

Governor Eliot Spitzer's Inaugural Address

by Gotham Gazette Staff

Monday, January 01, 2007 12:00 AM -

Happy New Year and thanks to all of you — intrepid New Yorkers and friends — for joining us on this glorious, gray January day.

I want to thank Governor Pataki for joining in this time-honored tradition as the reins of state government pass from his careful stewardship. Thank you Governor and Mrs. Pataki for 12 years of service.

We are honored by the presence of former Governors Hugh Carey and Mario Cuomo and the great grandson of Governor Al Smith. They represent the august tradition of New York leadership.

We are honored by the presence of New York's esteemed senior Senator [Chuck Schumer](#) and Congressman Charles Rangel and the entire Congressional delegation.

And of course, my colleagues in state government. Speaker Shelly Silver and Senator Joe Bruno and the members of their respective chambers.

A warm welcome to our great friend the esteemed Judge Kay and all the members of the Court of Appeals. A warm welcome to all those joining me in being sworn in today. Attorney General Andrew Cuomo and my partner, Lieutenant Governor David Paterson.

My deepest thanks are to my parents; my wife, Silda, and our three wonderful daughters.

History's Lesson

Today, we come together to mark a pivotal moment in our state's history, a day that in the rhythm of democracy marks a transition and a new beginning.

It is with profound humility about the task that lies before us and filled with great hope for what I

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know we will achieve, that I stand before you to announce that Day One of our time for change has arrived.

As we step outside on this first January morning of 2007, the light of a new day shines down on the Empire State once again.

The opportunity at the heart of this day is unique to our times, but not new to our history. As the writer Russell Shorto has aptly noted, New York created the model for the kind of society that would be duplicated throughout the country and around the globe: Our state was born as an island at the center of the world.

What began as a babble of dialects and peoples struggling to find a way to live together, searching for balance between chaos and order, liberty and oppression, became a symphony of democracy.

Under the shadow of liberty's torch, generations of weary travelers have sailed into New York harbor believing that of all the places on Earth, this was the land where people could come and find the chance to make their world anew.

That no matter how great the hardship, no matter how daunting the challenge, the promise of our democracy makes it possible to overcome the greatest odds so that we — individually and as a society — may arrive at a greater good.

And so it was for those first immigrants who came with little and worked long days to give their children a better life.

For the bold governor, Dewitt Clinton, who ignored the warnings of the skeptics and cynics and built an Erie Canal that so many had said was wasteful, impractical, and impossible.

For the reformers of Teddy Roosevelt's day who dared to take on the political machine and

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inbred corruption in order to give government back to the people.

For the suffragists and union members and civil rights heroes who organized and marched on our streets to win their chance at the American dream.

For the inventors, artists and entrepreneurs who have turned our state into a beacon of hope, ideas and opportunity.

Choosing Pragmatism and Ethics

And so it must be for us. Like all who have come before, we have arrived at this moment on this day because we have demanded a different and more vibrant future for our children.

Because we know that New York is the state where the depth of our talent and the breadth of our skills and the reach of our culture have forever changed America and the entire world — and because we know we can do it once more.

This election was not about electing one person as governor. Rather it was about what we the people collectively elected for the future of our state.

We chose pragmatism and ethics over partisan politics and dysfunction, and we demanded an end to gridlock.

So I pledge to toil each and every day so as not to disappoint the hard working people of this state who have placed their trust in this future — a future which rekindles hope and restores growth.

Today we stand in the midst of a global revolution that has transformed the way we live and the way we work. Creativity and prosperity travel wherever the brightest minds and most innovative economies can be found.

New York Has Been Sleeping

Over the last decade, we have seen what can happen when our government stands still in the face of great challenge and inevitable change.

We've seen it in the burdensome property taxes and the health care we can't afford; in the jobs that have disappeared from our upstate cities and the schools that keep failing our children; in a government that works for those who hold office — not those who put them there.

Like Rip Van Winkle, the legendary character created by the New York author Washington Irving, New York has slept through much of the past decade while the rest of the world has passed us by.

Today is the day when all of that changes — when we stop standing still and start moving forward once more.

And while I wish I could tell you that either a single election or a different party or even a new governor alone is enough to do this — I cannot. While I wish I could tell you that change will be easy — I don't believe that you elected me to do what's easy.

Easy is spending your tax dollars without consequence or sacrifice. Easy is saying yes to supporters and no to opponents. Easy is looking the other way while costs rise, debts mount and families lose ground. Easy is what we've had, but easy is not where we need to go.

The Lessons Of Two Roosevelts

Let us remember the lessons of two great governors, Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt. Teddy Roosevelt instructed, "It is only through labor and painful effort, by grim energy and resolute courage that we move on to better things."

And Franklin Roosevelt advised us to be, "bold," and to recognize that people demand "action,

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and action now.”

I have no doubt that we can move on to better things in this state — that we will find ourselves on the winning side of history once more.

We Must Be One New York Again

But to be number one again, we must be one New York again.

