



2016

Message To The Legislature

**Edwin J. Day
Rockland County Executive
February 16, 2016**

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Good evening ladies and gentlemen.

Many thanks to my fellow elected officials; community and business leaders; and citizens who have joined us.

And, thank you, also, to those of you watching from home. I acknowledge the news outlets who are bringing this update to those folks at home.

I am honored to be with you this evening to present the 2016 State of the County message.

Tonight, I'd like to speak with you not only about where we've come in the past two years, but what lies ahead this year and beyond.

In order to provide insight on our future, however, we must first reflect on our past, as well as the present state of affairs.

On election night in 2013, Rockland County voters told us they shared our vision, and entrusted me to carry it out.

I promised to focus my administration on three core priorities.

We call it our three-legged stool:

Stabilizing Rockland's finances - Righting our fiscal ship.

Creating a bright, vibrant job market – Making Rockland work again.

And, preserving our County for future generations.

These are the pillars upon which we built our campaign, and the program for governing this county today.

(Pause)

The month I came into office - January, 2014 - Rockland County had only \$42,000 in the bank.

We were on the brink of default.

We had a lethargic and disorganized operation plagued by out of control spending.

We were facing a \$138 million deficit that had ballooned from a surplus in just seven years.

We had plunged from a "Double-A" bond rating to near "junk" status.

We had lost credibility with the rating agencies, New York State and most importantly, our residents.

It was bad.

But, within hours of my inauguration, we rolled-up our sleeves and got to work, making the tough decisions.

Many of these decisions were based on our rising cost structure, unfunded mandates from the state and obvious revenue challenges.

Look: In my life, I've always attacked problems head-on, and this challenge was no different.

As I've said on many occasions, it's my job to make the tough choices that impact the 320,000 residents we serve, and I welcome that responsibility.

During those first few months, we consolidated key functions.

We cut expenses.

We reduced borrowing costs.

In short, we restored fiscal responsibility.

It's important to note that fiscal responsibility includes many things, but it truly means ensuring that the services the public needs and demands are provided in the most cost-efficient way.

And, today, we are doing that.

(Pause)

Through prudent budgeting, investing in our community's well-being, and focusing on improving our county's infrastructure, we have laid the groundwork for a healthier, stronger Rockland County.

We've built a platform of responsible growth that will lessen the demands on taxpayers.

Through operational reforms, we've reduced our bi-weekly payroll by several million dollars a year.

We recorded a healthy budget ***surplus*** in 2014, and we're expecting the same for 2015.

We've ***cut our inherited deficit*** by nearly 30% in just two years. **(Slide 1)**

Just look at how far we've come by executive action.

For too many years, we were living with a "credit card" mentality.

But, today, my administration has successfully put our county on a payment plan to whittle down the "sins of the past." ***And we have done so without the predicted double digit tax increases.***

We're doing it, a little at a time, just like most of us pay off our mortgage. In this time of financial recovery, prudence and paying down debt is the best policy.

I promise you this: we will stay the course.

(Pause)

Today, your County government is smaller.

Today, your county government is smarter.

And, ***today your county government is healthier.***

What I find most gratifying, is the fact that we have successfully tackled the kinds of challenges that have driven other governments into bankruptcy.

We did this together, while still providing more services for those in need than ever before.

The major rating agencies have noticed our strong, forward momentum and have given us three upgrades, a "positive" outlook and a "credit-positive" report.

And, in September, State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli announced that Rockland County is no longer New York's most "fiscally stressed" local government.

In fact, ***and in only one year***, we jumped past five other counties to ***move within a point of being removed altogether from the "significant fiscal stress" category.*** That was an amazing achievement.

And, for the second consecutive year, I'm proud to say this government is operating in the black.

In fact, my proposed 2016 Budget was reduced by \$43 million over 2015 - ***the largest year over year budgetary reduction in the history of Rockland County.***

This dramatic turnaround is the direct result of my administration's continued commitment to fiscal responsibility, accountability and economic improvement.

We have placed Rockland on the road back to fiscal solvency and prosperity.

(Pause)

Because of our ability to make difficult choices and implement timely solutions, in the past two years, Rockland County has emerged as a reform leader within the State of New York. ***We can all take pride in that!***

We have overcome complicated problems with innovative solutions, and our taxpayers have benefited.

But, while we have accomplished much during this time, there is still much more work to do to ensure the tremendous gains are shared by everyone in Rockland County.

Ladies and gentlemen, **yes, we still face serious and significant challenges, but know this** ... the "State of the County" for Rockland County is **strong and getting stronger** because it is built on a foundation of progress and "good government."

It's the kind of progress only made possible with cooperation forged through difficult decisions.

As a result, the sheer volume of progress has been nothing short of ground-breaking. Putting our fiscal house in order is good stewardship and helps us regain the trust of the people.

