

Opinion

Scott Johnson Reader's View: Mayor offers reflections, looks to future

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As your mayor the last four years, we've faced and tackled head-on many issues not seen in generations. I've worked with many of you across party lines, simply because that is the right thing to do. As I've gone door-to-door during my re-election campaign, I hear that some issues are being distorted for political gain. I'd like to address some of these concerns directly.

With the recession, we still face economic uncertainty as we plan for our future. Among the top issues are keeping our local economy strong, continuing efficiency with common sense in City Hall and safeguarding our unique quality of life. Despite very challenging times, I'm proud to have moved essential projects and services forward to meet our needs in the most cost-effective manner.

Plans for a new downtown parking deck, an affordable recreation center, a comprehensive long-term capital program and a complete overhaul of our zoning ordinances still moved forward in difficult times. We've also done more with less in City Hall, being more efficient and productive and successfully negotiating more affordable union contracts and health insurance. Overall, we must never lose sight of preserving what makes Saratoga so special.

New York state's 2 percent property tax cap will have a dramatic effect on how we meet our city's needs, both now and in the future. It's essential that we continue being more efficient and economical in how we operate. My opponent's tax-and-spend mentality can't survive in a tax cap reality. You simply can't promise things that you can't afford. I've never promised anything, and everything, just to get votes.

To meet our long-term capital needs and broaden our tax base, we must focus on economic development that generates revenue and lessens the portion paid by the average taxpayer. For example, I'm proud to have led the first bipartisan public-private partnership for a new parking deck downtown, finally providing a long awaited parking solution and additional revenue to both businesses and city sales tax. Again, it's just common sense.

As the mayor, I haven't stated my opinion on the issue of charter reform in order to avoid influencing public opinion. Despite the political "spin" by some opponents, the City Council is not engaging in "voter suppression." I do believe our charter can be improved and I plan on appointing a charter review commission to do just that, once this issue is resolved.

My main focus is on my sworn obligation to uphold the law and represent all Saratogians, not just special interests. We must listen to everybody's concerns and make sure the taxpayer is protected. There are serious financial and procedural concerns, inconsistencies and risks to the city that remain unanswered. How we operate our government is so fundamental to our continued success that fiscal responsibility must govern.

Together, we've made real progress in the last four years. I've listened to you and acted on behalf of our community. I'll continue to provide common-sense leadership to be fiscally conservative with your tax dollars while still meeting our

needs. As we face continuing economic uncertainty nationwide, it's critically important that we maintain consistent leadership based on a proven track record, now more than ever. We need a balanced perspective to best serve our city.

As your full-time mayor, it's been an honor to serve a community as great as ours. Thank you for your continued support and I ask for your vote on Election Day.

Scott Johnson is mayor of Saratoga Springs.