

Mayor Robert J. Duffy
State of the City Address
Monday, April 7, 2008
“Moving in the Right Direction”

Good evening and thank you Barbara. I thank all of you for the warm welcome, and for the presentation of our colors by the Rochester Police Honor Guard. It is my pleasure to meet again, as we did a year ago, in this beautiful and historic place. Before I start, I'd like to take a moment of silence for those men and women in uniform who have sacrificed their lives in service of our country and for those still in harm's way. Let me thank those in my life who do not get thanked enough. I am most grateful to my wife Barbara who tolerates my relentless schedule and provides endless love and support. And I must thank the rest of my family, my daughters Erin and Shannon, my mother Catherine and father Neil and brothers Gerry and Neil, also, to my wife Barb's parents, Bill and Ginny Donahue.

I would like to acknowledge our elected officials, many of whom are here tonight. Our City Council, all nine members including President Gladys Santiago and Vice President Bill Pritchard. You are partners in government and I appreciate your hard work and commitment to the city we love.

Our state delegation is in Albany working for us tonight, and our thanks to them. The Dean of the Delegation, David Gantt; Assembly Members Joe Morelle, Susan John and David Koon; and our State Senators Joe Robach and Jim Alesi.

Thanks also to our representatives in Washington: Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, and Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton and Charles Schumer. We appreciate their support and advocacy for our city.

I would also like to recognize County Executive Maggie Brooks and her team. I believe it is so important to work in a spirit of bi-partisanship, so that our community can reach its full potential. The people we serve must come before politics.

Welcome to our new School Superintendent Jean Claude Brizard along with Rochester School Board President Malik Evans and the rest of the City School Board.

A special thanks to our new Governor, David Paterson. His first visit as Governor was to Rochester, just three days after taking the oath of office. That's an encouraging sign for our city and for the upstate region.

Finally, I would like to thank every City employee for their dedication and hard work. From our Deputy Mayor, our Chiefs and Commissioners to our frontline City workers, you are all truly outstanding.

Most of you know that I am a tireless and enthusiastic cheerleader for our great city. My enthusiasm is not forced. Each day I wake up excited about my job and our city. I truly believe that greatness is ours for the taking and that we are on the right path to get there.

That is why I look forward to this event each year. It's a chance to assess and celebrate our progress, with many great things to talk about tonight. But as much as we have to celebrate, I will not minimize the obstacles we face. Our budget shortfall is daunting and recurring. A culture of crime and lawlessness threatens some of our neighborhoods. Too few of our young people are graduating from high school or finding good jobs. I do not intend to gloss over any of the obstacles. But I do want to assure you of this: The state of our City is strong and we can be confident of our future despite the challenges we face.

This journey of progress we are making together is not a sprint. It's a marathon. I've run three marathons in my life and finished each one. And I can tell you first hand that a marathon is long, and arduous and sometimes painful, but you just can't quit. You will be tempted to, though. Somewhere about mile 18 or so, you start to hear a voice in your head. It starts small and then gets clearer and more beckoning. It's a voice that says, "This isn't worth it...it's too hard...why not just drop out?" In a marathon, you have to put that voice out of your head. You think about the next step – then the next – until the goal you set is once again in sight.

Our City's march to greatness is the same. You will hear some discouraging voices. Divisive voices telling you that everything is bad and focusing on how hard the solutions are. These are voices that are only concerned about themselves and not about the future of our community. As a city, starting tonight, we need to tune out those voices. If we give in to the message of despair, we can never succeed. Instead, we will spend our declining days blaming each other for lost opportunities. But if we keep working together, encouraging each other, there is no stopping this great city. Our people are resilient, our children are filled with promise and potential, our resources are plentiful. Ladies and gentlemen, let no one convince you otherwise. This is our watch and we are going to succeed. We are going to make Rochester the best mid-size city anywhere in which to live, to work, to start a business and to raise a family.