I want to thank the members of my administration who have worked so hard to help make all of this happen.

I also want to acknowledge the increasing cooperation from the Legislature.

And I want to thank our employees for fueling the engine that got it all done.

Each and every person involved should be proud of their efforts.

(Pause)

For years now, we have heard how government is the problem.

What we have shown during the past two years is government is not automatically the problem; it can be part of the solution.

As we've seen, government, when run responsibly, can lay the foundation for a better future for all.

Case in point: Summit Park Hospital and Nursing Care Center

The closure of the hospital and nursing home was completed in December, less than 90 days after the intransigent buyer backed out of the deal, without warning.

The decision to shutter the facility was difficult for the patients and residents, and tragic for our employees, but necessary nonetheless.

This was, without question, **the toughest decision I had to make as County Executive.**

According to audited figures, the Hospital Fund had gone from a break-even to a cumulative loss of over \$150 million in ten short years.

The facility was bleeding red ink, drowning in debt and **was taking us down with it.**

Regrettably, and without a buyer, we had no choice but to cease operations.

The wisdom of our action was confirmed by the New York State Department of Health, which approved our closure plan just two weeks after I submitted the formal request to do so.

Our former patients ended up in their first or second choice of a nursing home and nearly two thirds stayed in Rockland. Because of that, a significant number of our employees found gainful employment locally and in their field.

Some costs will continue for years to come, but they are predictable and declining each year.

Closure affirmatively accomplished its immediate objectives and will contribute to the sustained financial viability of Rockland County.

But, from this unfortunate chapter, ***we have been given a golden opportunity.***

The closure released 365,000 square feet of contemporary space in Building "A."

And, with this space, we can do something great by undertaking a significant project of lasting value, one that ***builds for the future***, defines a meaningful common agenda for often unaligned parties, and above all, supplies a positive, sustainable source of momentum for taking public infrastructure and confidence to the next level.

Our vision involves a mixed-use complex that houses county departments like Personnel, Health and Social Services, along with independent, nonprofit health and human service agencies currently scattered across Rockland County.

For our nonprofit agencies, this would maximize their financial viability by efficiently centralizing leasing and support services, allowing concentration on their core mission of serving our residents.

For our **residents**, this blueprint would provide a "one-stop" location for essential county health and human services and programs, easily accessible via public transportation.

For the **County**, the re-purposing of Building "A" will enhance our health services sector employment and add needed sources of revenue.

For all **stakeholders**, our vision provides an opportunity to transform Summit Park into a modern, professional human services hub in real time.

At the very minimum, Building "A" could be leased to relevant agencies and benefit them by providing for a long-term, market rate lease, with a stable landlord, enabling shared service efficiencies and bringing revenue to county coffers.

If we choose to re-imagine our County's delivery of services, we would assume a lead role in organizing tenant agencies for alternative levels of shared governance, fund raising, strategic planning and service delivery.

There would be no limit to the synergies that will develop when previously separate organizations with related health and human service missions come together in an incubator-like setting.

My administration is committed to improving the health and wellness of the people of Rockland County through the delivery of a continuum of critical services.

Picture it: physical health, behavioral health and human services partners – under one roof!

Our proposal to re-think Summit Park will help ensure access to a full spectrum of high-quality programs and providers for all of our residents, including our most vulnerable populations.

As demonstrated earlier, we seek the Legislature's input and urge you all to join me in supporting the vision to ***re-think Rockland County's future for our children and grandchildren.***

(Pause)

Every day in Rockland County, an entrepreneur launches an idea, a company delivers a new product, and businesses, large and small, take risks so our community can reap the benefits of new jobs.

All too often, government is looked at as an obstacle to bringing wealth to local communities. I will tell you two things ... that observation is all too often accurate, and it is decidedly ***not the case here with Rockland government.***

I take my charter responsibility as Chief Economic Development Officer seriously, and will continue to ensure we have an economic vibrancy here in Rockland that will stem the demand of higher property taxes.

Most people agree the main goal of economic development is improving the financial well-being of a community through job creation, job retention, tax base enhancements and quality of life.

That is a major goal - and, it cannot be achieved quickly.

Tonight, I'm pleased to report that we're moving in the right direction.

In December, ***Rockland County reported the lowest unemployment rate*** among all seven counties in the Hudson Valley region at 3.8%.

Working closely with strong partners like the Rockland Economic Development Corporation, the Rockland County Industrial Development Agency and the Rockland Business Association, my administration's economic strategy is creating jobs and opportunities for residents across the county.

The fact that unemployment is at its ***lowest December level since 2006*** is a good sign our efforts are paying off.

Last year, we chalked up significant successes on projects that will positively impact our entire County for decades to come:

We have a new owner of the former Pfizer campus.

