

2013 Chair's Address to the Legislature

Martha Robertson

January 15, 2013

There are many familiar cycles in county government: monthly meetings, quarterly reports, annual budgets. As we speak tonight, we're entering the final year of another cycle: our four-year legislative terms. So it seems a good time to look back as well as forward.

Since we started this legislative term in January 2010:

The **County Clerk's office** has naturalized 370 applicants for citizenship, coming from more than 30 countries of the world.

Our **Emergency Response Center** answered 121,192 calls. They dispatched a total of 174,355 incidents to agencies.

At the **Tompkins County Airport**, some 700,000 passengers came and went. These were the busiest three years in the airport's history.

Our **Complete Count Census Committee** helped the federal government count 101,564 Tompkins County residents, going over the 100,000 mark for the first time ever. Using those new numbers, **an independent commission** redrew our legislative districts, also for the first time ever.

We managed to find balanced budget solutions during the most challenging fiscal times in our memory, in part because we closed our **Certified Home Health Agency**. We've taken important steps to stabilize the financing for **TCAD** and **TCAT**.

We're now living with a tax cap but have yet to see meaningful mandate relief. Perhaps the biggest surprise of the last three years is that we are *not* living with hydrofracking – at least not yet.

On a more personal level, more of us get movie tickets with senior discounts, and Leslyn now puts Indira on Dave's school bus every day. Joe has created 571 powerpoint presentations even though he has taken four days off of work.

We are the same fifteen legislators who were sworn in three years ago, with no turnover during this term. We know each other pretty well by now.

Looking back there have been some difficult times and some tough decisions since 2010, but it's also been a productive time. We have one more year; what do we want to do with that time? What mark do we want to make?

Clearly we would like to make a mark on unemployment and its related problem, income inequality. Diversity and social justice are part of this persistent problem, in which national and state policies have sway over much of what happens here.

In November 2012 the unemployment rate in Tompkins County was 5.4%, or about 3,100 unemployed residents. Those numbers have been fairly stagnant for the last three years. Although the rate is well below today's statewide number of 7.9%, it's much higher than our typical unemployment rate and is simply not acceptable.

A key measure of income insecurity, the number of households here receiving food stamps has gone from 4,254 in January 2010 to 5,063 last October, a 19% increase. Again, these numbers are not acceptable.

In Tompkins County we tend to roll up our sleeves and ask what can we do? How can county government help create jobs? We have amazing assets in our county, including creative and entrepreneurial folks in the public and private sectors, our higher education community, and especially TCAD. It's time to give economic development, including workforce development, more of our attention and time as a legislature. Therefore I am appointing an **Economic Development Committee** as a standing committee this year.

The group should work closely with TCAD, Workforce Development, the Strategic Tourism Planning Board and all our tourism partners, and the Southern Tier Regional Economic Development Council. In addition I would like TC3 to report to the Economic Development Committee, to work more closely with us concerning their employment-related programs. I look forward to seeing innovative partnerships and ideas coming from this group.

We also want to make a mark on climate change, where unfortunately the pace of change seems to be accelerating. There is no more important legacy we will leave our children and grandchildren than a safer world. Unfortunately the task is daunting, but fortunately we have no shortage of ideas to explore that we could implement here in Tompkins County.

Therefore I am changing the focus of PDEQ and renaming it **Planning, Energy, and Environmental Quality**; with more time and more focused responsibilities, this will give sustainability an even higher priority that it's had in the past. Our Planning staff has done a remarkable job in creating the Cleaner Greener Southern Tier plan, identifying 18 goals and more than 65 action items for the short- and long-term. This plan will provide a basis for the committee's work; I've asked Ed Marx to give the full legislature an overview of the Cleaner Greener plan at one of our meetings in the near future.

Beyond all of this, we will rely on the PEEQ Committee, together with HHS, to keep us abreast of developments with respect to hydrofracking in New York. Our constituents expect us to continue our advocacy on this critical issue.

2013 STANDING COMMITTEES

With that explanation of the committee changes, let me go through the committee appointments.

Economic Development – Will Burbank (Chair), Mike Lane (Vice Chair), Jim Dennis, Carol Chock, and Frank Proto

Planning, Energy, & Environmental Quality – Carol Chock (Chair), Pam Mackesey (Vice Chair), Will Burbank, Dooley Kiefer, and Pat Pryor

Facilities and Infrastructure – Peter Stein (Chair), Dooley Kiefer (Vice Chair), Carol Chock, Pam Mackesey, and Dave McKenna

With Carol moving over to PEEQ, I've asked Peter to lead F&I. Long interested in highway projects especially, Peter will bring his inquisitive style and personal initiative to this important area of county government. F&I should continue with a number of ongoing projects. One emerging issue is the strategic planning effort by the Airport Services Board.