Last year at this time I promised results. I said that our administration will be accountable for making measurable progress. We focus on three priorities essential to our City's success, public safety, education and economic development. I'll also discuss our commitment to excellent customer service.

Let me start with public safety. Making sure that our citizens are safe and feel safe, is my number one priority. We need to do more to stop the violence happening far too often in some of our neighborhoods. Following a wave of homicides, Chief Moore and I announced a plan to increase police presence on our streets. This enhanced policing plan has become known as Zero Tolerance. Its first phase saw a major investment to put more cops on the streets and on patrol.

But this new approach is not just about more officers. It's about the way we police. It's about giving our officers the support they need to aggressively prevent crime. To be out of the car dispersing loiterers, keeping the peace, gathering intelligence and searching for illegal guns.

By confronting the so-called quality of life crimes such as traffic infractions, trespass, and loitering, we can make a big impact on violent crime. New York City demonstrated much success with this strategy. We can debate tactics, but we cannot argue the results: New York City has seen a long term decline in violent crime with a dramatic decrease in homicides. We want to make it impossible for anyone to carry an illegal weapon. Criminals should be looking over their shoulders at all times for the police, and stop carrying guns. We are seeing an impact. As of tonight, we have had eight homicides in our city this year. Last year at this time, we already had 13. Eight homicides from January to April is 40 percent less than the last year and below the 4 year average. But that is nothing to celebrate. It's progress, but it's still eight homicides too many. If we look back to October 2007, when our new policing approach began, we also see positive trends. The total incidence of violent crime is lower than all five of the preceding years during the same six-month period. The total number of Part One offenses -- which include the most serious and violent crimes -- is 18 percent lower than last year, and 30 percent lower than the five-year average. The overtime dollars spent on our police last year were a direct investment in our most challenged neighborhoods. We made an investment in saving lives, and I stand by it.

Let me now address some of the other specific measures the city took last year to improve public safety. We are improving our 911 call system. All of our 911 computers are being replaced as part of a three-year upgrade, which allows reverse calling to cell phones and text messaging to notify citizens of a 911 incident near their home.

I said we would increase the number of smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in city homes, and we have. The Rochester Fire Department installed nearly 1,800 smoke detectors and 600 carbon monoxide detectors since April 1 of last year. They have also replaced more than 1,300 batteries to keep thousands of families safer.

And I promised to add 25 public safety positions. We added 15 police officers and 10 new security guards to meet that goal. Public safety is our top priority and I am pleased to conclude that we are making progress.

If public safety is the bedrock, education is the foundation on which we build a brighter future. Increasing our graduation rates will prepare young people to help strengthen our economy. It also improves public safety. About half of all crimes committed in Rochester are committed by high school dropouts. One of the ways we support education is by providing funds to the city school district. Rochester is more generous than other Upstate cities in supporting the schools. Rochester is mandated by the state to give our district \$50 million dollars more in cash than Buffalo, although Buffalo educates 5,000 more students. Despite declining enrollments, and no matter what the fiscal condition of the city is, school aid must be paid ahead of all other services, including police, fire and street lights.

As I said last year, the citizens of Rochester deserve to know what they are getting for their investment in city schools. That's why I'm delighted that Jean-Claude Brizard has taken over as Superintendent. Only three months into his tenure, he is demonstrating the energy, knowledge and commitment to make major improvements in our schools. I meet regularly with the Superintendent and I urge everyone to support his mission to put children first, above all other concerns and interests. In other words, to align words with actions.

There is an effort in Albany this year to increase the amount of cash we are mandated to pay our schools. The outcome is still in play. But regardless of the outcome, I do not intend to cut school aid by a single penny. I will meet with the Superintendent and agree where best to invest for our children to succeed and graduate.

I also want to acknowledge the front line in education, our teachers. My mother was a teacher so I have an idea of how hard they work and how much they care. On behalf of the City, and as a parent, my thanks go out to every teacher for supporting our children. The city's support for education goes beyond the classroom.

