to pave the roads (well, this time of year I guess it would be proper to say "plow the roads"), so let us not try to create one to score some cheap political points. Let us not devolve into the partisan cess pool that bubbles in Washington DC or Albany. Let us be different, let us work together because that's the only way that we will be able to make Ulster County the best place in the world to live work and raise a family.