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HAMILTON DEMANDS OUR COLLECTIVE BEST

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Good evening and thank you for that mercifully brief introduction, some of which was actually true.

Tonight is a bit of a coming out party for me. Hard to believe, but it has been almost 10 years since I announced retirement from public life.

I've spent most of the past decade making a living in the private sector, raising our young family and volunteering for local charities that I believe in. Not a whole lot different from many of you in this room and tonight's nominees.

Despite busy and hectic lives, despite being overscheduled and, at times, overwhelmed with the responsibilities as a parent, and an employee, you volunteer. You give of your time, often leaving little time for yourself. And you do these things because you want to make a difference.

You believe that citizenship brings with it many privileges, but also responsibilities. You wish to give it your best effort. You were probably taught this by your father or mother, a teacher or a neighbour, or in my case, by my grandfather.

My grampa Frank Cooke is here with me tonight. Grampa is 95 years old and he has led by example. Not only has he been a tireless father, grandfather and great-grandfather and successful in his own career, but he has tried to give his best back to Hamilton by volunteering, just like the nominees tonight.

Tonight I would like to spend some time talking about Hamilton and why it continues to demand our collective best efforts.

We are facing some very real economic challenges, environmental challenges and social challenges. We have poverty levels that are too high; we have literacy levels that are too low; we are losing our most skilled and educated to other communities and we are left with the high costs that go with higher risks.

I. Hamilton Community Foundation

Let me begin with Hamilton Community Foundation. I would like to acknowledge the legacy of great leadership passed on to me by my predecessor Carolyn Milne. I also want to acknowledge the presence here this evening of many special friends of HCF.

In particular, I recognize three present HCF Board members who are previous recipients of this award: Mark Chamberlain, Dr. Gary Warner and Madeleine Levy, all extraordinary leaders and bridge builders in our community.

So what do we do at HCF and why does it matter?

The Foundation was established by farsighted community leaders back in the 1950s in order to make a difference in the lives of Hamiltonians, long after these leaders were gone. Today, HCF manages assets of over \$100M and has invested more than \$55M into every facet of community life - - the environment, arts and culture, health and social causes.

Our focus is to work with others and to be a catalyst for long term change that will improve the lives of Hamiltonians.

II. Lessons Learned

As many of you may know, I have spent my career in different sectors. My new job as President and CEO of Hamilton Community Foundation brings all that experience together. And even in my brief time at the Foundation, I've learned that HCF is one of the places in this city where these sectors - - I mean the government sector, the private sector and the not-for-profit sector - - come together to make real change, real progress. Let me share with you some of the lessons that I have learned working in those three very different sectors over the past 30 years.

March of Dimes - Mixed Neighbourhoods

I learned from my 11 years building non-profit housing for the Ontario March of Dimes about how important it is to treat all of our citizens with dignity and to provide them with a decent place to call home. But, I also learned that this isn't easy.

You can meet resistance from local politicians, pressured by local neighbours who are fearful about change - - about new neighbours with special needs or lower income or both. So, in too many cases we end up compounding the problem by ghettoising our needy and then we wonder why we are not making inroads into poverty reduction.

Ironically, in the last 5 years I spent much of my career working in the development industry trying to build smart, New-Urban communities that are walkable and include a

range of incomes. Unfortunately, even today when we know about the importance of well integrated neighborhoods, there is still significant resistance to including smaller lots and affordable housing in new developments.

Regional Chairman - Local Social Costs

As Regional Chairman leading Hamilton through the last economic recession, I discovered how tough it is for a community when senior governments solve their debt and deficit problems by cutting transfers and downloading social costs at the very time that local social costs and needs are skyrocketing. We are about to go down this road yet again.

Police Commission Chairman - Early Intervention

As Police Commission Chairman, I found that spending money on early childhood education and the timely treatment of children's mental health issues is vastly cheaper than building more jails or putting more cops on the street.