We help students learn employment skills through the Summer of Opportunity jobs program. I would like to applaud the 53 employers who hired 522 young workers as part of this program. I pledged to create a community-wide plan for boosting literacy. We will soon launch a community-wide literacy program that will collect books, mentor children and help families make reading a part of their lives. My thanks go out to community leaders such as Dan Burns, Joe Klein and all the dozens of volunteers who are working on the Literacy Initiative. We recently added five Americorps/Vista volunteers who will work in library branches to provide literacy outreach to families. All five of them are here tonight with some of the people they serve. Would all of you please stand so that we can applaud your efforts? We will be adding five more Americorps Volunteers in July. Every city library branch will have an Americorps volunteer and a literacy outreach program. The Rochester Public Library is a part of our literacy strategy. We have added weekend hours all library branches, and teen centers to several of them.

Economic development is the third focus of our strategy for Rochester's success. Attracting more jobs, residents and visitors is a priority. And we are making headway. I love sports, but you don't have to be a fan to root for the success of Rochester's pro sports franchises. They have a history of success and have brought many championships home to our city. My congratulations go out to our most recent winners, the Rochester Razorsharks, champions of the Premier Basketball League.

The team owners Orest and Sev Hrywnak, coach Rod Baker, and all the Razorshark players deserve our applause. Our local sports franchises are also good for the economy; they truly contribute to our great quality of life. I said last year that we needed to audit the finances of some of our local teams that take advantage of city resources; such as PAETEC Park and Blue Cross Arena.

We did that. Unfortunately we discovered that the previous ownership of the Rhinos did not merit our support. For awhile it looked as though we wouldn't have pro soccer this year. But a new owner has brought the financial resources and the business plan to make the Rhinos a success. I look forward to a big crowd at PAETEC Park on May 17, as the Rhinos kick off a new season at home and a new era of pro soccer in Rochester. Please welcome new Rhino's owner Rob Clark and Rhino club president, Matt Ford.

While the Rhinos situation has stabilized, I have to report that the future of the Amerks and Knighthawks is uncertain. One of the principals with our past Rhinos situation is also a principal with the hockey and lacrosse teams. The pattern of unpaid creditors, litigation, tax liens and unsupportable debt that plagued the Rhinos at PAETEC Park is repeating itself with the Amerks and Knighthawks. We simply cannot work with current management, given its past performance, shaky legal position and current finances. We will of course invest in our local sports teams but only in teams with financially stable management that utilize sound business practices. I'm hopeful that a new owner emerges as we have seen with the Rhinos. If so, we will do everything we reasonably can to keep these great teams here and help them succeed.

Housing is another area where we are moving in the right direction. Some of our most visible progress is downtown. Next Spring, 67 new apartments will open at the Mills at High Falls. This is terrific because these homes will be affordable for young professionals. Altogether, we're adding nearly 300 downtown housing units in 12 different development projects. We are working on neighborhood housing as well. We are continuing to aggressively demolish vacant and obsolete buildings in our neighborhoods. Last year, the city earned a two million dollar grant from Empire State Development Corporation to continue this important work. An additional four million dollar grant will help us to create 145 market rate housing units in our city's historical structures. We are also keeping our commitment to focus investments in neighborhoods for greater impact. We are working closely with City Council and neighborhood groups to make this strategy work.

To support that effort, we completed a professional market study, with input from residents to strengthen housing programs throughout our city. The lakefront and harbor area are important development resources. I'm pleased to report four promising accomplishments. First, we successfully completed the sale of the ferry. We will soon refinance the debt to reduce the long-term impact on taxpayers. Second, we secured commitments from the Great Lakes Cruise Coalition to dock more passenger ships in Rochester. Third, we completed the concept design for extending River Street to support redevelopment at the port. And fourth, we acquired two acres of land that increase our flexibility to make future improvements.