IRG, successful in revitalizing former military and industrial complexes, plans to redevelop the sprawling campus in Pearl River and Nanuet, with the expectation of creating and restoring jobs through a mix of manufacturing, retail, research-and-development and other commercial purposes.

In Orangeburg, our high-tech data center cluster continues to grow dramatically.

The nearly-billion dollar commitment of the Bloomberg data center is joined by an almost matching investment by Green House Data, which recently opened its new center at One Ramland Road.

These high value/low impact facilities are economic jewels with huge potential for growth.

And, they will serve as a stable economic presence for years to come.

The latest figures from the International Data Corporation show that service provider data center capacity **will increase nearly 750% between now and 2019.**

It's my goal to seek additional, substantial investment Rockland County's "cloud-oriented" infrastructure.

We must demonstrate how committed we are to bringing even more opportunity to businesses and government organizations looking to offer great new experiences, while setting new standards for environmental responsibility in data center design and operations.

Every time you save something to "the Cloud," we want you to think of Rockland County.

(Pause)

Steve Porath, Executive Director of the Rockland IDA, reports that 2015 was its busiest year ever.

And, that's not by accident ... it is by design.

That's the result of hard work and commitment to economic development by my administration and our partners tasked with its implementation.

Other new IDA projects include, to name a few: the new \$25 million Crystal Run Healthcare facility in West Nyack, now under construction.

Streit's Matzos purchase and current renovation of major facility in Orangeburg.

Celtic Sheet Metal's purchase and planned expansion of the former Olympus site.

And an expansion of Par Pharmaceutical that included their moving all their New Jersey operations right here to Rockland. ***Yes, and contrary to some belief out there, we can, and we will compete with New Jersey and any other municipality!***

These and other projects will result in new jobs and new investment in our County.

And, 2016 is already starting off in big way.

The IDA is already busy reviewing multiple new, significant projects.

While some may see Rockland's small size as a handicap when competing for new businesses, the reality is, ***we've made it one of our greatest assets.***

While other counties and regions respond to opportunity like a battleship turning, we're reacting, responding, and readjusting in days, if not hours, to close the deal.

In business, this makes huge difference.

It's pretty simple, really: New revenue for local governments means reduced burden for local taxpayers.

Led by my Director of Economic Growth and Tourism Lucy Redzeposki, we are working as a team to attract new investment, while continuing to support our local employers, alongside our government partners at the village, town, and school district levels.

In the months ahead, we must use the positive working relationships that exist between these entities to forge a unified force that will better ensure that any county-wide projects in the future are evaluated fairly and clearly, not emotionally or politically.

My role as County Executive is to work hard each day to keep the state of our county government strong.

Keeping the state of our community strong is the job of us all.

(Pause)

As a community, we can never lose sight of the fact that, for someone who is unemployed or underemployed, 'one' is the only statistic that matters.

That's why we've joined with Rockland Community College and Rockland BOCES to launch the Rockland County Career Center, a new initiative that offers job search and career development services.

The Career Center is a collaborative endeavor that brings together employers and job seekers, providing a comprehensive, one-stop approach to career exploration, job training and employment searching.

Working with RCC President Dr. Cliff Wood and BOCES District Superintendent Dr. Mary Jean Marsico, we've created a strategy by which we collectively combine our resources to give our residents a pathway to a livable wage career.

Next week, we will officially launch this new partnership with RCC and BOCES, and I know it will go a long way toward improving the quality of life for everyone in Rockland.

By joining public and private forces in a productive strategy to identify and target new growth and new opportunities, ***we will continue to embrace bold ideas to expand opportunity.***

(Pause)

We recognize that small companies are now fueling our local workforce.

And many of our local start-up businesses are led by entrepreneurs who took the knowledge and expertise gained at larger operations to launch their own successful businesses.

With this in mind, Rockland County recently joined forces with the U.S. Small Business Administration in a program to bring more SBA programs and services to new and existing small businesses throughout the County.

The 'Strategic Alliance Memorandum' **marks the first time the SBA has entered into such an alliance with any county government in the State of New York. We should all be proud of that!**

This collaboration will ease the accessibility of our small businesses to both federal and local free economic development programs, services and trainings.

We are excited to partner with the SBA to provide the resources that many of our small business owners seek, allowing them to thrive.

We know that supporting our small business community only strengthens our local economy and improves the quality of life for all residents.

We're also partnering with the SBA to promote tourism in Rockland County!

This sweeping effort to bring foreign guests to our community ties together all of the wonderful arts, cultural and attraction amenities we offer every day.

Through this initiative, we look forward to sharing Rockland's eclectic shops, award-winning cuisine, historic inns and vast open space with thousands of international guests.

