



Office of the Honorable Eric Papenfuse
Mayor of Harrisburg
State of the City Address
Oct. 8, 2014

Not a day goes by that a concerned citizen doesn't come up to me on the street and ask, "Mr. Mayor, Do you like your job?"

To that question and its sometime-companion -- "Are you doing all right?" -- I always answer a resounding "Yes!"

The truth is, the job of being Mayor is an extremely demanding one. I have three young children, Clara, Everett, and Chauncey, ages 12, 10, and 6. And each of them has had to sacrifice greatly in terms of my attention and my presence at home. I try hard to dedicate meaningful time every week to my family, but I couldn't do what I do – and never would have made the decision to run – if I didn't have the support and love of my wife Catherine to sustain me. She and I have been a team since we first met in graduate school over twenty years ago. And I want to thank her for her commitment both to me and to this City.

I do love my job, because I believe strongly in three things. First, with hard work and determination, anything is possible. We can, indeed, bridge the divides of race, class and geography. We can and must lay the groundwork for a long and lasting recovery, for our City and our region.

Second, I believe that we all have to be a part of the solution. If we listen and respect one another's points of view, collectively we can change Harrisburg.

Finally, I believe that the moment is Now! The eyes of the nation and, indeed, the world are upon us, and we must seize this moment. *Carpe diem!* – as I used to tell my 7th and 8th grade Latin students.

When I myself was in 8th grade, in the early '80s, I used to babysit for a family who lived down the street from us in Baltimore. The husband was from Afghanistan, the wife was from Lebanon, and they were raising two young children – one, in the Christian faith, and the other, Islamic.

The father was an adjunct professor at Johns Hopkins University studying the economies of the developing world. His country had been ravaged by war, and this was long before 9/11, but he planned to return there someday with his family, to help fix what was broken.

Impossible, you say? Well, that man who inspired me with his vision at neighborhood cookouts and dinners on our front porch was Ashraf Ghani, just last month sworn in as the newly elected President of Afghanistan. His son, Tariq, with whom I used

to listen to and cheer for the Orioles, is at his side, and working for a Ph.D. at Berkeley on ways to end global poverty.

My faith in people and my eagerness to listen comes from my own religious upbringing. I went to college seeking to become a teacher, not an elected official. And it was there at Yale that I met an individual, not of my own faith, but who encouraged me to see the potential within everyone. I was a sophomore and was selected by a lottery to have tea with the Dalai Lama. At that event, the great spiritual leader told each of us that what mattered was not what he had to say, but what lay within our own hearts. I have tried in my life always to listen to others, to value their perspectives, and never to doubt the possibilities for change and goodness that lie within all of us.

Why now?

That point was driven home to me late last year when even before I was inaugurated; I was invited to the White House – surrounded by mayors from cities far larger than Harrisburg, all eager to learn our story. President Obama asked me to tell him about Harrisburg and how we had averted bankruptcy.

Even as I speak these words, the financial markets are listening. And so, ladies and gentleman – mindful of the example of three great world leaders – I say to you:

The state of our Capitol City is resilient. It grows stronger every day. [

In the nine short months since taking office, my administration and I have seized the moment. We have exited receivership, stabilized the city's finances, and already established the foundation for a lasting recovery.

Through determined efforts, our collective dedication, and an unrelenting optimism, much has been accomplished. But there is still much more to be done. And true success will not be possible without the tapping into the energies and good will of everyone in this room, and every citizen of Harrisburg.

In January, when I took office, despite the Strong Plan's having retired hundreds of millions of dollars of the City's long-term debt, we discovered a four million dollar structural deficit in our annual budget. The city was behind in paying its bills. Unaccounted-for invoices were streaming in to City Hall. And the anticipated revenues from the parking changes and the earned income tax increase were far from certain.

The situation was more dire than anyone had anticipated. City Hall was literally falling apart. Morale was low. There was no contract with one of our three major unions. The transfer agreement between the City and Capital Region Water was incomplete and untested. The Public Works Department needed to relocate immediately. The very future of the city's sanitation department, after a disastrous RFP attempt to privatize services last year, remained uncertain.