We are also investing in our own history, in a very important part of our city. Rochester is the chosen home of Frederick Douglass. He published the North Star in Rochester. He collaborated with Susan B. Anthony here. He is buried in Rochester, and was eulogized on this very spot in 1895. Yet other cities – like Cincinnati and Baltimore – surpass us in showcasing Douglass despite their weaker ties. The Reverend Errol Hunt, his son Gerard and other community leaders asked our help to in honoring this giant of freedom. The Hunts secured half the funding for the center. So last year, we committed \$550,000 to make the Frederick Douglass Resource Center a reality. It's nearing completion right now, on King Street across from the home of Susan B. Anthony. Please acknowledge Reverend Errol Hunt and his son Gerard.

Two other commitments I made last year are helping to improve our quality of life. One is swimming at Durand which earns a big check mark of support from city residents. More than 60,000 people last year took advantage of safe, legal swimming. That's up from just 9,000 the year before. We increased sponsorship of the Rochester International Jazz Festival. The very first jazz festival was a success when 15,000 people attended. Well, last year, the festival drew more than 120,000 people to 170 concerts, including thousands of out-of-town visitors. Altogether we estimate that the festival has generated a \$50 million boost to the local economy over five years. Please join me in congratulating the organizers of the Rochester Jazz Festival, Mark Iacona and John Nugent. There's so much to celebrate. The Criterium bike race, Music Fest and the dozens of concerts held all over our city. But so far we've been talking about solid base hits. Now let's mention a few home runs.

I'll start with Midtown Plaza -- or should I say -- the new headquarters location for PAETEC Communications. We thank Governor Paterson and the Legislature for delivering the funds to make the Midtown site shovel-ready. The City is acquiring the property and helping to relocate tenants. I'm pleased to say that we are on track to see PAETEC break ground in 2009. While companies in other cities head for the suburbs, PAETEC is investing in the future of downtown Rochester. The investment brings 1,100 new jobs to downtown. There's a direct financial benefit to the City in property tax revenues, plus a multiplier effect as area restaurants and retailers get more customers. Within days of the PAETEC announcement, private investors began contacting us about plans for other Midtown parcels. PAETEC is a growing company with a young workforce that is likely to be drawn to downtown housing and city attractions.

Rochester can take pride in being the new headquarters location for one of our most successful companies. This decision reflects the vision and the community commitment of an individual; Arunas Chesonis, the president and CEO of PAETEC Communications. Arunas cannot be here tonight because he has a board meeting to run. But he did send Timothy Bancroft, PAETEC Executive Vice President and Treasurer. Tim, we look forward to welcoming you, Arunas and PAETEC's employees to downtown.

We have another home run to celebrate, the return of a financial institution headquarters to downtown Rochester. Many people don't realize it, but ESL Federal Credit Union is one of our area's largest financial institutions. And they are demonstrating great community commitment by moving their headquarters to downtown, on Chestnut Street across from the Strong National Museum of Play. ESL will be breaking ground this summer and moving into their new building by the spring of 2010. The move brings 300 more jobs to downtown, with plans to expand up to 500 employees over time. ESL is building a dedicated garage for employees, which won't add to the demand for downtown parking. Combined with the PAETEC plans, ESL represents a tipping point for downtown development. One company deciding to relocate might be significant. When a second company relocates, it sends a powerful message. Rochester New York means business, we are on a comeback path, and downtown is the place to be for growing companies. Please join me in welcoming ESL President Dave Fiedler and the ESL team to downtown Rochester.

Just imagine how different our skyline is going to look in the next three or four years, with these new headquarters and all the surrounding development. Not many cities in the Northeast are enjoying this kind of transformational change. I have a message for any other business leader who's considering a relocation, start-up or expansion. Before you look anywhere else, call me at 428-7045. Or call my friends Dave Fiedler, Arunas Chesonis and Tim Bancroft. They'll tell you why the smart money is being invested in downtown Rochester.

