

February 5th, 2009

Council President Campana, Council members, guests, friends, and fellow residents- welcome to the 2009 State of the City Address.

Tonight I deliver my sixth, and admittedly most difficult address. While our City is not in dire condition I, like so many Americans, am concerned with news of job losses, a collapsing economy, bailouts, and mortgage crises. We are inundated with it each and every day, and no matter who you are, it starts to wear on your optimism. It grinds you down.

We begin to question ourselves, our economy, and our leaders. Words like change, recovery, and stimulus have become commonplace in every American home. These are words thrown around by politicians seeking reassurance from their constituents and themselves, words that lead down a path of little resistance. I have never been one to lead based on popular opinion or by taking the easier path.

Difficult decisions are by definition not easy. Holding true to your morals and acting on what you believe is right eases the decision making process. That is the road we travel in Troy. Real change can only come when leaders check their politics at the door, sit down, and get to work on the issues that matter. That has not always happened in this city. Partisan politics has a tendency to rear its ugly head and the gears of government are slowed, if not stopped completely.

When this occurs there is always plenty of blame to go around. But we must continue to work. Governing does not stop, nor is it limited to monthly meetings held in this chamber. It requires one to be committed and steadfast to avoiding distractions and focus on the real issue at hand. Sometimes the decision that has to be made is not popular, but is best for the people you serve. Remember that you not only serve them today, but for the future as well. As a result of this style of governing, over the last five years, we have seen real change in the City of Troy.

That real change has better positioned our city to endure the budget deficits facing New York State, though we will not escape unscathed. We have already received unpleasant news from the State level, as the 2008 budget was impacted late last year, and the 2009 budget took another hit before New Years Day. It is our conservative budgeting and the adherence to self imposed restraints that will enable us to carefully adjust our financial positions as we progress through this year.

It is my firm belief that government bodies should impose tax increases on residents only as a last resort. Every legitimate and practical step must be taken to tighten the belt to the very last notch. For the last two years we have resisted the temptation to raise taxes in a climate where it was expected. It would have been easy to shrug our shoulders, point to the rising costs of living, and ask our residents to contribute more from their shrinking budgets to the city coffers.

Believe me we could have used the money. You, our residents, and our business owners, can use it more. This year we sent a message across the state that Troy is in good financial shape and that years of tough decision making has paid off. This is no time to relax our fiscal vigilance. We will continue to move forward and govern using caution and optimism as New York State's difficulties are discussed in Albany.

The news from Albany, Washington and Wall Street is certainly discouraging. Economic slumps, housing price meltdowns and slowdowns in new construction are real. However, we have not been

affected as other parts of the State or the Country. Homes are still selling and new projects are being announced and built. Tonight I will unveil a plan to make sure that we stay strong in the years to come.

In each of the last five years I have delivered an address filled with prosperity, exciting accomplishments, and general gratitude towards all those that make things possible in Troy. This year's address will differ from previous offerings as it will focus squarely on the future.

Despite government being mired down in political battles last year, real progress continued throughout Troy. New businesses opened, taxes remained stable, federally funded programs advanced, exciting events were held throughout the summer, police initiatives were successful, and on Hoosick Street, our most traveled thoroughfare, a dramatic makeover began. I want to thank all of the City employees that made these things possible, as they were the good of 2008.

This speech is an invitation to the City Council, to residents, business owners, developers and anyone else invested in the future of Troy- an invitation to the future.

My administration has three years before our term comes to an end. We will sprint to the finish and leave the City of Troy in much better condition than when we first took office on January 1st, 2004.

Tonight, I outline the goals and initiatives which we intend to partner with the City Council and our neighbors to make happen. Each is proposed with one thought in mind- the betterment of Troy. We do not seek to command anyone, but instead work to convince everyone that the plan we pursue is to the benefit of the entire community- not just a select few.

Over the next five years municipalities throughout this state will be placed in a position where capitalizing on your opportunities will not be a luxury, but a necessity for survival and long-term success.

As state and federal cutbacks become a reality, we will be forced to choose between draining our financial assets in survival mode, or creating a climate of economic vitality that will encourage investment in our community.

