

The single greatest change is a shift in perspective. For too long, city government was an exercise in management-by-crisis. Our leaders lurched from one bad situation to another, trying just to stay afloat. But how often did we look beyond the horizon to a better vision of things to come?

We cannot survive forever without a vision. I remind you of Proverbs 29:18: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." If you are not into scripture, here's how Yogi Berra put it: "If you don't know where you're going, you might end up somewhere else." That's why we're committed to work with the Council to pass our comprehensive plan this year.

Tonight, as we trace the contours of the past year, and sketch a portrait of an uncertain but hopeful future, I'll try to pinpoint where we're going as a city.

I call that vision "Five by Five," because it includes five major goals, and five major partnerships necessary to achieve them. The goals are challenging. So they will require the work, faith and cooperation of five different groups of people: elected officials at all levels of government; city employees; community organizations such as block clubs and nonprofit organizations; the business community; and, of course, the residents of our city.

The first of our five challenges is to have a competent, honest city government. Through the years, all of us have been disheartened by scandal, bickering and dysfunction in our city government. In 2007, the voters sent a message that was clear and unmistakable: enough is enough.

I actually had voters tell me, "If you don't accomplish anything else as mayor, just don't embarrass us. Stop the infighting and get everyone on the same page, and we'll be happy."

As many of you know, I attended President Obama's inauguration last week. He put this philosophy into words: "On this day, we come to proclaim an end to the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and worn-out dogmas, that for far too long have strangled our politics. We remain a young nation, but in the words of scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things."

In this spirit, I've reached out to the members of the City Council. I meet once a week with the chairman - last year, Councilman Fruscione, and this year, Councilman Robins - to make sure the Council is informed and involved. And, as much as possible, I have tried to keep our disagreements private. We haven't agreed on every issue, but I respect them and their ideas. Disagreement is human, and debate is essential to our democracy. If we agreed all the time, we wouldn't be doing our jobs. But we need to keep working together to put an end to the mindset that says, "If I disagree with you once, we're enemies forever." When things have become heated, I have tried to hold my fire, keep a cool head, and treat others with dignity, asking only the same in return. Isn't that what you wanted?

Good government begins there - with lively debate, mutual respect and a spirit of cooperation. But it doesn't end there.

I campaigned on a pledge to build a professional, highly qualified administration. I said that people who were doing their jobs well would keep them. I said that, where local talent was available, we would avail ourselves of it. And where we needed a fresh outlook and a break from political entanglements, we would search the nation for potential department heads- not because our local residents are lacking, but because we know that a fresh set of

eyes and a new set of ideas are sometimes the medicine we need. I am proud of the administration we have assembled, and as you come to know these fine women and men, you'll be proud, too.

It was important for us to adjust the salaries for some of these positions, because they simply weren't competitive. If we've learned anything over the years, we've learned that the old adage is true: "You get what you pay for."

The City Council wisely started our city on this course: first, by raising the mayor's salary, and then by creating a contingency fund to give our administration the flexibility to raise other key salaries so we could hire the best talent. When I took office, I was able to secure funding through a local foundation to cover ongoing salary increases at no cost to the taxpayers. I briefed the City Council on this plan, and the Council authorized it. A few months ago, the Council changed course and decided to reject this outside funding. I disagreed with the decision, because I don't think we're in a position to turn down financial help. But I respect the Council's right to make the decision.

Now, we must be sure not to slide backwards. We must not try to hire top administrators at bargain-basement prices. I look forward to working with the Council to maintain a high level of professional leadership in City Hall.

Just as we seek the best department heads, we also seek the best possible city workforce. Our employees work hard. Years of lean budgets have taught us to do more with less, and each day they rise to the challenge. We must invest in their success by offering training and development opportunities, such as the customer service training we offered last year to 19 of our front-line employees.

We also must continue to address the diversity gap. The makeup of our workforce simply does not match the rich makeup of our community. We will work diligently to keep building a diverse workforce across departments - and we will not tolerate discrimination or harassment by our workers or supervisors. Just as we demand mutual respect among elected officials, so we demand mutual respect among our employees. Last year we offered diversity training for 38 department heads and supervisors. And, in collaboration with the Human Rights Commission, we will continue to improve our diversity and compliance programs. We are working with partners in the law enforcement community to make sure our policies and procedures are consistent with State and Federal law, in order to ensure a future work place free from discrimination in hiring and promotion. Where structural issues require long-term structural solutions, I am committed personally as mayor to have those changes in place on my watch.

