



March 11, 2024

Dear Neighbors,

This past week, the Assembly moved new legislation forward and continued progress on the NYS Budget. The Assembly One House Budget is expected to be released today, and I will share highlights in a future newsletter. Read on for highlights from the week in Albany and from the district!

# Legislative Update

## **Ban Carbon Dioxide Fracking**

Fracking is not just a threat to our environment; it's a danger to our future. We cannot afford to gamble with the health of our communities and the stability of our climate. That's why New York State took action in 2020 and prohibited extracting methane gas by hydraulic fracturing using a pressurized water-based solution. Now we must extend that commitment to ban hydraulic fracturing using pressurized carbon dioxide for oil and gas extraction, closing a loophole that a Texas company has proposed to use in the Southern Tier region. Regardless of the substrate being used to extract

methane, methane is still being extracted, leaking this strong greenhouse gas into the atmosphere and pulling up toxic radioactive materials from the Marcellus shale. That's why it's imperative that we pass A8866 immediately! I was proud to join my Senate and Assembly colleagues and environmental advocates, including the activist and musician Natalie Merchant, this week at a press conference in support of a CO2 fracking ban!



## Banning Food Additives Press Conference

For too long, the FDA has failed to take action to protect consumers from toxic chemicals found in our food. New Yorkers deserve protection from harmful food additives that have known health risks and consequences. I am proud to sponsor [legislation](#) to ban seven of these additives that are linked to serious adverse health effects, like DNA damage, heart and thyroid toxicity, and reproductive harm. The European Union and California have already

taken action setting precedent and paving the way for New York to take action and protect our residents. We also must close a loophole that allows food and chemical companies to irresponsibly bypass FDA approval for new food additives. Companies can add new chemicals to our foods without notifying the FDA by unilaterally declaring the substance as "Generally Recognized As Safe," or GRAS, without any oversight, transparency, or public notification. The GRAS designation was established in 1958 and was intended for food additives like sugar, vinegar, and baking soda. However, companies have exploited this loophole for almost all new chemical food additives. Since 2000, only 10 additives have gone through the standard full review process. [My legislation](#) would take out the secret of GRAS by requiring industry to notify New York of their GRAS determinations that have not been reviewed by the FDA. I was proud to join Senator Kavanagh, the Center for Science in the Public Interest, the Environmental Working Group, and Clean + Healthy for a press conference this week to advocate for these two important pieces of legislation.



**Assembly Passes Legislation Related to Lithium-Ion Battery Safety**

This week, the Assembly passed a package of legislation to strengthen consumer protections around rechargeable lithium-ion batteries found in many popular devices and e-bikes. Technology is advancing at a record

pace, and new and exciting products that have the ability to change our daily lives are rapidly entering the market. However, with new technology, there are always risks, and we must adapt and create protections as we learn of risks and hazards. In the last year in New York City alone, there were 250 battery-related fires that caused 18 deaths. These fires are also not typical fires; they burn hotter and longer, making them particularly deadly and more dangerous for residents and firefighters. I was proud to vote in favor of passing the legislative package that provides education and establishes regulations to keep consumers safe ([A4938](#), [A8102](#), [A9338](#)), creates a trade-in option so consumers can replace old and possibly unsafe batteries with certified safe ones ([A6811](#)), and gives firefighters much needed support ([A9337](#)).

**Protecting New Yorkers,  
strengthening safety  
for lithium-ion batteries**



# Around the District

## **Cortland County Chamber of Commerce Legislative Breakfast**

Much gratitude and appreciation to President Bob Haight and the Cortland Chamber of Commerce for the opportunity to attend the annual legislative breakfast with my fellow state and local legislators. We discussed the Chamber's legislative priorities of workforce development, childcare, and housing with local business owners and community leaders.

**Workforce Development:** Microcredentials are great short-term, targeted programs to build a workforce in a specific area. Tompkins Cortland Community College has 13 different microcredential programs that are now also eligible for TAP, state financial aid program for income qualifying individuals. Programs such as a Chemical Dependency Counselor Assistant, Clinical Medical Assistant, Direct Service Provider, Micro-Nano Fabrication Safety, and Early Childhood Assistant prepare workers for current and anticipated job openings in our area.

