

RON CORBETT

Leadership for Cedar Rapids

Ron Corbett for Mayor
Announcement Remarks
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Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Good morning. Today I stand on the west side of Cedar Rapids at the corner of B Avenue and 3rd Street to announce that I am running for mayor of this great city. There's been a lot of talk about the future of the city, and I want to start today by clearly saying I have no doubt that Cedar Rapids' best days lie ahead. The question is not whether Cedar Rapids will recover and return to the days when we were leading Iowa in job creation and innovation; instead the question is whether we will do this together as a unified community and do it sooner rather than later. I believe we need a "new game plan" to get us moving forward and achieve that goal of sooner vs. later.

The purpose of my remarks today is not to criticize the current administration, because we all know that no Cedar Rapids administration has ever faced the kinds of challenges this one has. Nevertheless, there comes a time when we have to take a step back and recognize the mistakes made in city hall for the purpose of learning from them and making sure we do not make them again.

If ever there was a time that Cedar Rapids needed decisive leadership, that time is now. We've lost homes, schools, businesses and churches...but most challenging is number of good people who have left our community as a result of this crisis.

Instead of clear, unified decision-making, our city government has given us studies, overpaid out-of-state consultants and delays. At a time when we desperately needed our local leaders to present a clear plan to the state and federal government, we've had indecision and a reliance on outsiders to make decisions for us.

Imagine if Quaker, Penford, Cargill, and the other businesses that have reopened after the flood made the decision to wait and delay. Many more people would now be out of work.

There may be a time to study issues, but now is not that time. We have enough clear thinking people in our community to make the bold decisions necessary to recover and grow...and it is those people I call on now to join this cause.

First, we need a new game plan to repair our image. Years ago there was a cartoon in the DM register. It showed a sleeping man under a tree with the caption "Des Moines." It also showed a young runner going by as the man slept. The caption over the runner was "Cedar Rapids." Our town was known as a leader in job creation, culture and innovation. Today, our current city government is looked on quite

differently. I've talked with many local citizens who feel we have lost our stride and sadly, many outsiders feel the same way. If you had no faith in a CEO or board of directors would you make an investment in that company? The pockets of Cedar Rapids taxpayers are not deep enough to fund this flood recovery alone. We need both the state and federal government to have confidence again in Cedar Rapids. If you have pride in our community and believe we have to repair our image, then I ask you to please join me.

Second, in 2009 we've been hit with a stock market collapse and the highest unemployment rate in 25 years. We need a new game plan for job creation and economic development. We've been here before. Back in the 1980's we lost companies that we thought were permanent fixtures to our skyline. The Wilson packing plant smoke stack stands as a reminder of that bygone era. Leaders stepped up and recruited new companies and jobs to Cedar Rapids. Strong leadership led to shovels turning dirt. Companies, like Genencor, PMX, and Cedar River Paper located here which meant good jobs and a growing tax base. Today we face a similar situation: Souvenir Pen, Cryovac and Swiss Valley Farms are closing their doors. Just as the smoke stack at the old packing plant stands as a reminder, the familiar Swiss Valley Sign along 380 is a new reminder. We need to step up just as previous leaders did and bring more jobs and companies to Cedar Rapids. We need to rebuild our commercial and industrial tax base. IBM is locating over 1,000 jobs in Dubuque; Google is creating jobs in Council Bluffs. What about Cedar Rapids? If you believe as I do, that we have to create more jobs and put a greater focus on economic development, then please join me.

Finally, we need a new game plan that puts city government on the side of the taxpayer. We must break the culture of delay that has taken hold of City Hall. Delay costs us jobs as well as the opportunity to rebuild in some situations. Too many homes sit abandoned because of delay, and too many small businesses remain paralyzed waiting on City Hall to act decisively. The library and fire station stand as monuments to delay. Instead of working aggressively to move these basic services forward, we've been given a six-month plan to study a costly new city hall.

Last week the citizens of Cedar Rapids voted to dig a little deeper into their pocket to help flood victims. As Mayor, I will make sure those resources go to rebuild homes. It's right to say we may need some temporary tax revenue to get out of this mess, but we should not stand for a city government that tries to use the flood as an excuse to enact permanent tax increases on our community.

As we rebuild, city government must become more efficient and less costly. If we fail to do this, many citizens may not be able to pay the property taxes City Hall is asking of them. Just a month ago, a budget was proposed to raise property taxes 14%. That is wrong and I would hope a more frugal budget is submitted which keeps increases to the rate of inflation or less. If you believe we need a city government that is decisive, will focus on rebuilding homes in Cedar Rapids, and will worry as much about the family budget as it does the government budget, then I ask you to please join me.

My vision for Cedar Rapids is simple: use city government as the catalyst for recovery and growth, but get out of the way of people, churches and businesses as they use their innovation and determination to bring our community back.

Use local, state and federal relief funds in the way they are intended: to spur redevelopment and relief for those who need it; but never use it to grow city government in a way that will permanently cost taxpayers more in the future.

The greatness of Cedar Rapids will come from its people and its institutions. There is no doubt that government will play an important role in this process. That role must have results with timely decision

making and leadership.

My friends, we must again become that pace setter so the entire state is looking to the City of Five Seasons and marveling at our progress. Never let it be said that a flood held Cedar Rapids back. Instead, we will let the world know that the flood of 2008 was a catalyst to again find our spirit of innovation. This future will happen with strong and decisive leadership from City Hall.

Today, I offer the people of Cedar Rapids a new game plan: one that relies on the experience and knowledge of local experts and one that recognizes and respects the wisdom of voters. Today, I offer the people of Cedar Rapids my experience in government, the Chamber of Commerce and in business. While many people know me as an employee at CRST Trucking, what most people don't realize is that I started my own business with Peppy's ice cream trucks twenty years ago. I know the challenges of small business and I also understand how decisions by bureaucrats and politicians can wipe out an entire year's profits for a small businessperson.

I also spent my time working in the state legislature as Speaker of the House. I developed a reputation as a consensus builder, one who could work with both Republicans and Democrats. We faced challenges and we forged solutions, but we didn't delay.

The bottom line of all my remarks is this: in the 2009 campaign for mayor, I want *Cedar Rapids* to win...and that is why today I am throwing my hat in the ring to be the next mayor of our community. Your support for a new game plan for Cedar Rapids is appreciated and needed, not simply for this campaign, but even more, for our community and the collection of hearty souls who call it home.

Thank you.