We are reversing the view of Rockland as being a "kind of upstate"; "somewhere" north of the City ; and "near" New Jersey to a **primary hub destination that visitors will branch out from** while enjoying the best of what Rockland has to offer.

For example, last year, 1.8 million Chinese tourists visited America and spent a whopping \$21.1 billion. I made my way to Flushing, Queens recently and spoke directly to the Chinese people through their media outlets with a twofold goal ... I want visitors to enjoy what we have here in Rockland and frankly, I want a share of the money they spend for our local economy!

If we can attract just a few thousand of these visitors to our restaurants, hotels and attractions each year, our local economy would see a major boost.

We welcome their investment – and, we thank the SBA for helping us make Rockland County **a destination!**

Through our tool-belt of economic development programs and initiatives, **it's my administration's goal to help create or retain more jobs than during any other time in recent history.**

Doing so offers the best proof yet that our economy is on the fast track to prosperity.

Government investments like this level the playing field in a State where there are far too many barriers to doing business, far too many regulations on employers, and way too much red tape tying-up local jobs. It's Rockland County's job to create an environment that helps to grow our local workforce.

We are working collaboratively with our partners in the business community and our unionized trade organizations to ensure a broader success for all.

Increased success in creating this strong economic platform will mean decreased reliance on our local property taxpayers.

Our economy is projected to continue its steady growth, and we've proven our county government can be an effective facilitator and partner in finding solutions to some of Rockland's greatest challenges.

(Pause)

Transportation infrastructure is one of the most basic responsibilities of County government and critical to every facet of our economic and daily life.

Whether it is getting to work, shopping, driving our children safely to school or moving goods and products to market, a transportation infrastructure system is at the center.

My administration recognizes the importance of improving and maintaining a roadway system necessary to serve the demands of our residents and businesses, as well as to build the foundation for economic growth so we can compete in the Hudson Valley.

Creating and maintaining our transportation infrastructure is a vital component of Rockland County's economic well-being and essential to much needed job creation and retention for our community.

With this in mind, our Highway Department, guided by Superintendent Skip Vezzetti, has led something of a two-year road and bridge "renaissance" in Rockland County:

On the heels of the completion of a \$30 million plus project just outside on New Hempstead Road, Union Road in Spring Valley, Oak Tree Road in Orangetown and Montebello Road in Ramapo all have received "extreme makeovers" since the start of my administration.

Skip and his team have five major projects queued up for 2016 and beyond, including the \$12.4 million replacement of the Orangeburg Road Bridge in Orangetown and the federally-funded replacement of the vehicle bridge on Samsondale Avenue in West Haverstraw, both of which cross the CSX tracks.

These projects represent some of the Highway Department's major initiatives since the start of my administration.

However, they do not include the dozens of miles of roads that have been repaved, resurfaced and redesigned during the past two years.

Today, our County roads and sidewalks are smoother and safer than in any time in recent history.

As I have said many times, we have a responsibility to ourselves and to future generations to maintain and improve the roads, bridges and sewer systems that previous generations built for us.

It is a responsibility we cannot ignore or postpone.

Waiting will cost us four to five times the amount of taxpayer money.

The end result of this renewed attention to our roads is safer infrastructure, which means greater capacity in the network, resulting in less congestion and decreased travel times, which improves our quality of life and attracts businesses and job creators to locate in Rockland County.

This is the least we can do for future generations - our children and grandchildren who will call Rockland home.

The bottom line: My administration will not delay investments in critical infrastructure.

Doing so would diminish our ability to compete with surrounding counties which have already made the commitment.

Delays would also result in major and more costly repairs in the future, as well as impact safety.

And, frankly, that would be unacceptable.

(Pause)

People often ask me, "Why can't you run government like a business?"

In many ways we have over the past two years as we have utilized many "best practices" from the private sector.

We've reduced costs and improved efficiencies, and we've focused on our core mission: providing the highest level of service at the lowest cost to taxpayers.

But government does have a unique responsibility to take on the tasks that the private sector can't or won't do.

Rockland County government is responsible for services that help our most at-risk neighbors achieve success and self-sufficiency.

Unfortunately, the problem of fraud is becoming increasingly important as the number of local residents who receive some form of assistance from the county grows.

Right now, nearly one-third of our entire population is receiving Medicaid and that massive number tells me that a closer look is required as frankly, the numbers just do not add up.

To that end, our Department of Social Services has made it a priority to target fraud, waste, and abuse of our programs and services.

In fact, Rockland County is a leader statewide.

Last year, the County saved more than \$2.2 million in public assistance cost-avoidance savings and overpayments identified in 2015. That was in addition to \$1.5 million saved in 2014.

During the first two years of my administration, our DSS investigators denied benefits on 209 occasions, saving several million dollars in taxpayer money.

