

Press



Release

11 New Hempstead Road, New City, NY (845) 638-5100 Fax: (845) 638-5675 e-mail legclerk@co.rockland.ny.us.

For Immediate Release

Contact:

Hon. Alden H. Wolfe, Chairman
Betsy Saetre, Community Relations Coordinator

(845) 638-5269
(845) 638-5184

County Legislature Holds Annual Reorganization

Alden H. Wolfe Re-elected Chairman

New City, NY (January 8, 2015) -The Rockland County Legislature held its annual reorganization meeting on Tuesday and through bipartisan support, re-elected Alden H. Wolfe (D-District 6) to a second term as Chairman of the Legislature. Legislator Jay Hood, Jr. (D-District 3) was re-elected to serve as Vice Chairman and Legislator Aron Wieder (D-District 13) was reappointed Majority Leader. Legislator Toney Earl (D-District 8) will continue in the role of Deputy Majority Leader.

Chairman Wolfe thanked the people of Rockland County for their support during "an unprecedented year of accomplishment for this body and its members." Wolfe highlighted examples - the successful opposition to United Water's proposed desalination plant, voter-approved Charter Reform and a budget process supported by and reflecting the values of the Rockland community - preserving programs that serve the neediest and protect public safety. Wolfe stated his priorities for 2015 are economic development; focus on food insecurity, CSX train safety and harmony among all residents of the County.

Wolfe said, " As our fiscal condition continues to improve, now is the worst possible time to disparage Rockland County. Negativity will only undermine our progress. We must stand together committed to moving forward. I know that this Legislature is willing to roll up its collective sleeve and meet our challenges head on."

The Legislature welcomed newly elected Legislator Lon Hofstein (R). Hofstein's District 5 includes parts of Clarkstown and Ramapo.

Legislator Cris Carey (R-District 9) was re-elected as Minority Leader. Carey appointed Legislator Lon Hofstein to the post of Deputy Minority Leader.

(Annual Reorganization Comments by Chairman Alden H. Wolfe Follow)

Visit us: <http://www.rocklandgov.com/>
Like us on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/rockleg>

**Comments by
Rockland County Legislature Chairman Alden H. Wolfe
Annual Reorganization
January 6, 2015**

Thank to all of you for braving the cold tonight.

- Judge Walsh, thank you for your kind words and your friendship and taking the time to come out tonight to administer the oath
- Thank you to Jay and Ilan for making all kinds of things up about me; seriously, I appreciate your support and the bipartisan support of my colleagues who are once again placing their trust in me.
- I thank my family – my father, who is able to be here tonight for the first time in many years. I'm sorry you picked the wrong week to not be in Florida. For the record, it was 80 there today. I checked. My daughter Morgan, who as an eighth grader is once again completely thrilled and delighted to hear her dad talk about her in public. My girlfriend Annabelle, who is always supportive of me despite her not so secret distaste for politics. Her sons Kevin and Daniel.
- Most importantly, I thank the people of Rockland County who have been especially supportive this past year.

And what a year it was. A part of me looks back thinking that 2014 was a year filled with political distractions that pulled our focus away from the important business of government, but in truth, it was an unprecedented year of accomplishment for this body and its members. I'll give a few examples:

- **Water.** In 2014, we pulled off something that no one could ever have predicted – our successful opposition to United Water's proposed desalination plant. Everyone in the state and indeed the nation is now looking at the Public Service Commission's findings as a landmark decision. This was a classic David v. Goliath victory where community activists and elected officials refused to let up, putting the interest of the ratepayers above corporate profit. I'm honored to have been part of this process, which led to the creation of the Rockland County Task Force on Water Resource Management. The task force and its mission holds so much promise for us all. I thank Harriet Cornell for her leadership, and I praise the County Executive for his cooperation in signing the enabling legislation. Thanks must also be given to my colleagues in state government, in particular Ellen Jaffee and Ken Zebrowski, who let Albany know what's best for Rockland County. And of course, the Rockland Water Coalition, whose nonstop pressure moved us all. With the task force now in place Rockland is poised to become a model in sustainable water use for the entire nation.
- **Charter reform.** Charter reform is an important issue that many of us had been working on for several years. Last year, we worked very hard to craft a law with positive changes for our County. We negotiated the language in good faith and reached an understanding with the Administration, only to see our trust betrayed with an executive veto. We overrode the veto with bipartisan support. We struggled to educate the public about something that, admittedly, isn't really very exciting, and in a landslide, the public approved the measure at the November referendum. We owe thanks to our Vice Chairman Jay Hood, who as Chairman of the Rules Committee picked up where I left off after becoming Chairman in January. I'm also grateful to those of you in the community who stood with us and supported these important changes, recognizing that changes that promote good government matter, no matter how small.
- **Budget** This year's budget process unleashed energy and unity not seen in recent years in our county. Members of law enforcement stood shoulder to shoulder with our not for profit agencies, from every

corner of Rockland. The feeling in these chambers was electric, and at the end of the process 4 of 5 Republicans and 11 of 12 Democrats stood together in true bipartisan fashion as Rocklanders. Don't believe what you read - this year's budget process wasn't a battle over fiscal responsibility. It was a fight for our values as a community. I firmly believe in what economists have consistently found, and that is that cutting jobs and essential programs thwarts economic development. As we proved, this body – Republicans and Democrats alike – don't believe in tax shifting, or gambling with our public safety or balancing our budget on the backs of our neediest. I give my thanks to Michael Grant, who as Chairman of the Budget and Finance Committee dedicated himself to finding ways to do the right thing for all of Rockland County.