Neighborhoods are just as strong a focus of our economic development efforts. That's why I'm pleased that another major company is investing in our city's northwest area. Last year, the neighborhood received bad news when Wegmans announced that its Driving Park store would close. Losing a grocery store is a terrible blow, because it takes away healthy food – and for many people, a job – within walking distance of home. But this story has a fantastic ending. It exemplifies what we can achieve when government, the private sector and the neighborhood work together. Showing true community spirit, Wegmans donated the site to us. The City worked with local developers to bring in a superb grocery store chain, Price Rite, the number one employer in the state of New Jersey. Price Rite purchased the store from the city and opened up a fabulous supermarket, with affordable prices and a tremendous variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. The new Price Rite will employ about 130 people, almost all of them from the neighborhood. It's a tremendous economic boost for that area.

Finally, the money we received from the sale, created a fund for economic development projects in that neighborhood. This entire process is a formula for success that we expect to repeat. We are already discussing a second Price Rite location in our city. Please join me in welcoming Price Rite store manager John VanSlyke.

Public safety, education and economic development are the keys to our success as a city. But there is another measure of our performance: customer service. Our goal is making it easier to get information and services from city government. I'm thrilled to report several improvements. One is as simple as the numbers 3-1-1. That's what our residents dial to get help from the city, or to report any non-emergency police matter. It's "One Call to City Hall," whether you need a pothole filled, have a question about trash pick-up or want to report any neighborhood problems. We're using state of the art equipment that helps us to measure and improve the efficiency of the call system, and to address your concerns more quickly.

We're also improving service on the Internet. City residents can pay their taxes online this year, and we've made it easier to find out about business opportunities in the city. One click does the trick at cityofrochester.gov.

Internally, our Rochester by the Numbers program has been fully implemented. Every department is held accountable for meeting quantifiable goals. Our goal is to provide services better, faster and cheaper. We also ensure accountability through our watchdog group in the Office of Public Integrity. Improper or unethical behavior is rare, but now we have an office dedicated to investigate and prevent such behavior. We've already made some arrests and we are recovering misused taxpayer dollars.

I'm also happy to report that we're making Rochester one of the cleanest and greenest cities in America. Operation Clean Sweep was a big success, with thousands of people joining city employees on weekends to pick up trash and beautify neighborhoods. Thank you to everyone who helped and I hope to see all of you this spring as the clean-up continues. We have also appointed the city's first Green Team - dedicated employees from every department steering our efforts to remain an environmental leader among cities. Thanks to the city's Green Team, Rochester isn't just in the running to be the best city in America. We're leaving smaller carbon footprints along the way!

For example, by the end of this year we'll have 13 hybrid vehicles, six powered by natural gas, nine electric cars and 55 police cars that run on biofuels. Green vehicles represent eight percent of the city fleet. Twenty five percent of the electricity used in City offices comes from renewable sources – far beyond the state requirement of 15 percent by 2010. And City Hall will be turning up the thermostats this summer to further reduce our energy use and to save money. Our new Water Operation Center has the distinction of being a LEED gold-certified structure.

It's the first municipal building in New York State with this distinction. That means it was built using the most environmentally friendly design and materials available.

To know the true state of the city, we also need citizen input. To get that, I committed last year to an in-depth survey of customer satisfaction. A scientifically valid survey gives the people we serve a chance to tell us how we're doing, and how we can do better.

We surveyed 650 city residents, city landlords and city business owners. We asked how they feel about their neighborhoods, and the city services we provide. The results of the survey will be released this week, but tonight I will preview the key points. At the beginning of the survey, we asked whether the city was heading in the right or wrong direction. Sixty-nine percent of residents feel that our city is going in the right direction. That is a powerful message to our team in City Hall. We may not be moving as fast as we all would like, but we are moving in the right direction. In running terms, we've got our wind and are hitting our stride.

We then asked our residents to grade us on the performance of city government and a variety of specific services. According to the survey grading scale, City Hall rates a solid "B" for our performance. That's above average, but it's not good enough. We intend to do better.