We seek an open, transparent government - one that is efficient, and accountable to taxpayers. In the coming weeks, we will re-launch our city website to make it even more informative and user-friendly. In the coming months, we will begin a new series of town meetings in neighborhoods throughout the city, so that you can meet our department heads and share your suggestions with me. And by this time next year, we will create a Citizen's Participation Academy. Modeled after a successful program created by Mayor Byron Brown in the City of Buffalo, this Academy will give participants an inside look at city government. Graduates will be equipped to serve as liaisons between city government and block clubs, community organizations, and area businesses.

We have worked hard to build relationships with partners at all levels of government. We were all disappointed that former Governor Eliot Spitzer had to resign from office just as he committed to help us. Now, we are getting to know

Governor Paterson, and I believe he is sincere in his desire to revitalize western New York, even in the midst of the state's very serious fiscal challenges.

Meanwhile, we have worked to gain the respect of United States Senator Charles Schumer, Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, State Senator Antoine Thompson, State Assemblywoman Francine DelMonte, and our delegation of Niagara County legislators. And on Saturday I will meet with our new United States Senator, Kirsten Gillebrand, to discuss how we can get our economy unstuck. Unlike in the past, key partners at other levels of government take us seriously. We are regaining the respect we lost through years of scandal and bickering. That's what you said you wanted, and that's what we're delivering.

Any discussion of good government must include a discussion of the city budget. Despite the rising costs of health insurance, energy of all sorts and materials, we were able to submit and pass a budget with no tax increase. Given the economic challenges that we face, zero percent tax increases may not be possible every year. But I assure you that we will make your tax dollars go as far as we possibly can.

Meanwhile, I commend the Niagara Falls Water Board for putting the brakes on runaway spending and rate increases. At long last, the Water Board has passed a budget with no rate increase for the coming year. Creation of the Water Board was a necessary step to keep the city out of bankruptcy, but we need to strive every day to maintain communications and encourage a close cooperative arrangement. That wasn't happening before, but it is now—and I thank the Board for the leadership they have shown.

Let's be frank. Under the previous leadership, our city was becoming a laughing stock. Now we're taken seriously, and even looked up to as a leader in some areas of policy. Some day soon, I envision a time when we can all lift up our heads and say, "I'm proud to live in Niagara Falls."

The second of our five challenges is economic development. We need good jobs that allow our people to live well and support their families, finding a way forward even as the national and state economies stall.

As almost everyone now understands, this process must start with reinvestment in tourism. We're an international icon. Until we get tourism right, we can't expect any sensible developer or business owner to invest here.

Together we will build a vibrant tourist area - where the Wintergarden no longer impedes the flow of foot traffic. Where long-neglected properties are finally improved. Where the Seneca Nation continues to invest and prosper. Where we capitalize on that Seneca investment by spinning off local businesses. Where a newly restored Hotel Niagara joins an array of other fine hotels. Where the magnificent United Office Building - now known as the Giacomo - draws new residents, tourists and shops. Where a new \$2.4 million visitor center helps tourists to make the most of their stay. Where new developers are eager to create new attractions. And where the Niagara Experience Center stands as the marquee development. As my tourism advisor Eddie Friel of Niagara University constantly reminds me, tourism is an industry, and like any industry tourism requires investment in infrastructure. Governor Paterson said in his State-of-the-State address that he was looking to support transformational projects in the tourism sector in Niagara Falls. When he comes to visit next month, we're going to remind him of that promise.

And make no mistake about tourism's power to lift up our community. In 2008, our city's hotels saw a 6 percent increase in occupancy and an 11.7 percent increase in revenue, up to \$63 million. Conventions and meetings held here had an economic impact of more than \$7 million in 2008 alone. We must continue to increase that number.

New forms of multi-modal transportation are a major part of our vision, and this summer's completion of the new \$43.9 million terminal at the Niagara Falls International Airport will become the cornerstone for our new infrastructure. Meanwhile, we are steadily amassing funds for our new train station and begin delivering passengers directly into the core of our city. It seems like we've waited forever to start work on the new station, but somehow we've kept hope alive. Now, if you'll pardon the pun, we can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel. This summer we will break ground on the first two phases of construction, including restoration of the Customs House and essential railroad improvements. It's about time.

As part of the larger train station project, we have secured Greenway funds to renovate the interior of the Customs House. This newly restored, historic building will house an Underground Railroad Interpretive Center - a major piece of our ambitious North Star Project highlighting our Underground Railroad heritage. Last fall, the city entered into an agreement with State Parks to bring Underground Railroad expert Kevin Cottrell on-board a multi-year mission to make North Star a reality. Last year's federal legislation designating Niagara Falls as a National Heritage Area will speed the advent of the Interpretive Center and other North Star projects.

