

Welcome and thank you all for being here tonight. It's an honor to take this oath in the company of so many of my fellow Duluthians. I want to thank every one of you for being here today to show your support for our city.

Throughout my life, I have been blessed with family, friends, teachers, coaches, and mentors who have shared the gift of their experience – many of whom are here tonight – thank you for the difference you made in my life.

There are two very important mentors in my life that could not be here today, but are in my thoughts. It was Congressman Jim Oberstar and the late Senator Sam Solon who taught me the value and importance of public service.

I want to thank the 112 citizens who contributed to our transition efforts by sharing your ideas, your perspective, and your passion for Duluth. In particular, I want to recognize the efforts of Erica Heikel, Marcy Stech, Tara Alfonsi, Sandy Sandbulte, Abbot Apter, and Pat Mullen for their help in recent months.

Congratulations to newly elected Council President Roger Reinert and welcome to incumbent Councilors Jim Stauber, Garry Krause, and Greg Gilbert.

I'm looking forward to working with the five new council members Jeff Anderson, Tony Cuneo, Todd Fedora, Jay Fosle, and Sharla Gardner. Congratulations.

To my fellow outgoing council members: Russ Stewart, Russ Stover, Laurie Johnson, and Tim Little – I value your service and your friendship – it has been a true pleasure to work with each of you.

And on behalf of all of us, I'd like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Mayor Herb Bergson for his many years of dedicated service to the citizens of Duluth.

I am especially pleased that my family is here to share this moment with me. It is a special honor to have been sworn in by my Uncle – Minnesota District Court Judge Tom McCarthy. My parents, Don & Mary Ness, are here, thank you for teaching me the value of service, faith, and the importance of a generous spirit. And thanks to my three younger brothers, Jamie, Patrick, and Nathan.

The most important people in my life are also here: my wife Laura, my daughter Eleanor, and my son James. I am convinced that by establishing a healthy balance, I will be both an effective mayor and a loving husband and father.

We live in a country founded on the ideas of great visionaries and we are inspired by the promise of the American Dream. As a student I was captivated by the bold aspiration of creating a nation based on the principles of liberty, justice and opportunity for every individual. We inherit these principles as an unfinished project. We are not there yet. Still, the strength of these founding ideals has led generations of Americans to contribute, and to sacrifice; striving to make this promise a reality.

It was Thomas Jefferson who believed that the spirit of our Republic could best be expressed in communities like our own. Places where our liberties were earned through a sense of civic duty. Jefferson's Republic requires that we *all* take ownership – that we are *all* responsible for creating the kind of community in which we will be *proud* to call home. Over two centuries later, his belief still rings true.

More than most modern American cities, Duluth reflects the participation and commitment envisioned in Jefferson's ideal. Our record-high voter turnout, our volunteerism, and our enthusiasm for local causes are clear indicators that we are engaged in the social fabric of our community.

While we should be rightfully proud of our civic activity, real value is achieved when we move from civic activity to civic *accomplishment*. How do we do this?

We do it through hope, optimism, cooperation, and an understanding that we *can* strengthen our country by investing in the health and well-being of our city. We do it by caring enough about our community to put in the hard work necessary to create positive change.

The challenges before us are well defined. The choice today is whether to continue to simply define our problems, or if we choose to *solve* them. Each of us has within us the power to create change, and together that power is multiplied.

There is no question that the challenges we face as a community will be difficult to solve. And yet, I am absolutely *convinced* in our city's ability to overcome any challenge in our way.

- Together, we will give strength to our comprehensive plan, by creating a modern, form-based zoning code.
- We will fully implement our Retiree Health Care solution, by having the will to make the difficult decisions and the respect to reach out to those most directly affected.
- We will honor our community's most sacred responsibility - eliminating sewer overflows into Lake Superior, by aggressively investing in our aging sewer infrastructure.
- We will reform the Building Safety Office, by focusing on improved customer service, process innovation, and by measuring service outcomes.
- We will improve the safety in our neighborhoods, by advancing innovative community policing techniques.
- We will reduce Duluth's poverty rate, by creating a workforce development system that provides specific training to employment strategies for residents who are looking for a better job.
- We will be mindful of those struggling to make ends meet, those facing societal obstacles, and will continue to benefit from being an inclusive community.