Next we asked how our residents feel about specific aspects of life in Rochester and essential city services. Residents scored the city above average, from a B-minus to a B-plus, in a variety of areas, such as: air quality; water service and quality; festivals, concerts and music series; the city's restaurants and shopping; our sports teams; parks and recreation; trash pickup; leaf pickup and snow removal.

Residents rated the city average in some other areas, with "C-level" grades: Parking; neighborhood noise; traffic; the conditions of our streets and sidewalks; the condition of housing.

The men and women of our Rochester Fire Department received an A grade and it's a mark well deserved. Imagine entering an inferno with air temperatures that can exceed 15 hundred degrees and risking your life to save another. That happened last year when two of our finest rescued an unconscious RIT student from a fatal fire on Upton Park. Every time that fire bell rings, the first responders of the RFD face that possibility. I join the community in thanking the Rochester Fire Department for your professionalism, your skill and your courage.

Our customer survey asked about some new programs and initiatives the city has launched in the past two years. Our curfew program, designed to keep children off the streets at night and out of harm's way, rates a solid B+. So does our truancy initiative, which makes sure kids are in school during the day. In addition to these letter-grade scores, the survey asked people to rate some of our new ideas and programs on a percentage scale. Durand Eastman beach is popular, with 70% of residents in strong support. Our Clean Sweep initiative also gets rave reviews, with 94% support. And the demolition of vacant homes gets strong support from 86% of our residents.

We are pleased to see these votes of confidence. But unfortunately, the city received its worst grade for our most important priority; Public Safety. We asked whether citizens feel more - or less safe than they did two years ago. 47.5% said they feel less safe. 38.5% feel safer. That's unacceptable. No one should ever have to live in fear. This is one city. If any one of us is victimized by violence, or intimidated by fear, then we all are.

That is exactly why we established the so called "Zero Tolerance" approach, and made aggressive policing the expectation of this community. You know, our city has struggled for decades to decide what we want from our police. In my view, we've been too hesitant to support what's necessary to keep our citizens safe. But the survey indicates to me that we've settled that question. Almost 9 in 10 people thought the "Zero Tolerance" effort is either a good or great idea. And, 85 percent of our residents agreed with hiring more police. To all of the people who support Zero Tolerance and our police efforts, I am with you 100 percent. We will continue this approach and do everything in our power to make sure that you can feel safe and be safe on any street in our city.

It's more than adding police or extending police shifts. We have added public safety positions with more security officers in city buildings and downtown on bikes and walking the streets. These positions allow us to move sworn officers to the neighborhoods. Maintaining this public safety strategy won't be cheap. But the start-up costs are over, and our new policing approach is becoming standard operating procedure. We are committed to making zero tolerance a community value and not simply a program.

I was proud to serve this city as a police officer, and I'd like to recognize the incredible job our police are doing. From a Mayor's perspective, Zero Tolerance policing is a strategy. For the hundreds of RPD officers, it is a dangerous and difficult assignment. It means putting your life on the line every day. And it is too often a thankless job. I want every man and woman of the RPD to know this. The 90 percent support for Zero Tolerance is not a vote of confidence in me. It is a vote of confidence in you. The citizens of Rochester applaud you and I join with the community in appreciating your work to make our city safe.

I know that Zero Tolerance policing raises concerns among some citizens, and I will hear those concerns. But let me be clear to the men and women of the RPD: If you do your jobs by the book, with deference to the Constitution and with the professionalism and respect you have demonstrated thus far, you will have the support of our community and my administration every inch of the way.

Public safety cannot be achieved by the police alone. Ending violence must be everybody's business. We need the help of law-abiding citizens to keep criminals, senseless violence and illegal guns out of our community. We need to join together and combat the "no snitching" attitude. Our young people need a different message, and I'm glad to see it on billboards in some of our toughest neighborhoods. "You bet I told!" Reverend Marlowe Washington has shown vision, courage and leadership in helping to create this program. I am delighted that he can be here tonight. Pastor Washington, please stand and take a bow.

