



“Rise to the Challenge”

Inaugural Address

Mayor Theodore L. Gatsas

Tuesday, January 3, 2012

Craig thank you for such a wonderful introduction. Craig has been involved with me since my first run for the State Senate in 2000 – we have enjoyed many laughs and many victories together and over time we have become friends and now we are family.

We discovered the American Dream together and he's probably the only person that will ever be able to force me to walk up steep hills in Dunbarton and then convince me to be positive about the experience. Craig is relentless but it is the quality I love most about him.

Through the years Craig has been someone I look to for counsel and advice – like always your words mean a lot and I thank you for being here today and bringing your two sons John and Clayton to share this moment with us.

Senator Ayotte, thank you for being here today and swearing me in. You are an inspiration to the young people in this audience; you are an example to each of them that you can accomplish anything that they put your mind to. I know that you will represent New Hampshire for many years to come because you take nothing for granted, you work hard each and everyday and you embody the New Hampshire spirit. As a constituent I am proud that you represent me in the Senate and thank you for being here today.

I would also like to recognize and welcome some family, friends and distinguished guests in the audience.

Let me begin with my wife Cassandra. We celebrated our 25th anniversary this year. I am very fortunate to have her in my life. She has stood by me every step of the way since I became a public servant. We have celebrated a number of special moments like today, and unfortunately Cassandra has also had to deal with me when I'm not at my best after long days and late meetings. Thank you Cassandra for being such a wonderful wife.

I would be remiss if I did not also recognize my mother Pauline and my brother Michael. On any given day my mother and brother can be my biggest cheerleaders and my biggest critics – sometimes they play both roles on the same day. Your love, support and feedback are important to me and I thank you for them.

I would also like to recognize the former Mayors that are here with us today. Congressman Guinta, Mayor Baines, Councilor Wieczorek, Mayor Beaulieu and Mayor Dupuis. It's an honor to have each of you join us today and it reminds me how very blessed this community is to have

individuals that continue to dedicate themselves to the betterment of the Queen City. If I could ask them as a group to stand and be recognized.

And now I would like to welcome our distinguished guests, fellow city officials, former city officials, my former colleagues in the legislature, friends, family and fellow residents of the great city of Manchester to today's inauguration.

To the newly sworn in members of the Board of Aldermen and the School Committee – this should be a day of celebration – congratulations. You have worked very hard to be here and I look forward to the work we will do together on behalf of Queen City residents.

Thank you to everyone that has worked to make today possible. From Matt Normand and his team in the City Clerks office, to everyone here at the Palace Theatre, Charlie Sherman for acting as our Emcee and of course to my dear friend Bill Skouteris who led this effort. Thank you.

I would ask the following groups and individuals to stand as your name is called and remain standing. The West High School Jazz Band for the music, the West High School ROTC Color Guard, Christopher what an inspiring National Anthem and to, Adrianna, Niko, Sophia, Thomas and Autumn thank you for leading us in the pledge and to the wonderful students of the National Honor Society from Central, Skylar, Emma, Alicia and Olivia from Memorial Nicole, Kate, Abrianna and Ryan and from West AJ, Rachel, Chris and Cecilia.

I have asked these students to stand because they represent the future of this great city. I am proud and honored to stand amongst them and I ask that we all recognize them for their achievements. Thank you to these great students for joining us today.

“Rise to the Challenge”

Two years ago I stood before you and asked that we “Imagine the Possibilities.” Since that time we have collectively realized many achievements. We did this by placing our partisan differences aside and working together in order to find common ground. This has resulted in a better, stronger Manchester that we can all be proud of.

Today Manchester is the envy of the state and as Mayor this makes me extremely proud as it should every citizen of this great city. Our city services are second to none and our schools are continually producing the very best that New Hampshire has to offer.

Despite the economic recession we have accomplished so much and found innovative ways to invest in our future. Today people across this city and across the State of New Hampshire believe in Manchester again. We have proven that hard work and collaboration pay enormous dividends. But today is not about reflection or rattling off a laundry list of successes. Today is about looking forward into the future and outlining what we can and what we must accomplish together. As we forge ahead, we must first overcome our most important challenge of getting our fiscal house in order.

To meet this challenge, less than four weeks from today on Monday, January 30th, I will deliver a budget address to the Board of Aldermen and School Committee and the taxpayers of Manchester. The times we live in are difficult to be sure – the times are serious and the challenges are great, but they are not insurmountable.

We can, and we will *rise to the challenge*.

We can rise to the challenge by streamlining city operations as we agreed to do when we passed the bonding resolution for the Municipal Complex, and we can make progress against alleviating the growing pressure on city taxpayers.

Following today's celebrations, we will hear a report regarding the reorganization of the city wide automotive fleet maintenance as we prepare to move our entire operation to the campus of the new Municipal Complex. I have a suspicion that what we will hear is by taking action to consolidate our operations we can do more with less. And the reality is that we can do just that. I recognize that these decisions will be difficult, but they are necessary and I ask my colleagues to join me in facing them.