It couldn't come at a better time. The new public safety complex is nearly complete. Developer John Hutchins is investing in a number of Main Street properties - including a restoration of the Rapids Theater, which we are proud to support through the NFC Development Corporation. Family & Children's Service of Niagara is building a new headquarters, and HANCI is conducting a \$1.8 million renovation and expansion at the gateway to north Main Street. Both of these projects have received funds through our Community Development Block Grant program. I believe these projects will be a catalyst for retail and housing developments on Main Street, and bring new life where there is now mostly plywood and empty sidewalks.

Meanwhile, we know that small business is the heart of our economy, and I personally commend every small business owner who continues to invest in the City of Niagara Falls. Through the NFC Development Corporation, we are creating new grant and loan programs to help small businesses start up and expand - including new businesses in the fledgling downtown entertainment district, and in business districts throughout our city.

We're investing \$1.5 million of casino funds to make Niagara County Community College's Culinary Institute a reality by the end of 2009. This \$15 million facility will be the first of many new jewels in the city's crown.

We intend to tap into the expertise of the new operators of the Conference Center Niagara Falls, because they can help us expand our growing base of festivals and outdoor concerts. This kind of activity will help us attract visitors and keep them here longer. But we must not allow red tape to tie up events that bolster our city. That's why our city administrator has created a Special Events Task Force to streamline the permit process for special events. The Task Force includes representatives from every concerned department, allowing event organizers to finalize plans quickly and conveniently.

Tourism, transportation, education, lodging, retail—all are vital components of a balanced future economy. But there's one more to add to the list: manufacturing. We're becoming a force in the new "green collar" industries that will provide jobs into the 21st century.

The Globe Metallurgical plant on Highland Avenue has been idle for nearly six years. With the help of the New York Power Authority and New York State, Globe is reopening the plant with a \$60 million upgrade. The plant will produce silicon for solar panels. Together with its subsidiary company, Solsil, Globe will create as many as 500 new jobs in our city.

Ashland Advanced Materials is investing millions of dollars in the former SGL Carbon Plant on Niagara Falls Boulevard, in hopes of creating up to 75 jobs in the next few years. Like Globe, Ashland will stake its success on growth in the renewable energy materials and technology markets, and put us in the supply chain for production of 21st century products like fuel cells and lithium batteries for hybrid cars.

Likewise, we continue to work with Northern Ethanol to advance our city's position in the renewable energy sector, with an integrated bio-refinery facility in Niagara Falls, potentially creating more than 100 new jobs and facilitating sustainable new partnerships with existing industries on adjacent parcels.

The latest announcement is from North American Hoganas, which will use clean hydropower to expand its production of powdered metals—traditionally used in the auto parts industry but more recently expanding into the nutritional supplement and water treatment markets, both of which are growing along with the Third World economy.

There is no question that brownfields will continue to be a challenge for years to come. We do intend to find new, more productive uses for our brownfields, including a green industrial park. And we are pursuing plans in the Highland Avenue and Buffalo Avenue corridors under the state's Brownfield Opportunity Area Program, in the hope of recovering these sites for new and better uses.

The old way of thinking was that environmentalism and economic growth were incompatible. The new thinking is that green cities, green industries and prosperous economies go hand in hand. Guess what? For once, instead of being last in line, we're at the front of the pack. And we're going to keep it that way.

Meanwhile, Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center is embarking on a \$6.9 million project to create a new inpatient behavioral health center on its second and third floors. This project will keep the hospital strong and viable, preserving its place as one of our community's most important employers and strongest economic drivers.

We have also seen exciting retail developments, most notably the return of the former LaSalle Senior High School site to the tax rolls as a retail shopping center.

How many of you are fans of NASCAR? Well, there's a yellow flag out on the track of the national economy at the moment. But we're going to cheat a bit, and use it to pass some of the slower moving cars on the track. And when, as it always does, the nation emerges from recession, and the green flag is waving

again, we will be well-positioned to sprint to the checkered flag of greater economic prosperity. We were economic winners in the 1900s, we were economic winners in the 1950s, and we're going to be economic winners again in the 21st century.

