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Ulster County Legislature

Minority Platform Address

March 11, 2009

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Richard Gerentine
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Kevin Roberts
Kenneth Ronk, Jr.
Catherine Terrizzi

Good evening ladies and gentlemen,

Mr. Chairman, Majority Leader Cahill and all my colleagues.

Welcome to the new form of government in Ulster County. This address may appear to be fragmented and I apologize for that. It is difficult to retrieve documents, notes and records when the Republican caucus does not have a place to call “our office.” I have attempted the best I could to write down notes on the back of recycled resolution packets, envelopes and paper towels. It seems the doors and closets have all had their locks changed. I guess the County Executive has a new profound definition of transparency, accountability, responsibility and integrity which I am struggling to accept.

But, getting back to my address: We, the Legislature, have an obligation to educate ourselves and our colleagues on the differences of how business is conducted on a daily basis and how the new Charter form of government affects the operations of our County departments and its residents. It is our duty to explain to the people of Ulster County we meet on the street everyday about this new form of government. We, as leaders, in the County have the responsibility to be sure that the Ulster County Government continues to provide the municipalities, as well as the great residents of this County with the services they need and have depended on throughout the years.

Despite what other branches of government say, it is our responsibility as Legislators to be transparent and available to all the people of Ulster County without being subjected to screening from one person or another. It is imperative that we continue to answer those e-mails as well as all of the phone calls we receive. WHY? Because we are YOUR Legislators working for all the people of Ulster County.

As Legislators, we need to take a stand and be proud of each and every vote we cast. We should no longer play partisan games. Last year we referred resolution 97, 98, 159 and 298 back to committee; all of these were ways of saving our taxpayers money.

Legislation on budgetary restraint, a gas tax cap and a super majority of tax increases. These are all valid ideas still floating around in some committee.

The resolution approved by this Legislature for a fuel oil co-op could have saved the taxpayers a substantial amount of money this past winter; we passed legislation September 11, 2007 for a car policy, which has yet to be enforced. Had the policy been implemented, we could have avoided purchasing vehicles. Just these two together—imagine the money that could have been saved for the people of Ulster now and in future years.

Things as simple as a Public Hearing on sex offenders passed in 2006 unanimously are now voted strictly on party lines no matter how important they are for the public.

Economic Development—The Legislature must continue to aggressively pursue this problem. This has plagued us for years. We have spent over a million dollars the last several years and yet have a net loss of jobs every one of those years. We, the Legislature, must come up with a plan. We cannot rely on others to add, start, retread old ideas and continue to throw our taxpayers money away on bad plans or NO plans.

We must realize that while the State constantly talks of consolidation, we have two people on the payroll making over \$200,000 combined, tripping over each other to attempt (once again) to solve our economic development woes. To reiterate, from the 2008 Minority Platform, I will stress, we need to develop and implement a plan for economic development and tourism NOW!!! Not TOMORROW, not for hundreds of thousands of dollars. While we are aware the Federal Government is dispersing Federal stimulus grants and the State is preparing for its fiscal uncertainty facing a budget deficit in excess of \$14 billion, Ulster County must be prepared to make drastic changes in light of the economic times we face.

I was glad to see the Legislature come together to stop the ridiculous \$600,000 bond for office renovations. More bi-partisan actions like that are needed. While the State is attempting to cut back on their personnel, we continue to keep hiring staff. Just look at the number of employees right here on the 6th Floor and their salaries.

As Legislators are you aware that for all of 2008 thru today we have 91 additional employees? The employee count is currently 2162—the highest in at least the last 10 years.

We, the Legislature, must lead by example and put an end to all the patronage positions the taxpayers can not afford. In these hard economic times, we cannot let a staff of seven (7) become 16.

We cannot let a Personnel Line go from \$500,000 to over \$1 million dollars. We can't continue to give two years pay raises to a position that hadn't started yet. We must stop or roll back the wasteful pay raises given retroactive to future employees. Are you also aware as Legislators that in 2008 there was only one position besides our psychiatrists that was paid over \$100,000? Currently we now have 16 people that get paid over \$100,000. We must work together toward a common goal on both sides of the aisle to eliminate this practice.

In these economic times as the residents of Ulster County are losing their homes and jobs (have you seen the recent unemployment rates for Ulster County?), it appears the train has left the station and we as a body must stop the runaway spending before we crash and burn.

As I have said in the past, the Republican caucus looks forward to working with each and every legislator in a bi-partisan way to help make Ulster County live up to its great potential. Though we don't agree on all things (it would be boring if we did), I feel that all the members of this particular legislative body are here working for the people of Ulster County to the best of their abilities. We are committed to formulating goals and to work cohesively toward reasonable solutions.

Now is the time for us to put aside our differences and realize we are the Ulster County Legislature and we can make a difference and we will. Thank You.