**Childcare:** Access to affordable, quality childcare is a huge issue affecting our district and most of NY State, and I have been advocating for a number of solutions to address the issue. First and foremost, we must increase reimbursement rates to childcare providers and the pay rate for the childcare workforce. Low rates for both providers and workers have caused insufficient

care for families and significant waitlists, keeping people out of the workforce. I will soon be introducing legislation, similar to what Washington and Maryland have recently implemented, that will create an outdoor childcare designation, which will enable providers to build structures focused on outdoor care and education and save millions of dollars on unnecessary capital investments. Research shows that spending time out in nature is one of the best ways to maximize both physical and mental health for children (and adults), and this legislation will help our children get out and play!

**Housing:** Affordable housing continues to be an issue, and we need significant investments in a variety of programs to ensure we have the variety of housing to meet community needs. In the NYS Budget, I am advocating to restore \$40 million for the Homeowner Protection Program (HOPP), \$25 million for the first-time homebuyers program, and \$10 million for land banks that are critical for ensuring affordable housing for homeowners. I have and will continue to be an advocate for fully funding Neighborhood Preservation Corporations (NPCs) and Rural Preservation Corporations that provide critical housing services like housing rehabilitation, manufactured home replacements, housing counseling, and weatherization assistance.

We cannot simply build our way out of our current housing crisis because it takes years to build significant housing. I was thankful to have an opportunity to share information about the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP). Waiting lists for the federal housing choice vouchers (also known as Section 8 housing) are several years long. HAVP will enable the state to provide a supplement and help reduce this list for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. There has been a lot of discussion about Good Cause, and there is growing bipartisan support as recognition of its role in anti-gentrification becomes clearer and not simply as a means to support anyone acting in a manner that violates a lease. No one solution will address the affordable housing crisis. I will continue to champion for a comprehensive package to address both homeowner and renter needs in our district.