Corporate CEO - Private Sector Investment

In the last decade as a corporate CEO, I came to appreciate more fully that without private sector investment and job creation, our community is doomed to economic decline. Simply put, if we stake our future only on public sector institutions and ignore entrepreneurs and investors, we will never create enough jobs that pay living wages.

Parent - Liveable Neighbourhoods

And, as a father of three young children, Maureen and I have learned again the value of safe and liveable neighbourhoods. Would any one of us want to raise a child in a neighbourhood where 5 lanes of one-way traffic cut through the middle of it? Would any one of us want to send our child to a school where half the students will not graduate? Decent, performing public schools and safe, liveable streets where children come from mixed incomes remain our best line of defence against poverty and our best engine of economic development.

Leaving Our Comfort Zones

Asking ourselves these questions requires us to leave our comfort zones. Tonight, I want to ask you to leave your comfort zone as we assess the conditions and the challenges that we find in our city today. This is not an exercise in assigning blame, but rather of accepting our shared responsibility to make things better.

III The Local Evidence

There are three pieces of evidence that I ask you to consider.

Hamilton Spectator - Health

The Hamilton Spectator will soon publish a groundbreaking project put together by investigative reporter Steve Buist that will map the health of Hamilton down to the level of neighbourhoods. The project, unique to Canadian journalism, explores the connections between health, poverty, education and environment. Readers will be able to look at the maps and say "I live here, what is the health of my neighbourhood?"

What are notable - - and discouraging - - are the huge variations that exist, between the best neighbourhoods and the worst. Some neighbourhoods are living with health outcomes that you might expect in Detroit or the south side of Chicago or even parts of the Third World, but certainly not in Southern Ontario. For example, the rate of emergency room visits in Hamilton's lowest income neighbourhood is 1,291 per 1,000 people. In the best neighbourhood, it's 97 ER visits per 1000 people.

JPC White Paper - Immigration

A just published report shows us that Hamilton is failing to attract its fair share of Canada's immigrants and as a result our overall population is in decline. Many of these are highly skilled, highly mobile immigrants and they are going where the jobs are. And, it's not Hamilton.

Dr. Kitchen - Education

My Grampa has always believed that education is the great equalizer. More than anything else, it offers the willing and the able the greatest chance of breaking the cycle of poverty. Using 2006 statistics, Dr. Peter Kitchen of McMaster University shows us that the high school drop out rates in our poorest neighbourhoods are staggering. In one Hamilton neighbourhood, half of the students did not graduate from high school and less than 20% went on to post-secondary study. These kids face a future of hardship and despair, when hope and opportunity should be theirs.

IV Economic Diversity

So, what does all of this tell us? Well, in a nutshell, we are sliding backwards and we are compounding our problems by concentrating where our poorest citizens can live and go to school. And, by concentrating on poverty, we do not contain the problem. It drags down the overall performance of our city and our schools. It does not allow us to attract new investment and new jobs.

Syracuse and Raleigh

Syracuse University Professor Gerald Grant has just released an important new book called "Hope and Despair in the American City". The subtitle is "Why There Are No Bad Schools in Raleigh (North Carolina)". It caught my eye because my little sister just moved to Raleigh after 20 years of raising her family in Buffalo, New York, where the public school system remains an unmitigated disaster.

Grant's book contrasts the abysmal performance of neighbourhoods and schools in his native Syracuse with much more positive educational and economic experiences in Raleigh. The reasons for this dramatic difference in performance: Raleigh made a commitment to integrating every school in its merged city/county system to ensure that kids from families of all income levels would learn together and gave their teachers the tools to innovate, while Syracuse has continued to concentrate poor kids together in the inner city.

Raleigh also opted for a much smarter approach to urban planning to ensure mixed land uses and incomes were spread all across the metropolitan region while trying to limit sprawl.

Diversity Matters

Why should any of this matter to us here in Hamilton? Simply because Grant's work supports what we know from evidence around the world and right here in Hamilton, that while poverty anywhere in our city is a bad thing, concentrated poverty is particularly destructive to neighbourhoods, schools and our long term economic prospects.