We can rise to the challenge by looking to our unions for relief from the rising cost of health benefits. The cost of health insurance continues to rise while employee contributions remain the same. The expense to the city and the taxpayers is naturally greater causing increased strain on the budget. The taxpayers of this city simply can not afford to sustain these benefits. We must address this issue in this budget cycle and find a mutually agreeable resolution.

On Tuesday, January 17th, in an effort to provide additional clarity on the issue the Board of Mayor and Aldermen will be given a comprehensive report on health insurance. This will include information about plan design, plan costs, and benefits offered to city employees versus those in the private sector. We must take this information and use it as a tool to craft health benefits for city employees that are fair and that the taxpayers can sustain.

Make no mistake, I value each and every employee in this city and thank them for their service to the taxpayers and residents – however the pressure is at an all time high and we must find relief. We must find a common ground amongst the policy makers, the taxpayers and our employees. We must all rise to the challenge.

We can rise to the challenge by undertaking a comprehensive review of the benefits packages offered to city employees – most notably our defined benefit retirement plan administered by the Manchester Contributory Retirement System.

It has been over 10 years since there have been any contribution increases by city employees and like all things costs continue to rise. I will name a Task Force on Sustainable Benefits at the Board of Mayor and Aldermen meeting on Tuesday, January 17th and charge them with reviewing the current benefit structure offered to city employees and to make specific recommendations to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen to consider.

We must make prudent decisions today so that our system can be sustained well into the future – so that prospective taxpayers like Christopher, Adrianna, Niko, Sophia, Timothy and Autumn can afford this system, and that future city employees can rely on.

I will ask the members of this task force to seek input from the public and stakeholders and to examine other structures and weigh the value of all available options.

This task force will be charged with reporting to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen with recommendations by May 1st so the Aldermen have time to review the changes and place any possible plan amendments before the voters on the ballot in November of 2012.

Change is difficult, but sometime necessary and again I ask that we all rise to the challenge to streamline city government, drive efficiencies and reduce the tax burden on our hardworking residents.

As a product of the Manchester public schools, I'm very proud of our students, our teachers, our administrators and of our educational offerings. And because I have such great pride, I know we can do better. The challenge is making the right decisions to ensure that we deliver against our promise to provide the best possible education at a price that taxpayers can afford.

We can rise to the challenge by implementing a sound redistricting plan that allows us to alleviate the pressure on some schools by filling the capacity gaps in others. This will require shifting lines and boundaries, and will also require us to let go of our preconceived notions about who should go to what school.

We can rise to the challenge by utilizing our school facilities in a more effective way. We don't have all the answers yet, but we need to keep searching because as they say, where there is a will, there is a way.

We can rise to the challenge by turning up the heat on the federal government and the state government to grant Manchester waivers for English Language Learners.

We can rise to the challenge by establishing a truancy court for Manchester students. I would ask Lieutenant Scott Legassee, to lead this charge with members of the community, school administration and members of our judicial system. If we work collaboratively together to institute legislation and city ordinances changes we will increase student attendance and once and for all parents will be held accountable.

We can rise to the challenge by following a collaborative budget process and by passing a responsible budget. For the newly sworn in members of the school board, much like the Aldermen, we have a serious budget challenge. And just like on the city side, any solution must include engaging the union for relief because the taxpayers can not continue to sustain the current healthcare benefits.

In the past two years I believe that we have seen the best and we have seen the worst of the decision making process for education. When it comes to education and the children of our great city the budget is never easy and we are always left with wanting more. The process between the members of the School Board and the Board of Aldermen has been divisive. It doesn't have to be. So let's leave here today and agree to end the finger-pointing and work towards a positive result.

Keeping our city safe is paramount to moving our city forward. Maybe I have high standards, but I'm sick of reading reports and headlines about crime in our city.

Look, I could come up with some crafty political spin and spend time blaming rising crime rates on the struggling national economy or a more transient resident base, but that won't solve our problems. If we want to stem the rising crime rate, we need to make it clear to those who would

choose to commit crimes in our city that we will not tolerate it. Not here, not now, not ever.

We can rise to the challenge by supporting prevention programs in our schools and in our neighborhoods with community policing programs, and shifting our overall mindset to the importance of crime prevention versus an over emphasis on punishment after the crime is committed.

We can rise to the challenge by finding the necessary funds to put more feet on our streets. More police officers will go a long way towards cracking down on crime, but in order to make that possible, we will have to make trade offs.

I stand here today knowing we can take all of this on without hesitation or delay and in the resolution we will find a very bright future ahead of us. But we must rise to the challenge.

If we agree to make these tough decisions and face the opportunities before us, I know in a very short time we will change the dialogue and take swift action to improve city services, invest in our children, and make our city safer, but, we must rise to the challenge.

None of this will be easy because unfortunately solving problems left unresolved for far too long comes with great difficulty, but this difficulty can't deter us from the task at hand. Passing it along to future generations to manage is no longer viable.

Let's accept our call to action, let's create a culture of collaboration, let's continue to believe in the greatness of Manchester.....

Let's rise to the challenge and let's build a better Manchester together.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the City of Manchester.