



**KENNETH J. RONK, JR.**  
**CHAIRMAN**  
**ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATURE**

**CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS**

**MARCH 22, 2017**

Colleagues Friends and Guests,

Serving as your Chairman has truly been among the honors of my life. It has been my goal to lead this body toward our true potential envisioned in the Charter. Although we are certainly not all the way there yet, we have made serious strides. I am determined to use whatever time I have as the leader of this Legislature to usher us closer to that goal.

This evening you have heard from Majority Leader Maio and Minority Leader Rodriguez. In my first year as Chairman I have learned many important lessons. The role of Chairman is more than just a list of goals for the year and a plan to reach them. It is about leading the body as a whole to its full potential. It is about helping the Minority and the Majority achieve their shared goals for the year. This Chairman's address will not be the typical recitation of my priorities, but a discussion about our progress as a body, and my vision to lead us forward.

Working together, we really had a great 2016. Democrats working with Republicans, Legislators from the Northern and Southern ends of the County, the Eastern and Western ends of the County, and even Legislature working with the Executive, we have worked to find compromise and consensus to make Ulster County even better. My door has been open and many Legislators from both sides of the aisle have walked through it to share their vision for our community. Some of the ideas that have come forward, I have embraced, and we have moved forward with. Some I have not and we have not pursued, and even others I have not embraced, and have moved forward nonetheless. One thing we have not done, nor will we moving forward under my leadership, is rush initiatives through without the proper vetting and due diligence that our constituents deserve. Deliberation, discussion, and debate help to avoid pitfalls and unintended

consequences that often pop up when legislation is passed willy-nilly. Two great examples of that patience, perseverance and performance are the evidenced by the two Local Laws that we have before us for adoption tonight: The Pet Sellers Law, and the Cyber Bullying Law. Both Local Laws which I have sponsored, amended, advocated for, and look forward to adopting have been before us for more than a year. Both address serious societal problems, and aim to make life better for children and animals, neither of which have the ability or mental acuity to advocate for themselves. I want to now spend a few minutes talking about each of them, and the process that we have taken that has allowed us to craft, not the quickest or most convenient laws, but the best laws.

Beginning with the Pet Sellers Law, a law that was first proposed in July of 2015, but was crafted without an important group of stakeholders at the table...the Pet Sellers themselves. For months we toiled, and argued, we amended and fought, and the year ended without a comprehensive pet sellers law. At the beginning of my term as Chairman, I engaged both the Animal Advocates, which I number myself among, (My wife Rachel and I rescued our Dog George, who was an abandoned Pit Bull Mix) and the Pet Sellers, particularly the hobby breeders represented by Tom and Beverly Delaney. We worked TOGETHER to craft the best law for the animals and for the dealers which also means it is the best for the people we serve...the Residents of Ulster County. Working on this law was not easy, and I want to thank partners on both sides of the aisle that supported me in this Journey: TJ Briggs, my Chairman of Law Enforcement, and Mary Wawro, who's Constituents have had concerns about this law and instead of just coming to the meetings to grumble as some do, brought forward ideas and worked with us to craft the best law we could possibly have.

Moving on to the Cyber Bullying Law, it was first proposed for no-name-calling week in January of last year. The law was well intentioned, and thoughtfully crafted, but faced opposition for one specific reason...the school administrators and support staff were not brought into the process. Now, as a victim of bullying myself along with countless others, this was very important to me, so we set to work on improving the law, making sure it is acceptable to school administrators, and assuring that we would avoid unduly punishing the youths charged with this offence but instead would be used as a way to change behavior. What we have before us tonight passes constitutional muster, it protects the defenseless victims of cyber bullying, and it protects children under 16 from entering their adult life marked by a criminal record. It is my sincere hope that the law passes as written tonight, and we can all go home tonight knowing that we may have saved the lives of children suffering from this blight on our society. I want to thank partners on both sides of the aisle Legislators James Delaune, Ron Lapp and Majority Whip Carl Belfiglio for supporting this initiative, and for standing up for these young victims.