The third challenge is to have a livable city, with strong neighborhoods and a great quality of life. As UB professor Henry Taylor says, economic development isn't an end in itself, but rather a means to an end. It allows us to provide the best possible quality of life for our citizens, and to attract new residents. Sometimes, it requires big investments in key projects, but just as often it means doing the little things right over the long haul. From fixing potholes to replacing sidewalks to trimming trees, everything we do that makes us feel better about where we live is a worthwhile investment. Little things done right eventually add up to a brighter future.

Our administration, in partnership with the Council, has made neighborhood issues a priority. In 2008, we replaced 402 units of sidewalk. We removed 233 dead and diseased trees, trimmed 369 healthy trees, and planted 64 new trees—and we're just getting started. We sent nearly 2,400 cleanup orders to delinquent property owners. And while we will fight to preserve viable buildings of historical character, we will continue to demolish structures that threaten the public safety and visit blight upon our neighborhoods. Last year alone, we demolished 95 such structures—and again, we're just getting started.

Last year, there was a killer loose on our streets. But people cheered! Why? Because it was the Pothole Killer! It was the first time the mayor's office received positive phone calls about potholes. It's not a miracle solution to all our problems, and new potholes are popping up all the time. But the Pothole Killer is emblematic of our eagerness to apply new ideas and new technologies to old problems, instead of banging our head against the wall. So the Pothole Killer is back, and will return again. And we will do everything we can to win the war on potholes.

Of course, many of our streets simply need to be repaved or reconstructed. Last year, the Department of Public Works paved 30 streets, and we reconstructed 77th Street, a major artery of LaSalle. We budgeted a lean \$1.73million for the project—and beat that by \$50,000. In fact, we had less than .7% overages on \$5.4million of municipally-funded work. Thank you to Bob Buzzelli in the Engineering Department. This year, we tackle Lewiston Road. We had not done a project like 77th Street in years, but we're going to do them every year from now on.

Another long-stalled project is the reconstruction of the Lockport Street Bridge. This federally funded \$6.3 million project will finally be done this year.

For too long, our city has struggled without the equipment it needs to provide basic services for our citizens. But in 2008, we were able to adopt a \$7.9 million capital spending plan for sorely needed new equipment. These purchases improve every service from street repair and snow removal to firefighting and police protection.

Last year, with a boost from the Maid of the Mist Corporation, we helped block club members construct NorLoc Park, a handicapped-accessible playground at North Avenue and Lockport Street. Again, we're just getting started. This year, we're using state and Greenway funds to create a comprehensive plan for our city parks, so we can be sure green spaces and recreational areas are used to their

full potential, and we're partnering with the Board of Education, Memorial Park Block Club and NOAH to put a park on the South Junior property. And Councilman Anderson is finally going to get his street hockey pad in Stephenson Park, if I have to put in myself!

We're creating a new public park at the Century Club property, and we're initiating major improvements and a canoe launch at Jayne Park on Cayuga Island. We're fighting erosion and creating new recreational opportunities along Cayuga Creek, and we're creating a blueway trail to link LaSalle with other points along the Niagara River Greenway. We're also replacing the 93rd Street pedestrian bridge, to connect the area along Niagara Falls Boulevard with nearby neighborhoods, parks and baseball diamonds. Patsy Mackenna is gone, but her love of our river and the LaSalle neighborhood will live on in the good work we do.

We'll keep looking for ways to give our residents more opportunities for culture, recreation and leisure. For example, this year's inaugural Blues Festival, Ontario House and Eddie Money concerts were a great success, and we hope to keep offering these kinds of events in the coming years. And with Assemblywoman DelMonte's assistance, we secured our new state-of-the-art portable stage, the envy of every surrounding community.

At the same time, we have improved the condition of our city golf course. Don't take my word for it. 2008 saw a nearly 6 percent increase in rounds of golf played at the Hyde Park Golf Course, bringing more than \$60,000 of additional revenue to the city. I even hit the ball straight to tee off the season, and that's a miracle in itself.

We have also called an end to that period in our city's history when our libraries were a political football. We will work with our library to identify cooperative projects like installing brighter, more energy-efficient exterior lighting to increase security, and will examine the potential for roof-mounted solar panels and other green projects to cut the energy bill.

Meanwhile, we are beginning to revitalize entire neighborhoods. While Senator Schumer works to secure federal funding, my administration is devoting Community Development Block Grant funds to help Habitat for Humanity and area homeowners preserve Echota. We will do more, and we will stay committed. I commend Mary Ann and Bill Rolland for refurbishing the three-story home at 21 Hyde Park Boulevard in Echota. While we mourn Bill's passing in December, we know that he and Mary Ann have left a loving and lasting legacy that will anchor the Echota neighborhood for decades to come.