This work is essential because our situation is critical. As photographer Will Yurman showed us movingly, something is terribly wrong. His "Not Forgotten" series in the *Democrat & Chronicle* captured the images of homicide victims and their families. It illustrates, as words can't, why people must come forward and help stop the violence in our city. Latasha Shaw was stabbed to death on a busy intersection where people were watching, and yet her killers roam free. Six months after she was killed at the corner of Driving Park and Dewey, no one has come forward to help police solve this heinous crime. Something is terribly wrong. Many of the eight homicides that have occurred this year are unsolved. People out there must have information that could help the police, but no one has come forward. Something is terribly wrong.

None of these people deserved to die. Somehow, this point is getting lost in the culture of "no snitching." The next victim could be your mother; your son; your brother, cousin or friend. It's not snitching to report criminal activity; it's protecting your family, your community and yourself. Let us take a moment of silence to reflect on these victims and on the terrible impact violence has on our community. And let me speak to all those who would like to come forward but are afraid.

Our 3-1-1 system is partnered with Crime Stoppers. I promise you, despite what others may say on talk shows or elsewhere, that every witness will be anonymous when they call 3-1-1. No police car will come. You do not have to identify yourself and you will not be identified. We need all community leaders to join in spreading this important message. Every minister, every parent, every teacher can make a difference. I ask you to spread the word that 3-1-1 is the best and safest way to anonymously share information that may save a life. Thank you.

Now let's look ahead at the year to come. We have entered a tough stretch of road, with a remaining projected budget gap of \$17.4 million dollars, and state mandates that restrict our financial flexibility. In contrast, Buffalo has a significant budget surplus. Yet Rochester receives \$35 million dollars less in per capita aid. Combined with our mandated school aid, there is a total fairness gap of \$84 million dollars between Rochester and Buffalo. Is it fair? No.

We have worked hard for two years to obtain equity. We have partnered with the Rochester Business Alliance, organized labor, and many other groups to lobby Albany. We have succeeded in getting state leaders to recognize the inequity, but not to eliminate it. We are thankful for any increased aid we receive in the final state budget. You'll likely see headlines of an increase up to \$20 million dollars. It sounds great and it will be helpful, but it will not solve our deficit problems. That aid is called a spin-up and it's much like getting an advance on your paycheck. It's a non-recurring source of revenue. We also may not have access to the money until next June. This money is one time only and should not be used for operating expenses. The spin-up won't take away the difficult decisions we must make to prevent these yearly budget shortfalls.

It is my job not only to close this year's budget gap, but to plan for the future. And that is what I intend to do. Now some may assume that this means a big tax increase. They would be wrong. It is irresponsible to say never, but raising property taxes should be the absolute last action to take. Raising taxes sends the wrong message to people and businesses looking to locate here. We are all taxed enough. And even though I do not intend to raise the rate, some homeowners will pay more in taxes because of factors beyond my control. For example, we had a city-wide re-assessment this year. Where property values are rising, the amount of tax you pay may rise as well. Also, there is a state-mandated adjustment that controls how much businesses pay in taxes, as opposed to homeowners. Many homeowners will see a higher tax bill because of these factors. In our marathon to make Rochester the greatest city in America, we have hit the wall financially.

So what are we going to do? Let's talk first about what we're not going to do. It would be illegal to cut aid to city schools. It would be irresponsible to cut our commitment to public safety. And raising taxes is not a good answer. Let me pause for a moment to talk about a standard political dance that goes on in tough budget times. You've seen it before. On the one side, politicians use scare tactics to generate a crisis. Citizens respond with protests, and either taxes go up or some one-shot revenue tricks are used to avoid real change. But I'm not going to play the crisis game. What would I propose? That we're going to shut the water off? Snow plows will come only every other blizzard? Coin-operated street lights? I'm not going to do that. Instead, I'm going to take my cue from our customers.

