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**REP. STAMMELTO RETIRE FROM COUNTY BOARD AFTER 3 TERMS**

 **Oneonta**- Rep. Andrew Stammel (D, WFP, i), age 39, announced today that he will be retiring from the Otsego County Board of Representatives at the completion of his third term on December 31, 2021. Stammel was first elected to the Oneonta Town Board in 2013 and then elected three times to the County Board, with increasing percentages of the vote in each election. He has represented the Town of Oneonta (District 4) since election in 2015 and has had the honor of chairing the County’s Health and Education Committee during his most recent two terms. This leadership position offered the opportunity to oversee the Department of Health, Office for the Aging, Addiction Recovery Services, and Mental Health, among others. Stammel is particularly proud of the work his colleagues and these departments have done to combat the past decade’s opioid crisis and the current COVID-19 pandemic, two immense challenges that required unprecedented engagement from local government. Stammel offered the following statement explaining his decision to transition off the Board:

 “It is an honor and privilege to serve the people of Otsego County and the Town of Oneonta. My decision to decline party nominations for another term was not an easy one but I am convinced it is right at this time. I have always advocated for term limits, be they internally or externally imposed. Organizations function best when they continuously bring in new people, ideas, and energy. The prior Democratic Representative for my district, Rich Murphy, was a public servant whom I greatly admired. His decision to step aside after three terms and to offer his blessing to the candidates following in his footsteps is one of his many actions I’d like to emulate. My expectation was always to serve three or four terms on the Board, depending on the circumstances. With several long-term County initiatives coming to fruition this year, it’s an appropriate time to have a transition in leadership.

Many local elected officials remain in positions longer than expected because they cannot find someone to replace them. Over the past few days, I learned that another qualified Democrat is interested in running for this position. This is good news for our community. Michelle Catan is someone who I think highly of and have previously reached out to offering political opportunity. Her expertise and experience with small business will serve the County well, particularly as we transition from overcoming the immediate public health threat of COVID to a longer-term project to repair the immense economic damage that has been inflicted. I believe in the relay race metaphor for local government. My section of the race will soon end and my colleague is ready to catch the baton. I have no interest in tripping her up or blocking her path.

The success of our County Board depends on bringing in diverse voices and backgrounds that reflect the many perspectives in our community. As the only attorney on the board, I hope my legal expertise proved valuable, particularly around our efforts to adopt ethics reform and to promote the rule of law. When I was elected, I was also the youngest member and probably the first ever LGBTQ member, giving me other unique insights. We now have another Rep. from the LGBTQ community and there are now three members younger than me! The number of women on the Board has increased and will continue to do so. This is all positive and reflects just one aspect of the Board’s modernization.

One structural challenge, however, creates a Board that is not adequately representative. The Board’s failure to schedule meetings during evenings and/or weekends reduces transparency and public access and also essentially disqualifies a large section of our population from serving. Anyone who has tried recruiting qualified candidates can confirm this. People with young families and working people with a regular 9-5 schedule or unpredictable shifts find it difficult to cater to the Board’s outdated schedule. The public often doesn’t realize that representatives who are regular working people are required to use hard earned vacation and holiday time or miss shifts from their day job to take a half day or full day off to attend meetings in Cooperstown. Some are required to choose between missing county meetings or submitting excessive time off requests, which are unfair to their primary employer.

I understand these challenges. During my time on the Board, my responsibilities as a SUNY Oneonta administrator have expanded greatly along with the volume of clients for my law office. Daytime meetings in Cooperstown are simply not sustainable or compatible with my full-time employment. I won’t make assumptions as to why the majority party blocks this reform. But it serves as an incumbent protection device and skews the available pool of representatives toward people who are self-employed or semi/fully-retired, a group that tends to skew older, wealthier and more conservative. If the Board is ever to be truly representative, it must adopt this simple reform. Adopting the county management reform took thirty years; hopefully this one does not.

I will come away from my Board service with a deep appreciation for our county employees. They work day after day to serve the people of our County and are repeatedly asked to problem solve and do more with less, especially during the challenges of the past year. My colleagues on the Board, of both parties, are also doing this work for the right reasons. They take time away from careers and families and open themselves up to often unfair attacks by political operatives and the media because they want to serve their neighbors. The public often only hears about the controversial issues and conflict in government but 99% of what local officials do is cooperative and collegial. It’s not usually flashy; in fact, it’s often tedious but is necessary to allow our government to keep serving our residents. Hopefully my colleagues on the Board continue to embrace the bi-partisan reform-minded approach of the past few years. If they can reject the extreme voices from each end of the spectrum and make sure the common-sense collaborative center holds, we will be in good shape.

Public service has always been a valued part of my life; first, with Scouting and Church as a child; then Americorps in young adulthood; and now eight years in local government. I will continue to stay open-minded and seek future opportunities to serve our community. In the meantime, I will be cheering for my successor and former colleagues from the sidelines, hoping for their (and our) success.

Finally, I want to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the Town of Oneonta residents for repeatedly placing their trust in me. We have a lovely, safe, and vibrant community that we can all be proud of. I’m in awe of the way our community residents have come together during the struggles of the past year, making personal sacrifices and looking out for vulnerable neighbors. Too often we hear gloomy tales about stagnant Upstate NY economies and declining populations; that’s not what I see locally. We have several strong local economic anchors in the public and private sectors, with other new industries developing. My small neighborhood alone has had ten new homes built in the past two years and our residents include retirees and young and diverse families. The potential of Oneonta and Otsego County is great. If we continue to welcome new people and ideas and embrace progress, our future is bright. Let’s keep working together to achieve it!”