And I am proud that the City of Niagara Falls was able to commit \$3 million toward the environmental remediation at Center Court. This action puts the Niagara Falls Housing Authority's HOPE VI project back on track, bringing tens of millions of federal dollars into our community. HOPE VI will transform Center Court into a new community of hope, beauty and promise. I commend the Housing Authority for its vision and passion in undertaking this project, and I look forward to a bright new day at Center Court.

Neighborhood by neighborhood, we will continue to improve our housing, rebuild our infrastructure, make the most of our parks, and ensure that our residents can take pride in their city.

This June, we will share that pride when Niagara Falls and Buffalo co-host a four-day event called Buffalo/Niagara Homecoming. Organized by a grassroots

group called Niagara Rises, this event will show off all the great things that are happening here, so that we can entice those who have left our area to come back. As someone who left Niagara Falls for employment as a young man, I can tell you that my heart was always here. I am hopeful and optimistic that Niagara Homecoming will become an annual event that inspires others to return as well.

Our fourth challenge is to keep our city safe. I am proud to say that the days of politicizing public safety in Niagara Falls are over. Overtime is under control. We have strong leadership in both our Police Department and our Fire Department. And our city is better off because of these developments.

Thanks to New York State's Operation Impact program, our Police Department is collaborating with state, federal and county law enforcement agencies to fight crime. As recently-promoted NYS Deputy Secretary for Public Safety Denise O'Donnell has told me again and again, our Police Department is regarded as a model program, and we have received \$337,000 to continue this effort for another year. By using CompStat and other high-tech tools, our cops are now able to pinpoint when and where specific types of crime are occurring. This information enables them to make the best use of police patrols. And our Police Department has installed 20 in-car video cameras as an additional tool to prevent criminal activity and ensure accountability. Where we know we have issues, we are determined to resolve them. I commend the department for the steps it has taken to police its own; Chief Chella will not tolerate corruption in his department, in case you didn't notice. Similarly, we acknowledge that we have received complaints of police misconduct. We take them seriously, and are taking steps to address them.

We know that we have to reach our city's young people to prevent youth crime and promote a healthy attitude toward law enforcement. Our Police Department has received a \$187,000 state grant to work with Community Missions and the Niagara County Probation Department on a program to combat violent youth crime. Meanwhile, we held two, eight-week Youth Police Academies in 2008 to show high school students how our Police Department works. This program is just one of many ways that our Police Department is increasing its interaction with the community.

Our ongoing Citizen Police Academy has given hundreds of citizens a firsthand look at our Police Department. This popular program will continue well into the future, giving our residents a sense of involvement and responsibility in promoting public safety.

And last May, in cooperation with the Block Club Council, Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center, Niagara University and other organizations, we opened the 18th Street Community Resource Center. The goal is to marshal various programs and services for a better quality of life in the area from 11th to 18th Streets between Ontario and Whitney.

The numbers suggest that crime increased somewhat in 2008 after significant declines in 2007. But arrests also increased - and in some categories, the increase in arrests was much higher than the increase in crime. This means that our Police Department is responding aggressively to criminal activity and is working diligently to keep us secure. Chief Chella and the Police Department are developing strategies to reduce crime once again, and I am confident that this will occur.

Meanwhile, in 2008 our Fire Department answered a record number of calls - nearly 6,000, including non-fire emergency calls. With an emphasis on fire



prevention education, the Fire Department is working to reduce the number of fires while expanding the overall services that it provides to the community. Last year alone, our life safety educator reached 3,790 children and adults with the Fire Safety Trailer, another 3,750 people through community fire safety programs, and 537 children and adults through firehouse tours. We had no fire fatalities in 2008, and for that I want you to give Chief Mackay, his department and yourselves a big hand.

When we talk about public safety, we must not forget our judiciary. Niagara Falls City Court is a critical link in enforcing codes, fighting crime and improving our neighborhoods. We have a highly capable group of City Court Judges, including Chief Judge Mark Violante, Judge Angelo Morinello and Judge Robert Merino. Last year, I was called upon to appoint a new judge to the bench, and I am proud to have chosen Judge Diane Vitello for this important job - a choice that the voters ratified overwhelmingly in November.

The deplorable condition of our current Public Safety Building on Hyde Park Boulevard indicates less than full respect for the importance of public safety. This year, at long last, we will have a courthouse and public safety complex that pays due homage to the rule of law.