And despite knowing that in order for city government to function well, we would need to increase the capacity of our work force, the financial reality was such that we had to control personnel costs or we simply wouldn't be solvent.

The four million dollar hole - which quickly became five million dollars after we discovered other necessary transfers and bills - meant, essentially, that we couldn't hire or fund additional programs, without creative new strategies and partnerships.

One such alliance was with CREDC, which agreed to fund the position of Community and Economic Development Director for the City of Harrisburg, for three years.

There was no precedent for such a funding agreement in the Commonwealth of

Pennsylvania. But we made it happen and won Council's support. And I want to take a moment to thank my hosts today, and especially Dave Black, for the leadership he showed in seeing that plan through.

We desperately needed resources to implement our new Community Policing strategy. So we turned to the Dauphin County Commissioners and District Attorney Ed Marsico. They provided funding for necessary equipment and also enabled us to hire a Community Policing Coordinator.

Another great success in identifying innovative revenue sources came only recently when, after months of discussion, PinnacleHealth Systems agreed to increase dramatically its Payment In Lieu Of Taxes, or PILOT, to the city - enough to fund several new positions and valuable programs in the coming years. Thank you, PinnacleHealth, for leading on this issue. I would like to see every non-profit entity within the City of Harrisburg follow their example and work with my administration to establish a yearly contribution to help fund the City's recovery.

The four-million dollar hole that my administration and I inherited in January 2014 meant that our first budget was essentially a statement of what we wanted to do, but not something we could immediately fulfill.

Unlike past administrations, where there might have been tension between the Mayor, Council, the Controller, and Treasury, we all worked together to solve this extraordinary problem. We implemented an across-the-board hiring freeze, reviewed all discretionary spending, and laid the groundwork for new purchasing and cash-handling policies across all departments.

I want to thank Controller Charlie DeBrunner, City Councilman Ben Allatt, and especially Finance Director Bruce Weber for their willingness to stand with me in making the difficult choices that this required. It hasn't been easy repeatedly telling every department in the city that you can't spend money on something desperately needed. But by working collaboratively, we have slowly closed the massive budget gap. And I'm delighted to say that we are on pace - for the first time in anyone's memory - to have a truly balanced budget for fiscal years 2014 and 2015!

After decades of fiscal mismanagement, the City of Harrisburg is finally living within its means.

Let me tell you what it took to make this happen.

One of the consequences of implementing a hiring freeze has been that I have effectively become the Chief Operating Officer for the City of Harrisburg, in addition to being the Mayor. We have not hired a Business Administrator, not because the city wouldn't benefit from such assistance and oversight, but because other urgent needs have taken precedence.

On a weekly basis, I lead the city's operational meetings, and I meet regularly with all members of the City's management team, including department heads and Council leaders. This gives me direct insight into every department's needs and has let me help craft creative solutions to the challenges they face.

None of this would have been possible without my Special Assistant Catherine Stetler, who keeps my schedule and acts as gatekeeper for the Mayor's Office. With unfailingly good cheer, she writes proclamations, responds to constituent requests, and keeps me on track.

When I had an opportunity to speak to other mayors on my visit to the White

House last December, their constant refrain was that they were only as successful as the team they assembled. We are fortunate to have a tremendously dedicated and talented team working for this City. I want to highlight their efforts today.

In speaking with our Tax Enforcement Officer Mike Hughes, I learned just how difficult it is for one person to collect all the revenue due to the City, from business privilege and mercantile taxes to parking permits and dog licenses.

We recently brought before City Council a contract with a company called Turn Key Taxes that can assist the city in identifying and collecting past-due revenues. We fought for and won a tremendous guarantee in that contract - one that basically says - unless the company performs as promised, and meets its target of hundreds of thousands of dollars in additional revenue in the first year; they will not receive any payment for their work.

Also at Mike Hughes's suggestion, we are working to repopulate the Mercantile License Appeals Board. At first glance this might not seem very transformative, but if used properly, it will give the City the potential to rescind the business licenses of nuisance bars and other businesses that are known to support illegal activities.

