

Remarks of Mayor Noam Bramson  
September 17, 2006

I've had the great pleasure of working with Nita for more than ten years. And I can't imagine a more wonderful role model and teacher, or a more outstanding example of how a public servant, through principle and dedication, can make a difference to a community and to a nation.

And, as Leslie said, those of us in New Rochelle have never had a better friend and advocate.

So, I thank you so much, Nita, for your kind words. And for honoring us this afternoon with your presence.

If you'll all permit me, there are just a few other people I'd like to acknowledge. The person who called us to order and did such a great job of organizing this event, from beginning to end, Leslie Molinoff. Thank you, Leslie.

All the members of the host committee. We had more than 500 reservations this afternoon, which is an extraordinary number, and a tribute to the host committee's hard work, so please give yourselves a round of applause.

Leslie noted the presence of several elected officials, and I thank each of them, but there's one group of people I told Leslie that I wanted to introduce myself, and that's the City Council. And as I do, I'd like to ask them to stand and remain standing.

Marianne Sussman, Michael Boyle, Roberto Lopez, Jim Stowe, Barry Fertel, and Chris Selin.

We are a team. I am proud to serve with each of them. They are, to a person, tremendously hard-working, dedicated to our city, and intimately involved in every one of our challenges. Everything we accomplish is in whole or in part a credit to them. And I ask you to join me now please in applauding their contributions.

Most of my family is here. My mother, Mira Bramson. If you have anything remotely critical to say about the City or its leadership, just make sure it's not within her earshot.

My brother Oren. My brother Emil, with my sister-in-law Leah, and their children. Our oldest brother Gabriel managed to escape this obligation, but he's with us in spirit.

And, of course, my wife Catie, who is my best friend, who does an effective job every day of ensuring that my ego is kept well in-check, and who accommodates the oddities of a life in politics with remarkable patience and grace. And I'll leave it at that, because I don't want to sound like a hallmark card.

Catie and I – both, and I'll presume to speak also on behalf of Jeremy and Owen, while they're still too young to talk back – we are grateful beyond words for the support and tremendous generosity of everyone here today. Each of you. And we feel truly fortunate to share a community with so many people whom we admire.

Serving as Mayor has been the greatest professional privilege of my life. Even on the tough days, and we've had a few, it's been a joy. I am proud of what we've been able to accomplish in just the short time since my appointment, yet I know we have a long way to go and much hard work to do before we achieve our goals as a community.

And so, in that spirit, in the company of so many good friends, and with a full and hopeful heart, I announce today that I am a candidate for election to the office of Mayor of New Rochelle.

Now, I know that was a shocking announcement.

So, as you take a moment to absorb the surprising news, let me say that although, of course, I seek your support, I don't delude myself that your presence here is necessarily about me. What we share, beyond allegiance to a candidate or a campaign, is a common belief in public service itself and a faith that, at its best, politics can be an engine of progress.

And what a privilege and responsibility for all of us together to engage in the leadership of this city at such an extraordinary moment in its history.

New Rochelle is in the midst of a transformation that in its scale and scope, exceeds anything that has come before.

As you drive away from this event a little later, all you have to do is look to the north at the changing face of our downtown and you know, beyond any doubt, that a new city is taking shape.

And for those of us who remember when New Rochelle's best days seemed to be in the past, when plan after plan faltered at its inception, and we looked jealously to the opportunities that flowed to other places, the reality of meaningful change – here, now – is truly exciting.

But what is not beyond any doubt, and what will be determined by the quality of our decision-making today, is whether New Rochelle shall be something more than just a new city, more than just a changed city, whether it shall also be a better city.

I don't know anyone whose goals begin and end with the construction of bigger buildings. That is a hollow ambition. So our preeminent challenge is to build here a community as a whole that rises together with its skyline.

What does that mean.

It means first that we need to elevate the quality of our planning. Through things that are obvious: infrastructure, services, parking, traffic management.