The evidence is clear: diversity is critical to our economic success.

The diversity I am talking about includes not only diversity by race, gender, religion and sexual orientation, but also and perhaps most critically income.

Neighbourhoods and schools that are made up of mixed income children tend to do well and those that are segregated by income tend to do poorly. They are healthier, they are literate, and they are graduates. They have a better chance of getting and keeping a job and as a result, the city has a better chance of attracting and keeping investment.

So, let me be blunt. If we want to end the cycle of poverty in this city and if we want to see a return of real economic growth, we must be willing to have a conversation about our neighbourhoods and our neighbours; about our schools and their performance; about the health of our citizens and the kinds of magnets we need to glue modern-day investment into place.

V Signs of Hope

Given this rather sobering evidence, you might ask if I am filled with hope or despair.

The answer is hope, tempered by the hard reality of the work ahead. And here, HCF and citizens of Hamilton have some stories to tell and lessons to share.

Six years ago, the Foundation had the foresight to make poverty reduction its number one priority by committing 80 percent of its discretionary funds to it. Together with the City of Hamilton and other partners, we established the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction and the Jobs Prosperity Collaborative to bring people together to attack poverty at its roots. HCF also directly funded some pilot initiatives that give us cause for optimism ... let me tell you about just two of those.

As many of you know, the Beasley neighbourhood - - 42 innercity blocks, home to 5000 people from 41 countries, where more than half live below the poverty line and unemployment is close to 45 percent - - faces many challenges and hardships.

In 2007, an anonymous couple chose HCF to make a million dollar donation to help provide for child care spaces that were soon to be lost. Three years later, the Beasley Community Centre is thriving, offering literacy, nutrition, education, and recreational programs for children and adults. Participation is growing.

The residents of Beasley played a key role in identifying the needs and in designing the programs for their own neighbourhood. This fall, this centre will move into a permanent home as part of the new Dr. J. Edgar Davey School.

In Hamilton, more Aboriginal youth are staying in school now than elsewhere in Canada. Why? Because, back in 2002, a concerned couple asked HCF what they could do to make life better for at-risk Aboriginal young people in Hamilton. The Foundation brought Aboriginal leaders together, brought the school boards and other partners into the conversation and started generating a solution.

Are these stories unique? In some ways they are - but there are hundreds more that we could tell at the Community Foundation, or folks could tell at United Way, or Mohawk, or at the hospitals, or any number of social agencies.

Thankfully, Hamiltonians are generous and philanthropic by nature. They have the impulse to give: according to a Statistics Canada survey, 92% of Hamiltonians made donations to charities in 2007 and 52% of Hamiltonians volunteer. Both those rates are higher than the Ontario and Canadian average. So the will to make a difference here in our city is enormous.

Our challenge in Hamilton is to harness that impulse, direct it toward shared goals, and work together. But, we must also be willing to have an open and frank discussion about

some of the uncomfortable truths facing this city. That is the lesson offered by Raleigh and Syracuse.

In Syracuse, they were unwilling to talk about the facts. In Raleigh, they relished the clash of ideas and encouraged civic engagement.

The Pan Am Games and hopefully a new LRT system give us an unprecedented opportunity to have a discussion about doing things differently, to turn good ideas into action. Done poorly, Pam Am and LRT will be one heck of an expensive 2 week party. Done well, with a focus on social inclusion, we have an opportunity to positively transform our City.

VI Conclusion

Working together, we can meet the challenge of making Hamilton the best place to raise a child. In 1998, Raleigh set a goal to have 95% of grade 3-8 students proficient in math at a time when a majority of inner city kids were failing. Today, a mere 12 years later, they are at 91 percent.

We should not be afraid of setting big audacious goals. Henry David Thoreau said “the young man gets together his tools to build a bridge to the moon, or perchance a temple on this earth. And at length, the middle aged man builds a woodshed of them.” Let us not settle for a woodshed in Hamilton.

Tonight, inspired by examples of citizenship that we are celebrating, let us get on with the work of making our dreams a reality.