Let's be clear. While our county has faced fiscal challenges, so much about Rockland makes it an ideal place to live and raise a family. The average Rockland resident is comparatively well off compared to the state and the nation. In the 6th wealthiest state in our country, we rank 6th highest in per capita income, and 4th highest in both household and median family incomes. Our unemployment rate is the second lowest in the Hudson Valley.

So it's important not to confuse the County's fiscal difficulties with our residents' well-being. We are not--as some suggest--on the brink of collapse, breadlines and worse--However, I say with sadness that not everyone here is prospering. Rockland's 13 plus percent poverty rate disturbs me deeply. During 2014, I've been fortunate to meet people from all over the County and to learn in more detail about the needs and hopes of communities outside my Legislative District. It's been a pleasure to visit dozens of agencies and programs and my admiration overflows for the work that's being done with such limited financial resources. That's why I'm especially proud that this body has made it a priority to support those who dedicate themselves every day to make life better for Rockland's most vulnerable.

Our nonprofits embody the can-do spirit of Rockland. As I continue to make visits around the county, I see that spirit everywhere, and that makes me optimistic about the year ahead. Economic challenges remain, but Rockland is poised to succeed.

So where does that leave us for 2015? What are my priorities for this new year? I'll share a few with you:

Economic Development: I'll continue to explore strategies to make Rockland County a more attractive tourist destination, building on the transit/tourism workshop I held in June, and working with local leaders in our village and hamlet centers to discuss how to draw more people to our spectacular parks, shops, restaurants and attractions. I'll also continue working collaboratively with the board of the Rockland Economic Development Corporation, its CEO Michael DiTullo and members of our business community, to explore ways to make Rockland County more attractive to business and industry.

A related priority is the outcome of the Tappan Zee Bridge. I'm working with other legislators and village officials to ensure that the new bridge supports the economic interests of the river villages and our County. If done right, the new Tappan Zee Bridge can provide tremendous economic benefits for our county. We must work together so that Rockland gets our fair share of the new mass transit system benefits.

Focus on Food insecurity: It's unforgivable that a snack at an afterschool program might be the last meal of the day for a child. I learned this during my visits to places like the Martin Luther King Center in Spring Valley and the Nyack Center in Nyack and it's emboldened me to focus on this critical issue. I'll be meeting with groups to see what more we as a County can do to strengthen their work, especially in ways to make food rescue easier. No one should ever have to experience food insecurity, especially in a county where so many are prospering. I look forward to working collaboratively with agencies such as Catholic Community Services, People to People, Touch, Meals on Wheels and Tomche Shabbos to help meet this silent epidemic and ensure that no one in Rockland goes hungry.

CSX: I'll continue to monitor the CSX train safety with my colleagues. I thank Congresswoman Lowey for her vigilance in Washington and Sheriff Falco for demanding vital information that first responders need in case of an emergency.

Not in Our Town: Our experiences this past year taught us that we can move beyond our ethnic, religious, racial and gender-based boundaries because our shared values are stronger than our differences. We all want a prosperous, harmonious county where our families can thrive. I believe that it's our responsibility to find that common ground and to build from there, which is why I'm happy to announce that we'll be working with VCS on a program that's been very successful in the past, entitled "Not in Our Town." We hope to build on our shared American values and respond to incidents of bias whenever they may occur.

Make no mistake: Rockland has its share of problems, but acknowledging our challenges and championing our opportunities aren't mutually exclusive. As our fiscal condition continues to improve, now is the worst possible time to disparage Rockland County. Negativity will only undermine our progress. We must stand together committed to moving forward. As I said this time last year, I hope that in the year ahead, both branches of County government will collaborate and focus on our County's common goals. I'm proud to be part of a body that values and personifies this ideal. No one is perfect, least of all me, but I know that this Legislature is willing to roll up its collective sleeve and meet our challenges head on.

Again, I thank you, my colleagues for putting your trust in me by giving me another year to serve as Chairman. We left 2014 on a high note, and I have a feeling that a year from now, we'll look back and say--"Wow! Didn't think it could get much better--but it did." I'm confident that if we all work together in harmony, 2015 will be a wonderful, healthy and happy year for Rockland.

Thank you.

###