And things that are not so obvious. Development isn't simply about clearing blocks and putting in something new. It's also about respect for our historic sites and architecture, establishing a harmonious relationship between the old and new that gives a unique sense of place and charm and human scale. It's about art, to add energy and cultural vitality to our city. It's about enhanced architectural design standards, so that our emerging skyline will be a source of pride and distinction, and not a series of soulless boxes.

That's one.

Second, it means protecting a suburban quality of life in our neighborhoods. Yes, we need urban density and scale in the downtown, but the rest of New Rochelle is and must be a quieter, more gracious and gentle place, where the dominant color is green and not gray. That's why we've worked so hard to secure and improve open space, and to limit the subdivisions that lead to overgrowth. It's why we should do more to invest in the beauty and health of our public spaces and parks, as well as the safety of our residential streets.

And that's just one part of a broader strategy to act as responsible stewards of our natural environment . . . from reducing energy consumption, to adopting green building standards, to making New Rochelle more friendly for walkers, and hikers, and bicyclists - environmental sustainability has to be our commitment, today and in the years to come.

It means, third, reclaiming our waterfront for the public's use and enjoyment. We have a nine-mile shoreline - it may be our greatest physical asset - but because of the way it has been mis-developed over a hundred years, you can be within a stone's throw of the water's edge and have no sense of proximity to the Sound. The prime

example is Echo Bay, where we propose to create a new waterfront community, with a continuous public promenade, parkland, appropriately-scaled housing and shops, view corridors from the surrounding neighborhoods. So just imagine standing on US1, looking to the south and seeing for the first time in any of our lives an unobstructed view of the water, and think about the transformative impact that could have on all of New Rochelle.

Fourth and last, it means bringing our city together. In my opinion, in recent years, there has been too much anger, too much rancor in our civic life, and I say that not to cast blame, but rather to accept responsibility, because there have been times when we in City Hall, when I, have not done a good enough job of reaching out and including every part of our community in decisions that affect the whole.

Part of this challenge is programmatic. Making sure we have affordable housing for the middle class and working families. Encouraging volunteer service, to connect those who have ability, time, and resources with those who most need help. Enhancing our communication with the public, so that more of us feel engaged in the life of our city.

But a bigger part of it relates to the spirit in which we conduct ourselves. Thinking, and speaking, and acting with the knowledge that we are in this together. North, south, east, west, we are interlinked by a common set of institutions, a common school system, a common economy, a common future, and we are going up or down together, as one city.

These are some of the things I hope to accomplish - with the City Council, and with each of you. And we don't have any time to waste.

Because if these goals might have seemed unrealistic for much of our history, today, we have the capacity to achieve them. And, therefore, the responsibility.

I've always liked a joke that Al Gore used to tell. It's about a new Member of Congress who assumes office after the retirement of a long-service veteran. The new Member consults with his predecessor and asks for all sorts of advice, including what to do if he gets in any trouble.

So the old veteran Congressman hands him three sealed envelopes and says to him, "if anything happens, opens these up, one by one."

A few months later, the new Congressman finds himself in a jam, opens up the first envelope and reads "Blame Me," meaning his predecessor.

A few months after that, he's in another jam, being heavily criticized, so he opens up the second envelope, and it says "Blame The Other Party."

And then a few months later, he's runs into the worst situation yet, being attacked on all fronts. He opens up the last envelope, and it says "Prepare Three New Envelopes."

There are no envelopes for us to open. Not even the first two. It's just us. With all the responsibility – for success or for failure – that implies.

And that is a great duty. Because as some of you have heard me say before, and I'll conclude on this note: what happens here matters everywhere.

I want Jeremy and Owen to grow up in a world where people of every background and tradition and experience know each other in flesh and blood, send their children to school together, learn to appreciate the circumstances that shape different lives, and understand that every person has a valued role in creating a future. That is what New Rochelle represents.

So we must succeed. We must. And I believe, with all of my heart and with all of you, with confidence and optimism, and with gratitude for the privilege of service, that we will succeed.

Thank you for being here. Thank you for your confidence. Thank you for your partnership. And enjoy the rest of the afternoon.