To date, our Front End Detection System has saved millions in taxpayer dollars – nearly \$4 million worth.

The system identifies and targets problems at the application stage and keeps people who are not eligible for government assistance out of the system.

I want to applaud our Department of Social Services for their hard work in cracking down on those trying to scam the system.

Commissioner Susan Sherwood is here tonight and I would like to thank Sue and her team for Front End Detection and their efforts year-round.

Let's give them a hand.

(Pause)

I will not tolerate people trying to take money out of the pockets of our taxpayers in Rockland County.

Residents should have the utmost confidence that their hard earned tax dollars are spent with accountability.

Only by advocating together for critical changes to state welfare laws will we successfully take steps forward in the battle to safeguard taxpayer resources and to ensure the integrity of essential programs.

Contact your state representatives and demand the changes both my administration and our legislature have requested!

Our hardworking residents invest millions of dollars each year in public funds to assist their neighbors who need help – people who meet the eligibility requirements to receive public assistance for the basic necessities of life.

Dishonesty within our public assistance system diverts precious taxpayer dollars, drives up costs and jeopardizes the strength of programs that serve our most vulnerable residents.

With aggressive DSS investigations at the source and aggressive prosecution by District Attorney Tom Zugibe, we are better protecting Rockland County taxpayers, as well as the limited pool of resources available to help our neediest population.

In the year ahead, watch as our DSS re-doubles its efforts to ***focus on a hand-up, and not a hand out!***

(Pause)

As County Executive, I truly understand the need to make tough budget decisions.

Every level of government needs to spend less, borrow less, and follow the lead of most families in our community who each and every day take action to live within their means.

For years you've heard me talk about the crushing burden of Medicaid.

Providing Medicaid is a mandate, the largest in our budget.

Medicaid recipients have increased consistently over the past five years, with an estimated 50% increase since 2011. That boggles the mind and frankly is unsustainable.

Nearly 100,000, or 1 in 3 Rockland County residents, are currently receiving Medicaid.

Historically, Medicaid expenses were funded 50% by the federal government, 25% by the states and 25% by local County governments. **(Slide 2)**

In 2005, New York State adopted legislation to reduce the effects of increasing Medicaid recipients and subsequent costs by placing a cap, or limit, on local Medicaid expenses.

As a result, even though recipients have substantially increased, Rockland financial responsibility for Medicaid has remained relatively stable, and has even decreased from 2011.

But, counties will still have a Medicaid bill to pay each year, and in Rockland County, the ***total will be the equivalent of nearly 60% of our total property tax levy.***

Because of Medicaid and other mandated programs, balancing the County budget continues to be a challenge.

Each year we have to overcome a multi-million dollar structural imbalance.

State mandates are over 90% of our budget and 100% of our problem.

State mandated programs include the pension program, safety net, child welfare, special-ed/pre-k programs, early intervention, indigent defense, probation, youth detention, and our jail – and that's only half the list.

No one will argue that our friends and neighbors don't benefit from these programs, and there is a constituency behind every one of these programs.

The problem is counties have no control over the cost of the programs. And New York State is the ONLY State in the nation that forces its counties to pay this bill.

My message to Albany is this. If you want true reform, let our county executives run these programs. Do not give us the rules, stick us with the bill, and then run and hide. Take the shackles off and let me do the job. We need to change a sense of entitlement that will eventually bankrupt us.

Sometimes the State provides partial reimbursement to counties, but often times the mandate comes without corresponding State revenue.

This issue was “front and center” just a few weeks ago when Governor Cuomo released an Executive Order regarding the homeless population.

To me, the solution is clear: ***Fix the mandates and you fix the counties.***

And, local property taxpayers will be able to keep more money in the family budget.

(Pause)

As I have said time and again, the health and safety of all residents in Rockland County is the highest priority of my administration.

Nine months ago, we launched the Rockland Codes Initiative, a sweeping effort to combat unsafe and illegal housing in our communities.

We’re utilizing the broad powers of the Health Department’s sanitary code to inspect dwellings and issue violations, which allows us to fight back against those who think it’s ***no big deal*** to take advantage of those who have little voice.

We’ve made it easy to file a confidential complaint about any property in the county.

We’ve also made the process more transparent and more costly for the offenders.

Is it working?

Just look at the results. **(Slide 3)**

In one year, the number of Housing complaints to the Health Department **increased by 28-percent.**

The number of Housing inspections **jumped 69-percent**, from 2014 to 2015.

And, fines assessed by the Department of Health increased **630-percent** in one year!

From \$54,000 in 2014 to \$391,000 in 2015.

They say ‘money talks.’

Now that we’re hitting violators with serious monetary fines, we’re seeing greater compliance.