Conducting business in the city of Harrisburg should indeed be a privilege, and we need to hold all businesses to the highest community standards. This newly reconstituted board will be an important tool in revitalizing our neighborhoods.

Working closely with Codes Director Dave Patton, our administration has engaged in a multifaceted "war on blight." Already this year, we have spurred the County Court system to establish a new Housing Court that will ensure speedy and equitable adjudication of all property maintenance cases in the City.

We have worked with the County Tax Office to reform our Tax Sale system – forcing prospective bidders to sign a waiver acknowledging their purchases and noting which properties are condemned. We have established a committee to review all purchases from the County's repository list. We have made bold new appointments to the Harrisburg Redevelopment Authority board and have given it direction, embodied in a new housing strategy, which seeks to deploy the city's limited resources in targeted ways.

We have established a new Land Bank to acquire blighted properties and put them in the hands of those who will develop them. We are working on a new Vacant Property Registration ordinance. And – perhaps most importantly – we are leading the charge for a powerful city-wide LERTA that will inspire property owners to make improvements without immediately taxing those crucial investments in the community.

On October 22nd, the City will host a public meeting at the School District, to discuss the issues surrounding the LERTA. This comes after many weeks of working directly with the County and the School District to lay the groundwork for a proposal that will create the jobs and opportunities we need in Harrisburg. With a ten-year full, city-wide abatement, contractors, developers, businesses-owners and home-owners will have a financial incentive to make improvements to their properties. Property values will increase, and my administration is committed to ensuring that the rising tide of prosperity will lift all boats.

It would be hard to underestimate the value that Jackie Parker, with her own experience as a mayor of a third-class city and her past work for DCED, has brought to her position as Harrisburg's Community and Economic Development Director.

Along with Senior Grant Writer Errol Newark, she has overseen the City's

grant review committee, which has helped us receive more resources from outside sources than ever before. She has successfully worked with a wide range of organizations such as the Harrisburg Housing Authority, PHFA, CREDC, the Community First Fund, and other non-profit and private sector partners, to shape a new economic development strategy for our City.

Jackie has also collaborated with Planning Director Geoffrey Knight to pass what successive previous administrations had thought was simply too difficult – a massive rewrite of the outdated zoning code to make it more user friendly and to encourage smarter City growth. Jackie and Geoffrey, along with City Council, the Harrisburg Planning Commission, and other community stakeholders, have begun a City-wide comprehensive planning process, which will, over the course of the next year, incorporate resident input to form a guiding document of the City's priorities.

Jackie worked closely with Lenwood Sloan to present Artsfest, July 4th, and Kipona, despite limited resources. And she is currently helping to plan the upcoming Holiday Parade and New Year's Eve festivities, on a shoestring budget.

Unlike in past years, when festivals cost the city hundreds of thousands of dollars, we have hosted community events in a fiscally responsible manner. We have sponsored a year-long, lunchtime Brown-Bag series promoting healthy living and featuring performances in the visual arts, music, poetry, and dance. Mobilizing the collective good will of the community, we reestablished the Parks Partnership and the Adopt-a-Park program, and we have reopened both the Brownstone and the Eugenia Smith Family Resource Center at Reservoir Park.

Although Lenwood's dynamic vision couldn't overcome the harsh fiscal realities in the short term, I thank him for his dedicated efforts and he will remain a valued advisor on arts-related issues as we move forward.

Since the start of the year, the City has received a series of grants to help improve our many playgrounds. Through a new planning grant from Harristown Enterprises and the Urban Land Institute, we will be examining the future of City Island, one of the crown jewels of our park system. In addition to overhauling the Park permitting process, Director Parker is preparing what we hope will be the city's application for a new City Reinvestment Improvement Zone – or CRIZ.

If the city is able to make such an application, it will be due in part to the hard work of Patty Kim, who recently navigated an amendment through the House of Representatives allowing Harrisburg, at last, to apply.

One of the things that I was eager to establish upon taking office was a monthly meeting with House Representative Patty Kim and State Senator Rob Teplitz to discuss the City's priorities.

We and our staff converse often on issues ranging from Act 47 reforms to strategies for funding for the 14th Street sinkhole. They share my passion for this City and the region. Through teamwork, we can help bring the necessary State resources to bear for Harrisburg.

