



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Highlights of the **January 4, 2011** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

#### **Robertson Elected to Second Year as Legislature Chair; Kiefer Reelected Vice Chair**

The Legislature has reelected Martha Robertson (D) to lead the Legislature during 2011. The position of Chair is filled each year by a majority vote of the 15 members of the Legislature. The chair is responsible for overseeing all Legislative functions.

At the Legislature's 2011 organizational meeting, Robertson was nominated for chair by Legislator Peter Stein, who said Robertson works harder than anyone he has ever seen, moves toward goals with determination, and makes things happen. Stein said he sees Robertson as having the ideal blend of attributes to lead as what he sees as the first among equals—through knowledge, seeking consensus with a respect for disagreement, and keeping at the forefront the mission of serving the people the Legislature represents. Legislator Dooley Kiefer, who has served with Robertson as Vice Chair, praised Robertson's "boundless energy" and said she has served as "an excellent face for the County."

Legislator Kathy Luz Herrera nominated Legislator Leslyn McBean-Clairborne for Chair, praising her ongoing leadership throughout the community and in county government, including her past service as Vice Chair, leading with grace and by example. While expressing thanks for the recognition, McBean-Clairborne declined the nomination, saying her life does not afford her time to assume the position of Chair, which she said essentially demands full-time service.

Robertson was reelected Chair by a 13-2 vote, with Legislators Herrera and McBean-Clairborne dissenting.

In her third term on the Legislature, Chair Robertson has represented District 13 (Western part of the Town of Dryden) since 2002. Before election as Chair in 2010, Robertson chaired the Legislature's Public Safety Committee during 2009 and previously led the Health and Human Services Committee (2003-2005) and the Planning, Development and Environmental Quality Committee (2006-2008). Robertson chairs the Industrial Development Agency (IDA) and represents the Legislature on the Tompkins County Council of Governments.

Legislator Dooley Kiefer (D) was reelected Vice Chair, nominated by Legislator Mike Lane, who said Kiefer over the years "has shown what a legislator in Tompkins County needs to do, and does the work," has made her mark in protecting the environment, and is dedicated to good government. Legislator Herrera nominated McBean-Clairborne, as Vice Chair, once again praising her leadership and past service. Nine legislators voted for Kiefer; 6 for McBean-Clairborne.

Kiefer has represented District 10 (Village of Lansing and part of the Village of Cayuga Heights) on the Legislature since 1994. As well as serving as vice-chair, Kiefer's leadership responsibilities during 2010 included chairing the Legislature's Facilities and Infrastructure Committee.

Chair Robertson will announce 2011 committee assignments at the Legislature's next meeting January 18.  
*Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584; Vice Chair Dooley Kiefer, 257-7453.*

### **Chair Robertson Offers Thoughts to Governor Cuomo in Annual Legislature Message**

Looking back on 2010 and ahead to 2011 and stressing the codependent relationship between county and state government, Legislature Chair Martha Robertson in her annual address to the Legislature urged the State's new Governor, Andrew Cuomo, to rebuild the people's trust in government as promised; to respect and work with New York's counties as an arm of state government; and not to implement a property tax cap without meaningful mandate relief for local governments.

Reflecting on 2010, Robertson noted that the County's especially intense and difficult budget deliberations produced bipartisan compromise on a budget that requires more of municipalities and offers less to constituents, shrinking the County's employee roster by 3%, after a 2% decrease in 2009. "We have been responsible, deliberative, and responsive to our public," Robertson states. "But that will probably not get us through the next year, or two or three. We collectively shudder to contemplate what is next, specifically...the impact of new cuts and new restrictions from Albany." With counties an extension of state government and captive to decisions made in Albany, and especially the looming property tax cap, Robertson cautions that the County's internal local goals for the year ahead cannot be addressed without talking about actions at the state level. The Chair points to the models of Tompkins County's new municipal Health Insurance Consortium and county-wide assessment system as potential ways to save money, and asks that the State help remove barriers so that the County can make "green loans" to property owners. Robertson urges that the State permit counties to retain authority to set local taxing decisions within limits without requiring Albany's approval every year or two and not to "balance the state budget simply by shifting costs to us."

Concerning the property tax cap, Robertson notes that, while it's agreed that property taxes are too high, a simple property tax cap without mandate relief will leave in place inequities of the current system which relies on the regressive property tax, not on the ability to pay. The Chair urges that counties be invited to help address the critical question of what "mandate relief" would mean in the context of a property tax cap. "Because of these mandates—created, designed, and regulated in Albany—counties cannot control the majority of their budgets," Robertson states. With the New York State Association of Counties documenting that nine major mandates accounting for 90% of county property tax levies around the state, "a tax cap without mandate relief ignores the causes of high property taxes and is irresponsible and hurtful to the people of New York," she adds. Regarding the huge mandate of Medicaid, Robertson notes that of the states requiring counties to contribute to Medicaid, the per capita cost in New York is by far the largest—an average of \$368 per person compared to only \$27 in California, a situation she characterizes as a serious structural problem. Pointing out that Medicaid is expensive because all health care costs are high, Robertson urges that a New York State single-payer health insurance system be seriously considered, as a way to save the state billions of dollars a year.

Robertson thanks her fellow legislators for their support. "I pledge to do all I can to lead with renewed focus and energy," the Chair states. "There is plenty of talent, compassion, and smarts among us to address the challenges we face. Let us forge ahead together."

Chair Robertson's full address is posted online at

<http://www.tompkins-co.org/legislature/Chairs%20message.pdf>.

Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434 or 272-0584.

### **Public Hearing Scheduled on Proposed Road Preservation Law**

The Legislature, by a vote of 13-2, scheduled a public hearing on a proposed local law that would amend the County Code to regulate heavy commercial/industrial use of County highways to preserve local roads from damage from such temporary heavy use. (Legislators Jim Dennis and Frank Proto voted no.) The hearing will be held on February 1, 2011 beginning at 5:30 p.m. at Legislative Chambers of the County Courthouse, 320 N. Tioga Street, Ithaca.

The hearing was initially proposed for the Legislature's next meeting on January 18, but the decision was made to delay the hearing to allow additional time to inform commercial entities and other users who have expressed potential concern to learn more about the proposed law before a hearing is held. Legislator Pat Pryor, who

suggested the delay to February 1, said she senses the issue is just beginning to receive attention in the community and thinks the extra time could be beneficial to provide the information to address any anxiety that could exist. Legislator Proto, who also said more information should be provided before a hearing to address such concerns, had unsuccessfully suggested a delay until February 15, which failed by a 6-9 vote.

*Contact: Dooley Kiefer, Chair, Facilities and Infrastructure Committee, 257-7453; Michael Lane, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 844-8313 or 844-8440*

Among other actions, the Legislature welcomed Sheriff Ken Lansing, who began service as of January 1. Sheriff Lansing said he is looking forward to working with the Legislature and has spent a productive two days with staff, who have offered a number of excellent money-saving ideas. Lansing has appointed former Captain Derek Osborne to the position of Undersheriff, with Sergeant Bob Lampman promoted to Captain. The Sheriff said discussions have begun with other police departments concerning the possibility of joint training and other initiatives including potential for assistance through grants. He invited legislators who have not already done so to contact him, saying his door is always open.

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