Electrical outlets are being repaired; smoke detectors are being installed; jerry-built rooms are being dismantled.

Our well-orchestrated battle against exploitive absentee landlords and property owners is led by two strong, determined County employees: Commissioner of Health Dr. Patricia Ruppert and RCI Coordinator Catherine Johnson-Southren.

I commend Dr. Ruppert, Kate Johnson-Southren and the entire RCI team of inspectors for working overtime to stop the madness.

Let's give them a hand.

(Pause)

Every day, these skilled Health Department inspectors visit unsafe and overcrowded homes and apartments throughout the County.

They see things that most of us will never see – and, thank God for that.

I'm proud to say RCI has been both *successful...* and, *sensitive*.

To date, ***not one resident*** has been evicted by an RCI complaint.

We understand that most of the tenants living in these conditions are on lower rung of our socioeconomic ladder.

They are living in illegal housing provided by unscrupulous landlords who receive cash for rentals and take advantage of the disadvantaged. ***We cannot, and will not, accept that!***

But, with the success of RCI, ***we will turn slumlords into landlords!***

(Pause)

Tonight, I'm pleased to unveil the next phase of the Rockland Codes Initiative.

With the help of County Attorney Tom Humbach, I'm announcing a countywide Rental Certification and Registry initiative.

The program requires that every property in the County, at which there are more than three renters, must register with the Health Department in order to be allowed to offer those units for rent.

The applicant will have to verify that the premises comply with all laws or regulations that ensure the health and safety of the occupants and first responders, as a condition of being permitted to rent the premises, while also maintaining the property's safe and sanitary condition in the future.

Owners will also have to provide backup documentation, like a Certificate of Occupancy, to show that the property is fit for habitation.

Failure to obey the requirements of regulation may lead to significant fines.

You'll learn more details about our new Rental Registry in the weeks to come.

Watch for an official announcement.

For the sake of our residents who are tenants and first responders, whether in Clarkstown, Ramapo, Haverstraw, Orangetown or Stony Point, the County is supporting their dignity and taking up the gauntlet against landlords just don't give a damn.

We all know that firefighting is dangerous enough, but it should not be made more dangerous when property owners, motivated by greed, illegally carve up apartments.

My message to slumlords is this: ***I will do whatever is necessary to ensure that neither a child, resident, nor one of Rockland County's "Bravest" dies in a converted attic or hidden stairwell.***

Join me as we move RCI into a new chapter, preserving the quality and character of our diverse neighborhoods and saving lives.

(Pause)

Speaking of bravery, it's time to meet two gentlemen who exude bravery and dedication to duty.

On June 17th last year, Highway Department 'Heavy Equipment Operator' Peter Power was transporting a roller on College Road, near Viola Road, in Ramapo when he came upon a car that had just flipped over.

Pete stopped the truck and took immediate action.

As he walked toward the vehicle, he heard a woman screaming... and, saw that the car was on fire!

The elderly driver was trapped.

She was unable to climb out of the burning wreck.

Without hesitation - or, regard for his own safety - Pete smashed out the windshield; reached into the vehicle; unfastened the woman's seatbelt; and pulled her to safety.

He got a big gash in his arm in the process.

Pete could have called 9-1-1 and waited for police and firefighters, but he didn't.

He courageously responded to a dangerous situation and saved the life of a stranger in need of immediate help. Then he said nothing and went back to work!

Well, and in spite of his modesty, we found out about Pete's heroism and I am proud to honor Peter Power tonight with Rockland County's **Distinguished Service Award**.

On behalf of us all, we salute your selfless service and are thankful that you were present that day to help.

(Introduce Peter Power)

On the late afternoon of October 27th, the U.S. Coast Guard received a distress call about an overturned boat in the Hudson River near Hook Mountain.

The distress call mentioned “people in the water.”

Mike Baker heard that call.

Mike was the captain that day, at the helm of the New York Waterway ‘Haverstraw-to-Ossining Ferry.’

The ferry was docked in Ossining, awaiting passengers for the return trip to Haverstraw.

And, even though a few Rockland-bound passengers were already aboard, Mike called to his deckhand, Tom Lennane, and said, “Let’s go!”

About five minutes and a-half mile later, Mike located the up-side-down vessel.

A man was sitting on top of the capsized boat, obviously suffering from the effects of hypothermia.

As he approached from the north, Mike re-positioned the ferry to the south, because the tide was outgoing - a maneuver that provided better control of the incident.

With the help of a volunteer passenger, Tom deployed the ferry’s rescue equipment, known as a “Jason’s Cradle” off the bow.

Once the gear was fully deployed, Mike slowly moved the big ferry to within a few feet of the capsized vessel, following Tom’s hand signals for the final few yards.

Within seconds, Tom and the volunteer pulled the man aboard the ferry and checked for other victims.