I have also established a regular monthly meeting with representatives from our Federal delegation – the offices of Scott Perry, Lou Barletta, Bob Casey, and Pat Toomey. This work group has been an invaluable help in applying for grant opportunities, understanding the impact of federal legislation on topics like the Flood Insurance program, and working with the GSA on a potential interim use for the Federal

Courthouse site while that project awaits funding.

All of our offices will be collaborating on the upcoming “Sinkhole Summit,” which we are hosting in Harrisburg on November 7th. Our goal is to find the resources necessary to help address a natural calamity that affects our residents in South Harrisburg.

These regular work-groups with elected officials have already proven especially beneficial for the City’s relationship with the Department of Housing and Urban Development. When I took office, my administration was informed by HUD that certain houses the city owned and fixed up with money from the Federal Government had never been sold to meet the program’s national objectives, despite years of repeated complaints and warnings. The situation was so dire that I received a letter early into my term stating the City would actually be forced to pay the Federal Government a penalty of nearly \$900,000, an amount that would have made it impossible to meet our other financial obligations.

The City’s Building and Housing Director Roy Christ & Deputy Director Damian Slaughter sprang into action, sold the homes, and met the federal objectives. But even then, HUD – so upset at the City’s history of noncompliance – demanded back its nearly one million dollars in funding. With the help of our federal delegation, and after a tense meeting in which I explained to HUD’s representatives that we had done everything we could possibly have done since taking office, the Federal Government – in an unprecedented decision – reversed its directive demanding repayment. This remarkable action allowed the City to avert a financial catastrophe.

This wasn’t the only looming threat to the City’s operations that my administration faced when I took office. We also inherited the urgent and immediate need for a new home for the Public Works Department. The existing building was on the grounds of the Harrisburg incinerator, and the sale to Lancaster County Solid Waste Management Authority, or LCSWMA, meant it had to be vacated within 90 days or the City would lose out on \$300,000 of incentives built into the Strong Plan. Leaving aside the fact that the City did not have any location identified that was acceptable to Council or within our financial means, the sheer magnitude of what had to be moved was staggering – from every truck and piece of heavy equipment, to every nut and bolt in the city’s inventory.

The only man for the job was Aaron Johnson, and I was proud to appoint him director of the Public Works Department. With the help of his deputy Dave West, he has demonstrated an ability to accomplish seemingly impossible tasks, even amidst the scarcest of resources. It was Aaron who identified the former Brenner Automotive building on Paxton Street as the best possible location for a new Public Works facility. At his urging, I negotiated an affordable lease with owner Mike Brenner. I want to thank Mike, as an exemplary member of the business community, for stepping forward to aid in the city’s recovery by taking less than market value for his lease.

Aaron and Dave not only accomplished the move in time for the City to claim the \$300,000 from LCSWMA and apply it to the cost of the Brenner lease, but they did so despite having only a skeleton crew and during one of the worst winters on record. They were so industrious that we not only moved all of our belongings, but we also salvaged enough metal from the old facility - which was going to be torn down anyway - to pay for the relocation costs.

Since the Public Works facility moved, I have been working closely with Aaron and Dave and City Council's Public Works Chair Sandra Reid, to dramatically improve trash collection and recycling within the city of Harrisburg. With the help of consultants generously paid for through State Coordinator Fred Reddig's office, we will be putting forth a new plan for sanitation in 2015, with the premise that - if this were my business, what changes would I put in place, to make it better.

Rather than simply outsourcing sanitation and allowing a private hauler to take responsibility for the easy aspects of trash collection, while leaving the city with the more difficult problems of alley dumping and bulk removal, we have embraced a form of managed competition, in consultation and partnership with the union, AFSCME.

Within the past month, we have also hired a new Recycling Coordinator as well as a new Solid Waste Enforcement Officer, a Codes Inspector for trash if you will, to improve compliance. And just this past week, we utilized the Host Fee from the incinerator to help pay for necessary upgrades to our leaking trash trucks. All of these changes will pay great dividends in the months to come.