- We will fix our neighborhood streets, by doubling our investment in the Street Improvement Program by 2010.
- We will provide greater opportunities to our kids and families, by continuing to support citizen-led projects like the Heritage Center.
- We will grow Duluth's aviation sector, creating good paying jobs for Duluthians, by building a new airport terminal, by encouraging aviation related academic programming, and by ensuring that, when the time comes, Cirrus will choose Duluth as the best place to expand their operations.
- And together, we will improve the tone and tenor of our public discourse, by insisting that civility, respect, and integrity are shared values across the lines that divide us.

As I prepare to take on the challenges facing our city and my administration, I am inspired by Duluth's potential. I feel an overwhelming sense of purpose to serve, and to *accomplish*, on behalf of the city that we love.

In 2008, my primary focus as your mayor will be on the internal management of city operations and on the unglamorous complexities of city policy. Throughout these efforts, I will be focused on three core principles: service, innovation, and accountability.

SERVICE to the community will be the defining mantra of city government. City Hall is rich with talent and dedicated workers. We will build upon the existing quality service of those employees, while raising the standard of excellence. I strive to be a servant leader - leading by example.

INNOVATION will inspire creative solutions and overcome the barriers that burden government. Innovation is the foundation of successful city government and Duluth will soon be noted for its courage to challenge outdated systems that frustrate creativity and common sense.

And city government will also be ACCOUNTABLE for its management of limited public resources – not only will we be accountable to a high standard of service, but also to each other.

Following tonight's Inaugural Address, I encourage you to pick up a copy of our 100 day agenda that outlines 17 tasks and initiatives that will help guide the first months of my administration. It is a very aggressive and ambitious plan designed to lay the foundation for our longer term goals. Copies of the agenda can also be found on the City of Duluth's home page.

As part of that 100 day agenda, we will focus on assessing our city operations, department by department, and our city budget, including an evaluation of our services and the use of your tax dollars. We will seek out opportunities for improvement by forming eight citizen-led study groups in the areas of budget,

economic development, and city infrastructure, to name a few – building upon the impressive work of our transition committees.

In 2008, I will deliver three additional reports on the State of the City and our progress throughout the year. This approach will give us the tools and the time to share a more comprehensive, detailed look on where we are, where we need to be, and our plans to get there.

Today, as I stand before you, I feel some of the same emotions I felt as a new father. Sure, Laura and I were nervous about the unknown trials of parenthood and the scope of the responsibility ahead of us. But we were also energized and excited about the awesome challenge of it all. When our daughter was born, nearly three years ago, we knew our lives were going to change dramatically. We knew it wouldn't all be easy. But our love for Eleanor, and now for James, is what inspires us to be the best parents we can be.

And it is my love for Duluth that gives me the inspiration and the courage to do the difficult work that lies ahead. I am inspired by the goodness of our community, by the talent, energy and passion of those in this room and throughout our city, and I am inspired by an unshakable hope for the future of Duluth.

I see a Duluth with an enterprising workforce strategy and profitable local companies, a virtuous cycle that attracts and retains talented Duluthians who then bring real value to their workplace and to their community,

I see a Duluth that is widely recognized as the premier outdoor destination of the Midwest, where we share our clean air, lush parks and forests, and genuine hospitality with millions of visitors.

I see a Duluth with a clean, safe, flourishing core business district that serves as the heart of our regional economy – an active hub of businesses, retail stores, galleries, and theaters – it's a colorful downtown, full of arts, culture and personality.

I see a Duluth that preserves and celebrates our unique neighborhoods, the places where our families find stability and establish roots, where friendships are born, and where the next generation of Duluthians can grow and thrive.

And I see a Duluth where we treasure and enhance our natural assets, our parks, trails, the Lake front and the River front – all woven into our shared values and our common identity as Duluthians.

There is a stoic strength of character deeply ingrained within the fabric of our City – a set of values that connect us to this place in a way not even possible in most American cities. Duluthians are able to express how this place, this unique and authentic city, serves as a reflection of our own identity. It also serves as our

inspiration to care so deeply, so passionately, about the challenges we are facing.

To paraphrase John F. Kennedy, we do not take on our challenges because they are easy — but because they are *hard*. And we do it because we believe in our city, and we do it because we *believe it can be done*. When we allow our love for this community to guide our civic engagement, that's when Duluth's great potential will finally be realized.

Thank you all for being here, thank you for your support, thank you for believing in Duluth.