Public Safety – Brian Robison (Chair), Peter Stein (Vice Chair), Jim Dennis, Leslyn McBean-Clairborne, and Dave McKenna

Continuing with the musical chairs, Brian Robison will take over as chair of Public Safety this year. With his law enforcement background and his service as the committee's Vice Chair, Brian is well-poised for this slot. Issues this year will include changes to the Public Safety building, hiring a 911 center manager, and continued exploration of alternative models for providing law enforcement in Tompkins County. I would also like Public Safety to examine the issue of gun violence; beyond our gun buy-back day, what else can we do to make our community safer?

Budget, Capital and Personnel – Jim Dennis (Chair), Nathan Shinagawa (Vice Chair), Brian Robison, Kathy Luz Herrera, and Leslyn McBean-Clairborne

Jim Dennis has done a great job in leading our budget deliberations, and I'm fully expecting him to bring in another unanimous vote in 2013! I'm pleased that Leslyn will be on Budget this year, so we can see even greater focus on WDIC.

Government Operations – Pat Pryor (Chair), Mike Lane (Vice Chair), Dooley Kiefer, Pam Mackesey, and Peter Stein

Pat Pryor has done such a great job with the Broadband Committee that I was pleased she felt she has time to chair GO. A number of emerging issues will come to the committee this year, including evaluating our policies on contracts with respect to livable wages, diversity, and other issues.

Health and Human Services – Frank Proto (Chair), Kathy Luz Herrera (Vice Chair), Will Burbank, Nathan Shinagawa, and Pam Mackesey

I think HHS is Frank Proto's middle name. Aside from the usual vigilance about state and federal cuts, HHS should – together with the Public Safety Committee – also examine gun safety from a broad perspective. How can we improve access to mental health care? How can we work with the schools, perhaps the medical community or other partners, to foster a closer-knit community to reduce violence?

Workforce Diversity and Inclusion – Leslyn McBean-Clairborne (Chair), Kathy Luz Herrera, Nathan Shinagawa, and Pat Pryor

Working closely with Deputy County Administrator Paula Younger, Leslyn will continue the vital work of WDIC. We look forward to implementing recommendations from the Climate Survey and bringing the county's Diversity Plan in final form to every county department.

2013 SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Broadband – Pat Pryor (Chair), Dave McKenna (Vice Chair)

Just before coming here tonight I checked the news: still no announcement on the Governor's \$25 million grants for broadband access! We expect to hear any day now. The Committee's work this year will depend largely on whether our local application is successful.

Capital Plan Review Committee – Mike Lane (Chair), Martha Robertson (Vice Chair), Dooley Kiefer, and Frank Proto

Looking back on our last three years, I'm very pleased with the journey this committee has taken us on. We came into office in January 2010 with strident demands for more space for the court system in this building, and with no plan on how to make that happen. The Capital Plan Review Committee took on the complicated decisions about COFA relocation, a new home for the Legislature, moving the Old Library programs to more appropriate and functional spaces, and whether a center of government makes sense for us. The committee also led this body in revising our 20-year Capital Program. Finally, I'm happy to tell you, COFA moved today into beautiful new space in the Human Services Annex! The legislature will relocate this year as well, to the historic and elegant Old Courthouse.

Established as a temporary, “Special” committee, CPR's work is almost done. What remains is to make a decision on the future home of the Community Justice Center and what we want to do

with the Old Library site. My hope is that CPR can take the first half of 2013 and bring recommendations on these issues to the full legislature, and then retire. Mike Lane will lead us in that work, once again.

Charter Review Committee - Mike Lane (Chair), Dooley Kiefer (Vice Chair), Kathy Luz Herrera, Dave McKenna, and Peter Stein

Once the CPR committee concludes its work, this body will have the time to take on another temporary job, the task of reviewing our County Charter as we do every ten years. Using the experience of several who did this the last time around, the Charter Review Committee will be lead by Mike Lane. Among the issues they should consider are revised rules for electing legislative leadership with a 14-member body.

You have in your folders the Assignments and Responsibilities list. If you have any questions or suggestions, it's possible to adjust the assignments during the year. If you want to suggest a change, please talk with Joe and the relevant department heads and committee chairs.

These committee assignments will take effect as of February 1, so the January meetings and responsibilities will continue as they were in 2012 for a couple more weeks. After our meeting adjourns tonight, please stay around to work on the meeting schedule for the year. Cathy has placed a draft calendar in your red folders for us to start with.

Finally, I want to thank you for your confidence and support in my role as chair of this body. I deeply appreciate the opportunity to serve another year. You were all very generous with your time in meeting with Mike and me about our direction for 2013. My gratitude especially goes to Mike, for his partnership in developing this committee structure and assignments. I look forward to Mike's wise counsel throughout the year.

We have many challenges ahead of us in 2013 as we complete this legislative cycle. On behalf of our 101,000 constituents, let us work hard together, and as Peter says, always seek to learn something. Thank you very much.