Using the host fee to fund the essential business of our public works department, instead of relying on the general fund, has been an important priority for this administration. Rather than spending the money on activities or giving it away in grants to other organizations, we have decided to prioritize spending in-house, on salaries like that of our new Arborist, and on other essential environmental needs - whether it be mulch for the city's playgrounds or a portable salt dome for the city's Public Works dept.

That same strategy of prioritizing spending of non-general-fund revenue sources on essential city operations - has also transferred, for the first time, to our CDBG budget. In past years, the city awarded the majority of these federal funds to outside nonprofit organizations. This year, we have used the majority of the funds to augment our own internal operations, from Public Works and the hiring of a new Codes Inspector to supporting our Police and Fire Departments.

I arrived in January to find our police officers working in unacceptable conditions. The Public Safety building was falling apart around them. We turned to the community for help, and donors to the City Hall Beautiful Fund responded generously. We have already completed such projects as renovating the roll call, break room, and victims' rooms, replacing aging carpets, and making other important facility upgrades.

A stable, strong, and appropriately valued police department is at the core of any city. In fact, my single most important decision since becoming Mayor has been appointing Tom Carter as Chief of Police.

No one is more committed to restoring the Police Department and bridging the gap between community and law enforcement. Perhaps the most revealing thing I can say about him is what one constituent wrote me earlier this year, in a private letter.

There had been a violent crime. A child had been involved. A mother wanted answers and was distraught. Chief Carter arrived on the scene and spoke to her with sincerity and compassion. And - as she wrote - when she looked into his eyes, she knew that everything would be OK.

By freezing hires in other City departments, we have been able to make 30 new hires in Public Safety. Rebuilding the Police and Fire Departments was and remains our top priority. This year alone, we have hired 17 new police officers, and 13 new fire fighters. The latter group, I had the pleasure of swearing in, just two days ago.

Over the next several years, the Police Department will continue to see a series of retirements of veteran leaders. But with Chief Carter's direction and the able guidance of his Captains, Moody and Cleary, we will rebuild - with a new emphasis on community outreach, accountability, promotion based only on merit, and a professionalism reflective of the Chief's own sincere and dedicated vision.

From a community policing perspective, no one works harder than our community policing coordinator Dave Botero. Dave has developed an interlocking network of neighborhood watch groups. Acting as a liaison between the police and the public, he has been a tireless advocate for community concerns. He knows how to get things done. Fluent in Spanish, he has helped connect Latino residents to City government, and we are grateful for his service.

While many residents were concerned when Receiver Lynch gave up the City's residency requirement for police officers, in exchange for concessions from their union, the result of this has been the hiring of the most qualified group of new officers one could possibly imagine - a mix of distinguished veterans with diverse and accomplished backgrounds, many with deep personal and familial connections to Harrisburg.

My own approach has been to incentivize residency through a new "Walk to Work" initiative, in which the city will contribute \$2000 toward the closing costs of any City employee purchasing a home within the City's limits.

Pinnacle Health has put forth a similar initiative, offering \$5000 for each of its employees who would like to buy a home in the City of Harrisburg. At the Pennsylvania Housing and Finance Agency, Brian Hudson has brought additional resources to bear, to offer interest free loans. And I challenge every business represented in this room to put similar housing assistance programs in place - to encourage your employees to live in Harrisburg.

The recent hiring of 13 more fire fighters would not have been possible, had the City not been able to negotiate a new union contract. When I took office, no such contract existed, even though the expected savings from this negotiation had already been factored into the budget and was essential for the Strong Plan's success.

In fact, the Firefighters' union had voted these contract amendments down. One of the hardest things I've ever had to do was push for the department to accept voluntary concessions - concessions that have meant the reduction in minimum-manning and the closing of one of Harrisburg's fire stations.

Although it apparently had never happened before, I took the time to meet with each and every firefighter who works for the City. I answered their questions about the contract. I tried to reassure them of the imperative need for their financial sacrifice, for Harrisburg to recover. And I gave my promise to work with them to rebuild the department in the future.

We owe them and their Chief Brian Enterline – who, I'm pleased to announce today, has agreed to be the permanent head of the Fire Department – a tremendous debt of gratitude.