After the all-clear, Mike turned the ferry toward Ossining and pushed the throttles to “full.”

From the helm, Mike kept in constant radio contact with the Coast Guard, who notified Ossining Police and EMS to meet the ferry upon return.

The response, rescue and return to land all took place within 20 minutes.

EMS briefly treated the victim on board, before transporting him to Phelps Memorial Hospital.

Waiting passengers boarded, and Mike took off for Haverstraw - all in a day’s work.

But, it was so much more.

Just as Pete demonstrated in Ramapo, Mike risked his own life for the safety of others. And, this isn’t the first time.

Many of you know Mike from his tenure as Fire Chief in Pearl River.

On this particular autumn day on the Hudson River, his expert seamanship, brave and quick action likely prevented more tragedy.

I am honored to award Mike Baker tonight with Rockland County's **Distinguished Service Award**.

Thank you for your skill, courage and commitment to saving the lives of others.

(Pause)

I was elected two years ago to change the trajectory of Rockland County.

And, as you've heard tonight, we've accomplished a great deal toward that goal.

In fact, we're just hitting our stride.

We continue to work **every day** to restore faith and trust in "good government" for the people.

People believe in their government when it works.

With respect to the goals of "good government," my administration has been moving forward to ensure that taxpayer dollars are conserved and spent wisely.

Under a program conceived by County Attorney Humbach, we have revamped the contracting process for the County's contract agencies.

These are the agencies employed by the County primarily to provide outreach and support to the residents of the County in need, by reason of health, homelessness and poverty.

We have put into place measures to enact, where required, competitive bidding and other cost control measures, as well as improving oversight of how County funding - **your money** - is spent by these agencies.

With regard to nonprofit health and human services agencies, the administration has worked closely with those agencies and Legislators on a concept to provide multi-year contracting that will mandate a procurement process that adds certainty to the funding of the agencies on a recurring basis.

This will allow the agencies the stability to plan their growth for the long-term.

It will also allow the contractors to work closely with the administration to identify needs, opportunities and potential concerns through a mutually agreed and on-going process of strict monitoring and oversight.

Many thanks to my Deputy County Executive Guillermo Rosa for taking the lead on this.

(Pause)

County Attorney Humbach and my Director of Public Policy and Intergovernmental Relations, Stephen Powers, have also introduced competition into the realm of federal Housing and Urban Development grants to local towns, villages and nonprofits.

In simple terms, they devised a policy that rewards HUD grant recipients for saving money on a project.

The policy change also rewards grant applicants or developing projects that create revenue. ***Imagine that ... your government expecting recipients to create revenue in exchange for your tax dollars!***

From now on, an agency that either comes in under budget or returns revenue to the “pot” of available federal monies will get the first bite at that funding when new projects are approved.

It is the intention of this incentive to encourage ***smart spending*** of taxpayer dollars, and to increase the available pool of money to build the number and scope of projects in the future.

I thank Tom and Steve for “thinking creatively” to help our administration spend ***your money*** wisely.

(Pause)

Keeping with the theme of “good government,” tonight I’m asking the Legislature to work collaboratively with the Executive Branch to update our procurement code, making it easier for vendors, ***especially our local firms***, to compete legally, and do business with our county.

In 2012, the New York State Legislature authorized local governments to utilize the Best Value Competitive Bidding process, which allows non-price factors to be considered when awarding a purchase contract.

Some of these factors include warranties, energy efficiency, contractor’s local experience with Rockland County and knowledge of the communities served.

State agencies have used the Best Value award process for over a decade.

Rockland County still has not acted on this opportunity for over three years.

This evening, I ask, once again, for the Legislature to pass the required local law to authorize Best Value Competitive Bidding, and I thank Budget & Finance chairman Mike Grant for his renewed interest in this effort.

Even more important than providing the ability to award our own contracts using Best Value, this local law will enable the County’s Purchasing Division to consider the use of national purchasing cooperatives.

In many cases, these national cooperative contracts provide lower pricing based on the nationwide scope of the contract. ***That reduces the cost of government and saves all of you money!***

The ability to utilize these national cooperative contracts allows for a more efficient procurement process.

Director of Purchasing Paul Brennan has provided the required draft local law to the legislature, as well as draft procedures to implement Best Value Competitive Bidding.

The draft procedures allow for sufficient oversight on this new contracting process, requiring legislative approval of all competitive bids awarded by the County using the Best Value award process.

We can save taxpayers millions of dollars while maintaining a high level of service delivery to citizens and making county government more efficient and accountable to the taxpayers.

The Purchasing Division also recently implemented the most current software technology to manage the evaluation process for both "Request for Proposals" and Best Value Competitive Bids.