In our six neighborhood budget meetings, hundreds of citizens told us some things the city is doing that they can live without. Not services they don't value, just that they could live without it. And I'm going to take our citizens at their word. Their message reinforced my intent to align our investments with the priority areas our community has identified. This will mean that parts of city government and some services will no longer exist in the form they do now. Instead of shrinking from this challenge we will embrace it as a tool to restructure and reshape city government. While maintaining focus on our priorities, we will explore consolidations, outsourcing and other ways of doing the people's business more efficiently and reliably. We will re-examine every service to determine whether it is essential and how it can best be delivered. Some city programs and activities will have to end. Some city jobs will have to be eliminated.

That is not to say that any of these are not important or deserving. It's just that we can no longer afford them. In the coming weeks, I will lay out our budget plan. It will be in balance and show investment in our priorities. It will identify more efficient ways of delivering services.

To that end, I will soon announce a major reorganization and a new delivery system for city services. It will utilize teams from several current departments, including Neighborhood Empowerment Teams, Economic Development, Community Development, Police and Fire.

They will work together from locations in each quadrant of the city and provide City Hall services directly to neighborhoods. The new configuration will provide our residents one-stop shopping for most city services. It will involve closing some existing offices. The goal is to move a full array of services into neighborhood centers in each quadrant. This plan will allow us to provide services in a more efficient way. It is a prime example of how we will embrace our challenge to improve government. I would only consider raising taxes if it is still required to balance our budget after we make these other tough decisions. We're running a marathon, and this stretch of the course is going to be painful. But we cannot take an easier course.

Personally, I know that I am ready. Two years ago, when I ran the New York City Marathon, there was one stretch of road that just didn't seem to end. I was hot, I ached all over, and I just wanted to veer over and find a patch of lawn where I could rest. But that is not what I went to New York to do. I went to run and to finish – not to drop out. I am not a quitter or a fair weather friend. I'm a product of our Tenth Ward, where hard work, loyalty and perseverance are not just words – they are values. I am equally committed to the path our city is on. I remain confident that we in City government are ready to keep moving towards our shared goal.

More important, I know that our community is with city government on the journey. In our survey, we asked a final question, presenting the following statement: There's still a long way to go, but the City is improving. More than 8 in 10 of our citizens agreed with that statement. 83%. That means that despite all of our concerns, we are hopeful. We know that Rochester is on the right track. I can feel it. I hope you can too. We are on course to see our City reach greatness once again. So many of the pieces are falling into place, new corporate headquarters, new housing and a streamlined new government.

Before closing, let me address the children of our great city. The primary reason I ran for Mayor is that after 29 years in the Rochester Police Department, I saw too many young lives destroyed, disrupted or damaged by poverty and violence. Education is the only true bridge out of poverty, so stay in school. Dropping out virtually sentences you to a life of failure. And there is so much reason to hope. Even in our most challenged neighborhoods, I see incredible families, and some of the brightest and most talented children anywhere. I see far more good stories than bad.

But we never seem to celebrate the successes. We focus more on what goes wrong, those negative voices again, whispering in our ears to just give up.

Tonight I want to end with an example of not giving up. I want to celebrate one of those success stories. This young man has tremendous parents who encourage him. With opportunities to nurture his talent, he has resolved to work hard. And he is making his dreams come true. I believe there are thousands more like him, city children who can achieve greatness if we give them support and a chance. Only a sophomore at the School of the Arts, this young man has already accomplished what few people ever achieve. He performed live on the Grammy Awards Show before millions of people, and I'm delighted that he is here tonight. He is an example for every child in our city that anything is possible if you have a dream and work hard to achieve it. Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to introduce Mr. Timothy Mitchum.

Thank you, Timothy. You are such a great example of what our young people can achieve. Thank you everyone and God bless Rochester.