Chief Enterline has told me that his hardest day was having to close the Paxton Station, and surely his second was when he went, with me, to Shipoke to sit and talk with the residents there about why it had to be done. It was a tough meeting. We took lots of questions. But when we left, the residents understood. And the City took decisive action – something which it had not been able to do under either of the previous administrations,

although this necessity had loomed for several years.

That meeting was the last time I saw Councilwoman Eugenia Smith. We miss her greatly.

Eugenia was always committed to honest, open and transparent dialogue. She believed that good communication is essential to good governance, and I take very seriously her call that we be accessible and responsive to the needs of our citizens.

Since taking office, I have prioritized improving City Hall's communications both internally and externally. Communications Director Joyce Davis works closely with the media to answer their questions. With the help of talented station director Momin Bhatti, she has significantly improved programming on Channel 20, including my own monthly topical talk show, "Word in the Burg."

Assisted by Community Services Coordinator Ryan Grigsby, Joyce has implemented a new ticketing-system for all citizen questions and concerns that come into City Hall. These are monitored, discussed regularly with appropriate staff, documented and addressed.

This will form the basis of a new City-wide 311 system that will be up and running before the year is out. Soon, the only number residents will have to call is "311," whether they are reporting potholes or identifying broken streetlights.

City Streetlight coordinator Kevin Baum has slowly and methodically been responding to our aging infrastructure, by replacing fixtures and fixing lights in every neighborhood. More importantly he's been on the selection committee – with City Engineer Wayne Martin and City Councilwoman Susan Brown Wilson – to choose the energy company that will convert all the city's lights to new LED fixtures in the coming year.

That RFP and its scoring qualifications will serve as a model for the city as we move forward. It was skillfully drafted by our new city engineer, who happens to be both an engineer and an accomplished lawyer. Wayne Martin has proven an extraordinary resource, whether helping the city obtain the qualified engineering work of Gannett Fleming to assist with the 14th Street sinkhole, designing a fix for the long-broken Hall Manor swimming pool, or navigating the complex funding waters of PennDOT.

When we took office, the City had no master street paving plan and our traffic control technology was desperately in need of upgrade. With Wayne's help, we will soon have a five-year paving plan for the entire city, with a special emphasis on pedestrian safety and multi-modal plans of transportation.

One of the great reasons for living in an urban core is "walkability". As we move forward, every paving project will take this into account. Front Street's new bike lane is the start of what will become an interlocking grid of bike lanes and a shift of commuter traffic patterns to 7th Street. This will include the eventual return of North Second Street to two-lane traffic north of Forster, improving crosswalks and intersections throughout all the City's neighborhoods, and establishing a new biking and pedestrian connection along the CAT bridge over the Susquehanna linking the East and West shores.

The bids are in, and work will begin soon on road improvements to 15th and South 17th Streets. This represents only the start of PennDot's multi-year, ten-million-dollar commitment to helping address our city's transportation needs.

Over the past months, a task force appointed jointly by our administration, the

County, City Council, and the State coordinator, has worked tirelessly to establish a new nonprofit to govern the funds set aside from the Strong Plan for economic development and infrastructure. Next year that money will be available for the City's use.

This is a tremendous accomplishment and speaks to the continued energies of our Coordinator Fred Reddig and his team. Special credit goes to Steve Goldfield, who - along with Neal West at Harristown and Sheri Phillips, the Secretary of General Services - has negotiated a new lease for the Verizon Tower building. This was a major financial transaction impacting the City that was not resolved within the Strong Plan. The new lease will mean 900 new workers downtown, parking and dining in the City, and helping contribute to Harrisburg's revitalization.

Throughout the year, behind the scenes at City Hall, Solicitor Neil Grover has brought to his position an unmatched commitment - never before seen among any city official - to make sure that City Council considers and vets all contracts. This includes such diverse proposals as our recent effort to join the Capital Area Council of Governments, leasing a backhoe for Public Works, and even paying for musicians at Kipona.

In prior administrations, these contracts would have been kept off the books and paid for by special funds, deliberately evading City Council's oversight, opinions, and budgetary review process.

