

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Martha Robertson Seeks Re-election to Tompkins County Legislature from Dryden's District 13

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Martha Robertson announces that she will seek another term as the Tompkins County Legislator from western Dryden, District 13. In 2001 she unseated an appointed incumbent, Joe Lalley, to earn her first term on the Legislature.

A Tompkins County resident for 22 years and a lifelong Democrat, Robertson has worked hard to maximize the benefit that County taxpayers realize for their investment. "We have to find every possible way to reduce the property tax burden while meeting the critical needs of our citizens. We are constantly making choices among competing demands and must find the right balance." (*See enclosed "Votes by Tompkins County Legislators on 2005 Tentative Budget"*)

Robertson has chaired the county's **Health and Human Services (HHS)** Committee for three years. She has been a leader in establishing TompkinsRx, the county's prescription drug discount card (*See enclosed "TompkinsRx -- Experience in Tompkins County"*). She fought to preserve the county's role in and funding for the Recreation Partnership, strengthening this intermunicipal organization and saving programs for kids. Shining a spotlight on the local housing shortage and homelessness, Robertson brought diverse voices to the HHS Committee to analyze the problem and recommend solutions. As a result, community awareness has been heightened to the importance of housing issues and the County's Comprehensive Plan sets priorities for action.

As a member of the **Public Safety Committee** for three years, Robertson studied options for expanding the Public Safety Building to meet the mandates of the State Commission on Corrections. She ultimately decided that our jail population does not warrant a building the size that the Commission demanded, and was instrumental in the Legislature's decision to postpone construction indefinitely.

"The new jail would cost county taxpayers at least \$2 million every year for 20 years, by itself adding about 6% to our annual property tax rate. Those expenses must be paid whether the jail is full or half-empty. Every day that we board out fewer than 52 inmates we save money. It was a hard decision, but it allowed us to keep control of taxes while spending more wisely to educate and house people, help them get jobs, and provide meaningful support to young people at risk."

Robertson has also worked hard on issues of local importance to her district in Dryden. Working with the Town of Dryden, she has championed road and lighting improvements that improved safety. In a project that is nearing completion at the intersection of Turkey Hill and Ellis Hollow Roads, Robertson brought together the Varna Volunteer Fire Company and the County Highway Department to design a solution that greatly increases visibility. (*Contact: Natan Huffman, Varna Volunteer Fire Company, available at media conference or at 339-7483.*)

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In addition, Robertson is spearheading an effort to develop a park-and-ride lot in District 13, to mitigate traffic through Varna. That effort has led to a current survey of the commuting patterns of all Cornell University employees, under the auspices of Cornell, the Ithaca Tompkins County Transportation Council and TCAT. (*For a report on a December 2004 meeting see <http://livingindryden.org/archives/001268.html>.*) Further developments will be shaped by the results of that survey.

Robertson plans to pursue the following goals during a second term in office:

Prudent Spending to Maintain Services:

- Use data to make decisions: Use demographic information to plan for future needs. Use outcome-based measures to evaluate programs we already have. Analyze costs and benefits to evaluate any proposed new initiatives.

Housing:

- Construction of Single Room Occupancy facility for people with mental health issues. To be built and operated with state funds, the SRO will be a safe home for people who need basic supportive services, and will reduce their too-frequent reliance on emergency shelters.
- Promote construction of affordable housing, especially owner-occupied homes, in western Dryden and throughout the county.
- Expand support for renovation and repairs of existing housing.

Health Care:

- Continue to lobby federal and state lawmakers for more affordable health care, including reimportation of Canadian drugs and competitive pricing for American drugs.

Transportation and Economic Development:

- Pursue development of park-and-ride lots, especially one in Dryden, in a public/private partnership. Such a facility can bring economic development opportunities as well as needed services to District 13.

Justice System:

- Pursue an in-house study of the justice system as it affects jail population. What are the factors that have helped us keep our jail population low? How can we do even better?
- Improve public safety by strengthening programs that reduce crime.

Intermunicipal Cooperation:

- Continue working with municipal officials through the Intermunicipal Working Group.
- Expand cooperation with the Town of Dryden to support community centers and recreational opportunities in District 13 and throughout the town.

Summarizing her plans for a second term on the Legislature, Robertson said, “The job in government is never ‘done.’ We set goals and work toward them, continually revising them as we check things off the list. I’m eager to continue the work of my first term, using taxpayer money wisely for the benefit of all our citizens.”