This year, we are embarking on the renovation of the BRC into the new Ulster County Family Court complex. This Legislature has had a role in the move from the very beginning. Multiple subcommittees, and much lively debate and discussion resulted in our decision to make the move, the ballot question was written by me, with input from the County Executive and members of the Legislature, and the voters approved it to the tune of more than 72% of the vote. We owe it to them to keep a watchful eye on this important project, and make sure that it comes in on time on budget, and truly works to better serve the Children and Families of Ulster County that utilize the Family Court. For these reasons, I sponsored the resolution creating a Special Oversight Committee for the Family Court Renovation and Relocation. I have every confidence that committee Chairman Legislator Litts and the other committee members will do us proud, and

ensure that we watch the taxpayers hard earned dollars. For their support of this project and personally for their support of me in the wording of the ballot proposition I would like to thank Legislators Chris Allen and Craig Lopez and my Ways and Means Chairman Richard Gerentine.

We have collectively worked over the years, in any way we can to support the Crossroads Ventures project at Bellayre. There are many who have worked against this project, citing environmental objections, most of which are pure bunk, but this Body has stood staunchly beside the project. Numerous resolutions and letters have been authored or sent from this body over the years, including a resolution and a letter sent last month asking the Governor to restore funding that had previously been removed. We were all pleased to find out later that week that the funding had nearly all been committed to be restored by the Governor. I want to single out Legislator Peter Loughran and Vice Chairman James Maloney for their long term support of this project, but also for their commitment to all economic development in Ulster County.

Talking about Resolutions and letters, this seems like a good time to talk about the proposed ban on Memorializing Resolutions. I know there are a sizeable number of people signed up for public comment this evening to talk either about the proposed ban or a specific memorializing resolution. It has become clear to me through emails, letters to the editor, and phone calls that there is a rash of misinformation out there about the effect of the this ban, so let me clear up some misconceptions. The proposed ban does not stop citizens from exercising their 1st amendment rights as some have been asserting. We have a Public Comment period at every one of our Legislative meetings, and we invite comment on agenda and non-agenda items alike. Another misconception is that this will hamper our ability to speak directly to our State and Federal Representatives. This could not be further from the truth. We send letters, emails,

petitions, and make phone calls on a daily and weekly basis to our elected representatives. I can tell you that some letters have had an even more tangible result than many of our memorializing resolutions.

I respect the opinion of those in this room who disagree with me on this issue. I have always believed that smart and dedicated individuals can disagree. What I cannot respect are legislators who have been using these resolutions, and this proposed ban to attempt to divide and politicize this body. You can always tell where the motivation is when the blatant and embarrassing grandstanding begins. I have a different belief about government, and a different philosophy about leadership than these legislators. Democrat Adlai Stevenson remarked after losing the Presidency to President Eisenhower, "That which unites us as American citizens is far greater than that which divides us as political parties." I believe that this perfectly translates right down to us in Ulster County. We have been working together so well as a body, and as a government that some legislators only looking for strife and division have turned to memorializing resolutions to try and play politics like you only find on the State and National level. I now support this ban on Memorializing Resolutions, one I have not supported in years past, because I will not stand to see our body unnecessarily divided for the benefit of a few, and to the detriment of the people who matter most, the more than 180,000 residents of Ulster County that we serve. Thank you to Legislators Richard Parete and Kevin Roberts for your perseverance on this issue, and for your commitment to helping re-focus the Body on County issues that we have direct responsibility for.

In closing, my door remains open to you and my mind remains open to your ideas, but there is no room in either for petty partisan politics. I will continue to work with every fiber of my being, with every tool in my tool belt, and with all of the knowledge that I have acquired to keep this body as a cooperative, deliberative, and productive body.

Someone whose friendship I cherish and I were having a conversation right before my re-election as Chairman about a criticism that I have received from a few legislators. That criticism is that I work too well with the County Executive. My friend said to me, if the only bad thing they can say about you is that you work too well with people, you must be doing a great job. I really think we are, and friends, I hope you will continue to join me in working on the many things that will unite us together rather than searching for the few that divide us. Doing so we can continue to make Ulster County the best place in the world to live, work, and raise a family.