It is my goal to pursue the latter. Tonight, we will begin to unveil the steps that must be taken to stem the tide of this economic slowdown, and battle the long odds that face communities throughout New York.

We must usher Code Enforcement into the 21st century. We will offer a paradigm shift in federal grant funding. We will develop our natural resources. And we will work diligently and without political delay to build the momentum to soar.

Tonight I tell you that my administration proposes to make dramatic investments in the next five years to our neighborhoods through the federally funded Community Development Block Grant program. These targeted funds, provided in support of local organizations working to enhance and stabilize their neighborhood, will lay the groundwork for economic development in locales where so many had given up hope.

We will invest more than \$6 million in South Troy and North Central. Though there are many uses for this money, I can think of no better option than an investment that will generate optimism in two

neighborhoods full of potential and ripe for change.

In recent years residents have proven to be invaluable in identifying neighborhood needs and priority projects. They will remain so moving forward. We will work with them and business owners to focus on areas of need, and supply the means to complete street improvements, safety enhancements, sidewalk replacements, trash receptacles, lighting, street planters, building stabilization, neighborhood pride banners, pocket park rehabilitations, and selective demolition of abandoned structures.

These areas have higher concentrations of blight and poverty and while investment exists, it lags behind other areas of Troy. By making these targeted investments, we will achieve two vital goals.

Dramatic improvements to South Troy and North Central will provide proof to longtime residents and newcomers that their elected officials are going to stand tall next to our neighbors. We will send a message that urban living centers are not dead, they are not havens for crime and drugs, and that each and every one of us will continue to fight for the cherished spot they once held. For decades our neighborhoods served as a home to our greatest thinkers and achievers, those who built this City from scratch. There is no reason they cannot stand like that once more.

The second achievement we hope to attain is to lay the foundation for an economic revitalization. While \$6 million in targeted improvements is a solid start, this renaissance becomes more attainable when that money is coupled with a showcase project featuring developments that will change the landscape.

In North Central, the site formerly occupied by Jack's Junkyard will begin remediation this year with an eye towards becoming a landmark along the Hudson River called Quadricentennial Park. Obtaining this land was not an easy process, nor will the subsequent cleanup be completed overnight. When the job is done however, where there once stood a symbol of blight and pessimism in North Central, there will be the rebirth of an industrial wasteland. It will be a park to view the river during all seasons, a spot to picnic in the summer, a place to fish each spring during our annual Big Fish, or launch a boat for a leisurely afternoon.

South Troy is the proposed home of the Upper Hudson Rivers and Estuaries Center, a state funded project in conjunction with Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and the Beacon Institute that pledges to be a global center for interdisciplinary research, policy-making and education regarding rivers, estuaries, and their connections. While the building is not scheduled to open until late 2010, the potential it holds for the redevelopment of the entire Hudson Riverfront is tremendous.

One final note before I move onto another area of the City- we will continue our targeted code enforcement strategy, the NICE Program - Neighborhood Improvement through Code Enforcement - in South Troy. This specific neighborhood contains more than 500 properties situated adjacent to the perimeter of Washington Park, a historic district neighborhood that has not only seen significant investment during the last decade, but proves that efforts of this magnitude can be successful.

In our downtown, we will continue to work with the Troy Downtown Collaborative to create, organize, and produce quality events like River Street Festival, ChowderFest, the Troy Pig Out, and the Rockin' on the River Concert Series, all of which drew tens of thousands of people to our streets in 2008. These events are vital during a time of economic strife- providing free entertainment to our families, and serving as a conduit to attract people from around the region that visit our shops, eat at our restaurants,

and spread the word that Troy's comeback is real and exciting.

These events did not happen by accident, nor will they continue simply because they occurred last year. The Business Improvement District proposal, currently in front of this City Council, pledges to take the reins of these events to ensure long-term sustainability while providing a number of services that will promote, grow, and improve the Central Business District in Downtown Troy.

Tonight I ask that the City Council embrace the BID plan and allow the property owners of the district to vote. Should the vote progress as its proponents believe, this Council should move quickly to enact legislation that officially creates the district.