The last of our five major challenges is to create a "green" philosophy here in Niagara Falls to promote a sustainable way of life. Those cities that are most nimble in addressing the new challenges will become more prosperous. Those that lag will be left behind.

More than a century ago, Niagara Falls led the world by harnessing one of the world's largest sources of sustainable hydroelectric power. Our heritage demands that we lead the way again by developing renewable energy sources. And we must work to reduce our own use of fossil fuels, so that we can reduce emissions and make city operations more sustainable.

"Going green" isn't a fad. It is a way of life and must become a way of thinking that shapes the way we operate, the way we build, and the way we do business every day.

So we have started buying hybrid cars, including - you guessed it - the mayor's car. We've worked with the Power Authority to buy two electric vehicles for the Police Department. We are participating in a trial program for a fuel additive that may reduce pollution and improve gas mileage. We're working to reduce energy usage in city buildings, and we've started to replace old-style light bulbs with high-efficiency fluorescents. The first replacement bulbs were installed in - you guessed it - the mayor's office.

The new public safety building wasn't originally designed to meet green building standards, so I insisted that some changes be made. And thanks to our intervention, we will have a LEED-certified courthouse. We are also working with the Power Authority to reduce energy costs at the Hyde Park Ice Pavilion.

And we're making sustainability a key part of the design of the Old Falls Street-West Mall reconstruction project. Our work will be a national model for reducing the rain runoff entering our sewer system, reducing the burden on our wastewater treatment plant.

Through the NFC Development Corporation, we recently created a grant program that will help businesses to modernize their facilities so they'll use less energy, replacing outdated lighting, furnaces and water heaters.

And in the future, we will explore ways to educate our residents about simple, day-to-day changes they can make to "go green" in their own households. This will include an outreach program to make sure our residents are recycling all the materials that they can - which will benefit the environment, reduce the need for landfill expansion, and improve the financial return on our city's recycling program.

Our city is known for its natural beauty. It is our responsibility to safeguard it. We must think green at every level of decision making. Working together, I'm confident that we will create a progressively cleaner, greener community.

Good government. A revitalized economy. A strong quality of life. Safe neighborhoods. A green mindset.

That's Five by Five. That's my vision for Niagara Falls - not just a prescription for survival, but a portrait of the thriving community that we are striving to become.

I realize that it's not easy to summon faith in this better future. The disappointments and failures of the past 40 years have drained us of much of our optimism and confidence. One year's campaign platform becomes the next year's broken promise. But I'm asking you, against history and instinct, to believe again.

Other communities have turned the tide and shaped their destinies. Many of them had far less to work with: no natural wonder in their backyards, no internationally known name, and not one-tenth of the courage and toughness that we have mustered through these hard years. If they could do it, then why can't we?

Why not Niagara Falls? Why not now?

And so we must gather our collective faith - for in the words of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase."

I also realize that many of you think things should be moving faster, that the rebirth of Niagara Falls simply shouldn't take so long. I understand. But remember how long it took for us to reach this point. We can't fix it overnight. And recall that we're still paying the price for quick and easy land deals and developer contracts; we have to make sure we don't make those same mistakes again. We'd all like to wake up tomorrow morning to the city of our dreams - but it's going to take time. The important thing is that we're making progress. We're planting the seeds and nurturing them, and the day will come when our city will return to full bloom. It may not be tomorrow, but it is closer than ever before. And so we must gather our collective patience, for as the Irish proverb says, "Patience can conquer destiny."

Addressing the U.S. Conference of Mayors just prior to the inauguration, White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emmanuel made the point that we must never allow a serious crisis to go to waste. You know what he meant. During times of crisis, our nation has always risen to meet the challenges of history. From Abraham Lincoln to Franklin Roosevelt and now with Barrack Obama, visionary leaders have risen from our midst to guide our nation on its way.

But as our new president reminded us in his inaugural address , it is ultimately our responsibility as citizens to get the job done. Niagara Falls, too, is ready for a "new era of responsibility."

Get involved! City government doesn't have a monopoly on wisdom or ideas. Write me a letter or send me an email. Go to a Council meeting. Run for office. Join a block club. Volunteer at your church or a nonprofit organization. Take ownership of your city. Make things happen and make your voice heard.

Humorist Will Rogers said, "Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there." I think that, with a lot of input from the grassroots, we're on the right track. Now it's time to get everyone on board and get the train moving down the track.

My friends, the state of our city is incomplete. The work is well begun ... but much work remains for us to do. Let's go out and make it happen.

Thank you, and God bless you all.