And so in order to return to policies of opportunity and prosperity, we must change the ethics of Albany and end the politics of cynicism and division in our state.

If ever there was a time that called out for introspection by those in government, it is now. Lincoln spoke of listening to “the better angels of our nature.” Indeed, those of us who work in the great building behind me must hear and heed the serious responsibility that public service demands and rise to this moment and show the public in words and in deeds that we understand that our responsibility is to the people of New York.

The reform we seek is substantial in size and historic in scope.

It will require a new brand of politics — a break from the days when progress was measured by the partisan points scored or the opponents defeated. No longer can we afford merely to tinker at the margins of the status quo or play the politics of pitting one group against another. We must replace delay and diversion with energy and purpose in the halls of our capital.

What we needed now more than ever is a politics that binds us together, a politics that looks to the future, a politics that asks not what is in it for me, but always what is in it for us.

We must embrace a progressive vision of government once more — a vision that upholds the values of individuality and community; of entrepreneurship and opportunity; of responsibility and fairness. No one any longer believes in government as a heavy hand that can cure all our ills,

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but rather we see it as a lean and responsive force that can make possible the pursuit of prosperity and opportunity for all — by softening life's blows, leveling its playing field and making possible the pursuit of happiness that is our God-given right.

It is both tempting and understandable for each of us to focus on the problems and concerns within our own neighborhoods, our own cities, our own regions and our own businesses. But for any one of us to succeed, we must succeed as One New York.

A state that is not urban or rural, upstate or downstate, Republican or Democratic, but first and foremost New Yorkers — striving together, reaching together, working together toward our common dream.

And so, together, we must strive to build One New York through a politics that operates on the principle that we rise or fall as one people and one state.

We will succeed not because we point fingers or refuse to budge, but because we compromise enough to find principled consensus, and because we listen enough to find wise solutions.

Not everyone will agree with this vision and some will not support these solutions. Indeed, we will make mistakes. But progress we will have — measured by our core values.

Our purpose is not reform merely for the sake of reform, but to restore fairness and create opportunity and redefine the very fabric of our community.

Innovation Economy, Accountable Schools, Patients First

Some may feel anxiety over changes that seek to make businesses more competitive, but all will benefit from an Innovation Economy that attracts young people and new businesses in every part of New York.

Some may express skepticism over a school system that demands more accountability from

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students, teachers and parents, but all will benefit from an education that rewards excellence and gives every child the best possible chance in life.

Some may feel threatened by health care reforms, but all will benefit from a system that finally puts patients first at a cost that all families can afford.

Some public officials may not want to face stricter ethics rules and more competitive elections, but all citizens will win when we finally get a government that puts the people's interests, openness and integrity first.

With most of these reforms, there will be those who say we can't, we shouldn't and we won't.

They will peddle the politics of cynicism that we must now make the politics of yesterday. Because if we band together and succeed in our efforts, our future will mean a New York that values the dignity of each person — and once more offers opportunity for all.

Transforming Government, Rebuilding The Economy

Every policy, every action every decision we make in this administration will further two overarching objectives: we must transform our government so that it is as ethical and wise as all of New York, and we must rebuild our economy so that it is ready to compete on the global stage in the next century. The simplicity of articulating these principles belies the complexity of the task. But victory will be ours, as it must be.

And so on this day of unbridled hope and possibility, I ask you to think not only of the challenges and aspirations that you hold in your own hearts, but of those that are held in the collective heart of New York.

This One New York includes Chris Kelder and his family, who have farmed their land in Ulster County for more than two centuries, passing their dreams on to each successive generation.

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It includes today's immigrants whose lips speak the languages of Spanish, Chinese, Korean, French and an infinite array of dialects from all over the world.

Today's immigrants enrich our state with their vitality and their vision, in the same way as the immigrants of the last century. All these different tongues translate into the incomparable work ethic of New York.

And it includes the brave immigrants who came through Ellis Island over the last century in search of a better life, one of whose grandsons stands here in front of you today the embodiment of their dreams.

Each of us comes from a different place and from a different background. Each has faced their own tests and trials along life's journey.

But throughout the history of New York, what has always united us as a people is the recognition that we are all on this journey together, and if we're willing to catch each other during our stumbles and look out for one another during the tough times, we have it in our power to remove any obstacles in our path and walk toward that brighter day.

No matter how great the challenge — no matter how impossible the odds — our destiny will never be a path to follow, but always a trail to blaze.

And so on this new day of a new year, I ask not just for your support, but also for your cooperation, your patience and your participation in making our dream real once again.

As New York's former Governor Theodore Roosevelt once remarked, there can be no great progress without first entering the arena.

My fellow New Yorkers: join me in that arena.

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Lend your sweat, your toil and your passion to the effort of building One New York of which we can all be proud.

My fellow New Yorkers. Our moment is here.

Day One is now.

Together, let's build that One New York. Let's walk toward that better day.

Thank you, and God bless.

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