The use of the "Bonfire" program strengthens the evaluation process by providing greater oversight of the evaluation process, and provides a project dashboard that allows the Purchasing Division to monitor the status of multiple projects from a single screen.

Rockland County is setting a new standard for performance with its procurement function.

While honoring "good government" principles, including transparency and open competition, we are more effectively leveraging our buying power and establishing more strategic relationships with vendors selling goods and services to our residents.

As I said a few moments ago, we are working every day to restore the people's faith and trust in government.

This means spending your tax dollars prudently and wisely.

(Pause)

As you can see, we're turning the corner in Rockland County.

We've lowered costs, cut more red tape and updated our technology to improve customer service at every click.

And we're not done yet.

Over the past two years, we have worked to build a government that is responsive to the needs of our residents, businesses, and those that rely on the County for services.

And, tonight, I'm pleased to announce the launch of a refreshed **Rocklandgov.com**.

With much of today's interactions between the County and citizens happening over the Internet, we are pleased to unveil a newly redesigned, much more user-friendly website that continues our work to put people **first** in government.

The website - *set to go 'live' next week* - prioritizes information that is in high demand by residents and visitors, and makes it easier to find key services and programs.

The "makeover" of **Rocklandgov.com** is a major component of our broader redesign of county government to make the services offered by the county more accessible and more cost-effective.

I'd like to thank all those in our MIS Department who worked so hard on getting this project off the ground.

(Pause)

And, finally, tonight, I'm officially unveiling Rockland County's new "brand." **(Slide 4)**

This effort was the brainchild of my Director of Strategic Communications, Scott Salotto.

In simple terms, it's the most ambitious branding effort ever undertaken by this government.

We will incorporate the new logo into every aspect of county operations - signs, letterheads, tourism promotion, vehicle emblems, business cards and dozens of other uses.

We have a county flag and seal, but until now, Rockland County never had a unified brand.

Like Rockland County itself, our new logo combines the familiar with the unexpected.

It draws clear influence from our County's triangular shape – with the Hudson River to the East.

It's basically a stylized version of our classic County map.

The **five** green cubes serve as symbols of our five unique towns, all coming to focus on **one**, charcoal-colored cube, which represents one, UNITED Rockland County.

It connects our rich history and heritage, with our vibrant communities and a bright future.

The result of more than two years of research and development by Scott, it received a soft launch last month, but will go into widespread use with the redesign of the County's official website.

While our new identity certainly isn't everything Rockland County is, it will serve as a constant and consistent reminder of the transformation of our spectacular county.

Telling Rockland's story as a healthy, forward-moving county for those seeking to live, work and start a business is a top priority of my administration.

This redesign is a reflection of our ongoing efforts and it is called marketing. Successful marketing translates into revenue

Thanks to Scott and The Byne Group for their vision and hard work.

(Pause)

Tonight I've talked about the critical partnerships we have in economic development, in public health, in programs advancing our commitment to protecting the taxpayer.

As your County Executive, ***I will continue to put taxpayers first.***

I will continue to focus on jobs and opportunities for residents, young and old.

And ... I will continue to invest in our quality of life.

When I talk with local residents, there's **excitement** about Rockland County again.

It's electric.

People are talking – and, it's all good!

People have recognized our hard work.

People realize I'm in this job for the right reason – to make Rockland County the best it can be, at the lowest cost possible.

Our eyes are wide open to the challenges that lie ahead, but we can't stop looking for opportunities.

Because as Frederick Douglass once noted, "Without a struggle, there can be no progress."

Rockland County's people have a great spirit.

They're innovative, compassionate, generous, informed and engaged.

They have a great sense of place and a respect of heritage and tradition.

They fight back when "outsiders" take to social media to disparage our communities and our people.

They condemn efforts by some who seek to divide and pit neighbors against each other, under the misinterpretation of the scripture.

Our residents ***absolutely know*** the kind of community they want to live in.

(Pause)

Tonight, I leave you with a call to action.

We are one community with a strong foundation for the future.

But, that future is dependent upon our ability to work together to address the issues that affect all Rockland County.

Whether the issue is providing stable property taxes, stopping overdevelopment and downzoning, or enhancing our quality of life, we must all take on these challenges side by side.

The Executive and Legislative branches in Rockland County have historically struggled with consensus, and oftentimes have settled for status quo instead of progress.

But we have an opportunity to change that dynamic.

Let us rededicate ourselves to a unified commitment to our citizens.

Because only together can we make the enrichment of community life our shared purpose.

And, ***only together can we prove to generations to come that failure is not an option.***

And tonight, let us not leave here without holding a good thought and silent prayer for those who actually provide for the security and liberty that allows us to gather in halls like this across this great nation ... our brave men and women who serve in Armed Forces of the United States of America.

Thank you, God bless you and may God bless the United States of America.

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