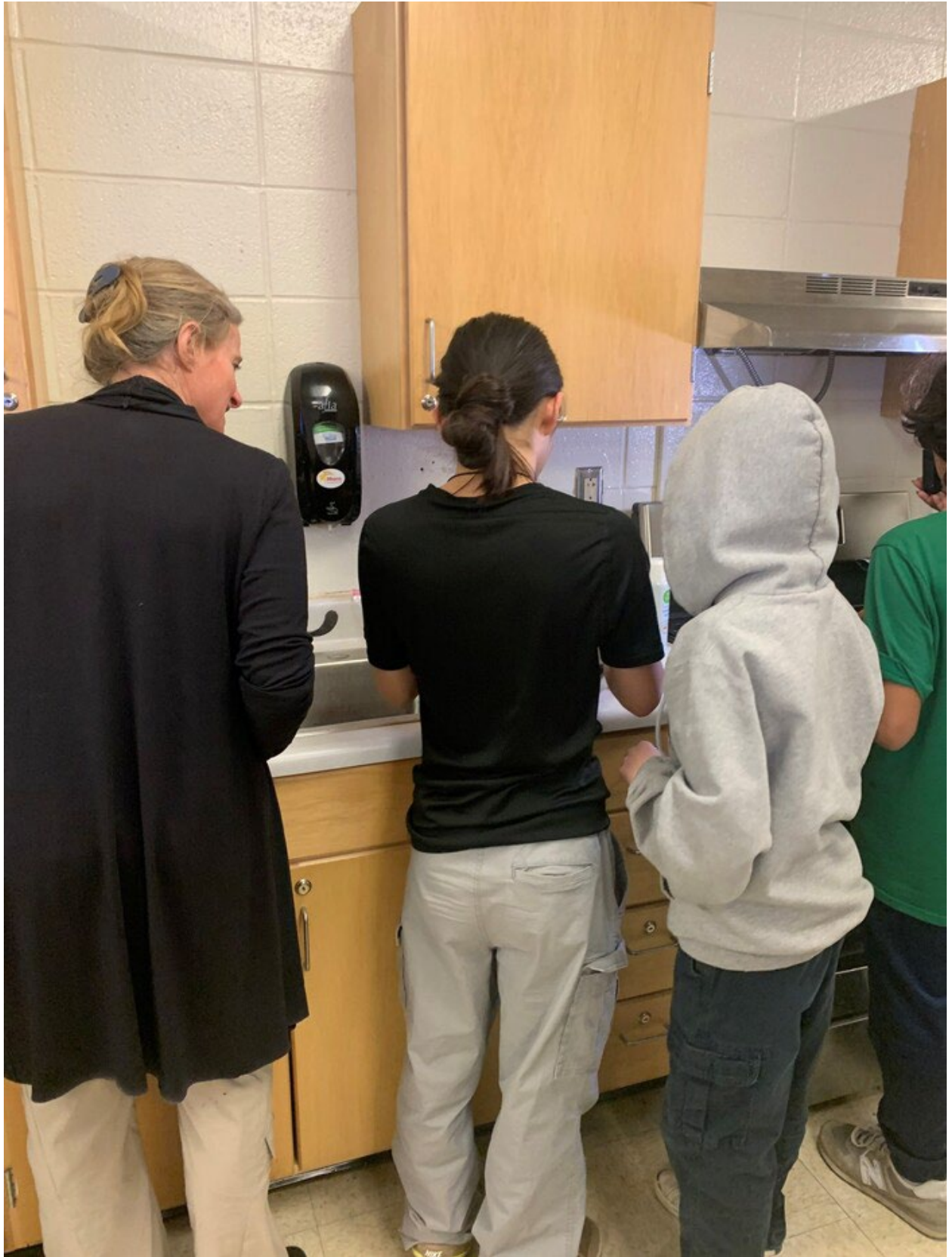




## **Tour of DeWitt Middle School**

I joined New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) President Melinda Person and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten on a tour of DeWitt Middle School in Ithaca this week as they visited the district. We were able to observe a 7th grade farm to table cooking class. The course meets the traditional Family and Consumer Science credit in a unique and engaging format. Working in teams, the students learn different cooking skills as they prepare various dishes for the course. They start the 10-week course with prescribed recipes and slowly work their way to a choose-your-own-adventure day. We were lucky to visit on this lucky day and observed the students making chicken and vegetable

stir fry, soft-shelled tacos, pasta with homemade tomato sauce, and baked cookies from scratch. I had a blast speaking with the students about what they were learning and their favorite dishes as well as with the teacher about food justice and the importance of diversity in food options. Thank you to all our teachers who engage students in creative ways every day and teach a variety of lifelong skills!



# Community Resources

## Property Assessments

**Cortland County:** City of Cortland property owners were recently notified of their reassessed property value for 2024. The last time the City assessed property values was 2008, and property values have increased dramatically since that time. The new assessment is the full market value of the property, derived from recent selling prices of similar properties.

If you have questions or feel your assessment is not accurate, you may contact the assessor via email at [CortlandReval2024@icloud.com](mailto:CortlandReval2024@icloud.com). You can also schedule a 15-minute informal review meeting to discuss your assessment, which will be held in-person at the Homer Town Hall. To schedule, call 680-877-5036 (M-F, 9 am - 2 pm) or [schedule online](#). More information, including how to prepare for your informal review meeting, can be found on the [City of Cortland Assessor website](#).

**Tompkins County:** Tompkins County 2024 preliminary assessments are now available. To determine assessments, Assessment Office staff visually reviewed every possible property from the public right of way instead of simply relying on sales reports, and viewing properties individually can provide a better sense of the property. If you have questions, you can

contact the Assessor's Office (M-F, 8 am-4:30 pm) at 607-274-5517 or [assessment@tompkins-co.org](mailto:assessment@tompkins-co.org). You can request an [Informal Assessment Review](#) online.

Cortland and Tompkins County residents can review more information on contesting your property assessment by [viewing this brief video](#) or from the [NYS Department of Taxation and Finance website](#). All informal reviews should be completed by May 1, as Grievance Day is May 12. It is important to note that the assessor's office does not set tax rates or collect taxes but assesses property values.



Image from Freepik

## Grant Action News

The Assembly publishes the Grant Actions News monthly, compiling great grant opportunities from state, federal and private agencies, and you can now review the [March 2024 edition](#). All not-for-profit applicants applying for state grants must pre-qualify on the [NYS Grants Management Website](#). Potential not-for-profit applicants are strongly encouraged to begin the process of registering and pre-qualifying immediately, as this is a lengthy process.

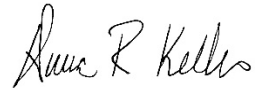


## Tompkins County Workforce Development Upcoming Events

Tompkins County Workforce Development is offering a variety of events in March to support job seekers, and you can review the full list [here](#). All events are offered both via Zoom and in-person at the Career Center, 171 East MLK St. (Center Ithaca Building, 2nd floor). Registration is required for all events. For questions or more information, contact Cindy Sloan, Workforce Development Specialist, at [csloan@tomkins-co.org](mailto:csloan@tomkins-co.org) or 607-272-7570, ext. 136.

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In good health,



Anna Kelles, Ph.D.

Assemblymember, 125th A.D.

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