I very much share Neil's philosophy of collaborating with City Council. Council President Wanda Williams and I meet every Thursday before their legislative sessions. And I stay in regular communication with all Council members.

One of my most vivid memories from the past nine months was casting the tie-breaking vote for Jeff Baltimore, who has been a tremendous addition to City Council. I am equally proud of the fact that I have made dozens of appointments to boards throughout the city, from the board of Capital Area Transit to the Historic Architecture Review Board. Council has unanimously approved every single name we've put forth. In praising the nominees, Council President Williams said she realized those appointments have been based on merit, not politics. I thank her for recognizing this, and I look forward to continuing the practice.

Council and the Mayor's Office represent the same interests. We should constantly be working together and not against each other. I've made a special effort to attend virtually every Council meeting and committee session this year, in order to answer Councilors' questions and to explain my administration's priorities. That has never happened before in our city's government and I think it has paid off, and it will continue to help make for good policy.

Last year, as Council's trusted advisor during the Strong Plan negotiations, Neil Grover laid the groundwork for improving relations between the branches of government. But the main reason I chose him for the position of City Solicitor is that he, like I, believes that true accountability for Harrisburg's past missteps is essential for a lasting recovery.

Simply put, a necessary part of healing the mistrust and divisions in our community will be bringing to justice those who took advantage of this City. My administration has worked closely with the Attorney General's office, and our legacy will be judged, as I believe, in large part, on their findings.

As we look to the future, three challenges remain paramount.

First, how do we ensure that the economic recovery that we believe will come, will benefit everyone, not just a select few? My Senior Advisor Karl Singleton is leading efforts to develop a Regional Diversity Council. It seeks to promote access to contracting and employment opportunities for historically hard-to-place citizens and minority business enterprises throughout the capital region. The coalition's mission is to channel resources equitably, to socially disadvantaged minorities seeking to become self-sufficient through education and economic development.

Karl is also stepping up to lead the City of Harrisburg's efforts at transformative change by accepting President Obama's challenge to implement the My Brother's Keeper initiative, to benefit young men of color and their communities. Meaningful community engagement lies at the core of this mission. Along with our newly formed Interfaith Advisory Group, we are calling on faith leaders who may, in the past, have been silent, to work now in concert with one another, and to help restore hope throughout every neighborhood in our City.

The second imperative that we must address for the City's future is providing every school-age child with the opportunity to learn. When I had lunch with fifth graders at Rowland yesterday, I had the chance to listen to their hopes and dreams for the future.

Yahaira, Samuel, Taeli, and Glenn, here is the shout-out you requested!

It is for YOU that I have been outspoken in my concerns that the current Recovery Plan's goals for the School District aren't high enough.

Such a plan would never be acceptable in a suburban municipality. Our administration will continue to push for meaningful choices for parents, since no one should be forced by circumstances to send their child to a failing school. As the brutal tragedy of last Friday showed, the City and the School District must cooperate, to ensure the health and safety of our youth. I am pleased at the initiatives we have already begun, such as establishing a summer enrichment program, with the District, for the City's youth. And I look forward to future partnerships, such as the return of School Resource Officers to every school building.

Let us resolve, as a community, to make the educational success of our youth our number one priority. If we all agree no longer to tolerate failure or accept social promotion, and instead to empower parents with real choices, our district can and will succeed.

Finally, the question remains – how do we bring more people into our city on a daily basis, to spend their resources, engage with our community, and be part of a meaningful renaissance?

This why I have fought so vocally to redirect the County's hotel tax dollars from marketing one particular entity, instead to promoting the city as a whole. We must seize this moment to encourage others to visit Harrisburg.

So next time, when you see me on the street, trust in the fact that I have faith in our ability to effect real and lasting change. And, instead, tell me what each of you has done to address the needs of our city.

Was it mentoring a child? Crafting a new PILOT arrangement for your non-profit? Adopting a housing incentive for your employees? Or volunteering with organizations such as Rotary, the YWCA, and the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank to help those in need?

Join us, as we all work together to ensure Harrisburg's future prosperity. We are a strong and resilient city. Together, we can make a difference!