Tonight I also renew my request that the City Council join my administration in advancing a revaluation in the City of Troy. Last year, little movement was made on this front, and once again our equalization rate sank, and County taxes, despite having no proposed increase, shot up for our homeowners. We face similar issues this year with our school districts. Couple this with the current economic situation, and we face a perfect storm if we do not act in the very near future.

In the coming months we will hold additional public meetings to discuss this matter with anyone that may be concerned. As I said here one year ago, it will take political courage to accomplish something that no one else has been able to do in the City of Troy in more than 30 years.

Earlier I talked about taking advantage of our natural resources. Chief among those resources for Troy is the Tomhannock Reservoir. By 2010 we will expand the number of communities to which we sell water by contracting with Waterford, Halfmoon, and Poestenkill for the first time. Last week we heard that the EPA had reached a deal with General Electric to pay for the cost of an \$8.2 million pipeline running under the Hudson River. What the news failed to mention was that this pipeline was recently completed and is already fully functional.

As we expand our sales to other communities, we must also take appropriate steps to guarantee the infrastructure that supplies the water is safeguarded from aging and deterioration. No matter your thoughts on the economic stimulus package, Troy stands ready to compete with municipalities from across New York State for millions of dollars. One of the largest projects we seek to fund is the complete rehabilitation of the pipeline that extends from the reservoir to the water treatment plant. Though it is not the most glamorous of projects, this \$30 million rehab will ensure a safe water source for generations.

My administration is working to push forward a strong and realistic slate of projects. High on the list of our requests will be the complete funding of the road costs for the Congress-Ferry Street and Upper Congress Street reconstructions, as well as portions of the economic development in this area. We expect the road work to begin by summer, and hope for the private portion of the project to begin shortly thereafter.

Last week we met with Congressman Paul Tonko to discuss a number of different options we may have under the stimulus package. We have decided that we will apply for funding a new City Hall on this site.

As we prepare to move our offices to the former Verizon building on Sixth Avenue, we will also begin the process of creating a mixed-use development here that transcends urban redevelopment, reinvents

public space uses, and opens up our waterfront.

With the Quadracentennial Park in North Central, this site and Riverfront Park in Downtown, the science center and the King Fuels property in South Troy we are in a strong position to determine for ourselves what development takes place along the Hudson River.

It is appropriate that the potential reuse of waterfront should come this year, as we prepare to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson's discovery of the Hudson River. Staff in City Hall, and volunteers throughout the community, have been hard at work preparing a series of events to celebrate this historic occasion in September. It will be a week of events surrounding all of our historic neighborhoods, with a culmination on Troy Night Out that we hope will be remembered 100 years from now during the Quincentennial.

Before I close tonight, I want to remind everyone that the strength of Troy is the future of our children. That is why it is imperative that we continue to support and encourage them as they mature into adulthood. One of the things I treasure most about being the Mayor is the interaction I have with our schoolchildren. They are always thrilled to meet the mayor and they ask the darnedest questions.

There is never enough we can do for them. One thing we can do is make sure they do is stay in school and develop the tools necessary for success. Last year we began the Truancy Abatement Program, a partnership with the school districts, the Troy Police and host of other agencies. Already truancy has been reduced by over 30% in Lansingburgh Schools with similar results expected in the Troy Schools. Started with little fanfare, this initiative is delivering results by keeping kids in school and getting them off of the streets- away from temptations that could harm them for the rest of their lives.

In 2008 we completed our third summer of youth programming at Frear Park. This free program provides supervised recreational activities and lunch to more than 100 children each day. Parents are not the only ones thrilled with its success. Any visit to the park during the program will prove that children enjoy the opportunity to have something to do during the summer, while making new friends from across the City. It is a wonderful program that deserves great accolades.

The news that we hear each and every day fills us with anxiety about where our cities, our state, and our country are headed. We have plenty of work in the City of Troy to make sure our revitalization continues. The dream is still very much alive, provided we get to work, avoid needless political battles, and put forth a determined effort to position Troy as an enlightened example of 21st century living.

Tonight we begin anew.

Thank you, good night, and God bless.