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Opinion

## Reader's view: Budget requires give and take

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By SCOTT JOHNSON, mayor of Saratoga Springs

My fellow Saratogians,

With the election now over, I want all Saratogians to know how honored I am to continue as your mayor. My sincere thanks go out to all who supported my re-election and made it possible. To those who did not support me, I ask that we now put our differences aside and work together for the sake of our city.

As your mayor, my guiding principle has been, and will continue to be, to make the best decisions for our city. While I know we cannot all agree on every issue, my pledge is to be mayor for all Saratogians.

The current challenges facing our community will require leadership based on common sense, focusing on good management, cutting spending and serving the taxpayer. In these economic times, it's critical that we keep politics out of government. I'm proud that we've restored civility, professionalism and respect to the mayor's office, and I'm confident that the incoming City Council will work together to tackle the tough issues facing our city.

As I was growing up here in Saratoga Springs, times were hard. I've never forgotten my humble beginnings and the lessons I learned from my mother — work hard, respect others and never buy what you can't afford. In these tough economic times, those lessons are as valuable as ever.

As I look forward to a second term, I continue to believe that we need more cooperation and better management within departments, and in handling your tax dollars.

The answer is not to promote public fear by insisting the only solution is to cut essential city services with layoffs of cops and firefighters. Better management is the answer, together with cooperation from the unions to share the burden.

Labor costs account for \$30 million of the \$36 million city budget, increasing yearly. As such, I will continue my efforts to negotiate new contracts that are fair but affordable.

The latest police contract demand was a 7 percent wage increase payable next year with no sharing of increased health care costs, when the economy is struggling to recover from the worst economic downturn and unemployment in more than a generation.

It's time for the unions to be part of the solution and not the problem.

I strongly believe it's better to have no contract at all than one you can't afford. I'll be meeting with the unions to protect essential city services, and to avoid layoffs where possible, but cooperation by the unions is essential if we are to protect their jobs. The bottom line is that a give and take attitude is essential to survive this economic crisis. The old ways of doing business are over and a new mindset is crucial in running city government.

I'm proud of the great strides we made together in my first term in office, but there's still work to be done. I'm humbled by the confidence you've placed in me, and pledge to continue a common sense direction for our future. Thank you again for your support, and for allowing me the opportunity to continue to serve you as your mayor. Let's work together to do what is best for our great city.

*Scott Johnson is mayor of Saratoga Springs.*