



Statement by Ron Corbett on the Future of the Veterans Memorial Building

March 19, 2009

When I announced my candidacy last week, I talked about a “New game plan for Cedar Rapids.” I have received many words of encouragement from Cedar Rapidians. The sense from citizens is pretty simple: Leaders are not working together and the culture of delay in City Hall is hurting everyone.

Today I will continue to outline my vision for Cedar Rapids. It is difficult to work in tandem if there is no respect for others. The culture of delay in city hall is an example of disrespect to the veterans of this community and the Veteran’s Commission.

To the veterans of this community, this building on Mays Island is more than bricks and mortar. It is more than office space. It is a memorial to the veterans who have served this country. If the grave marker of a deceased family member was damaged and needed repair, we would all want it restored? It’s a matter of respect. Although this is not a grave site, it is a memorial and it needs to be repaired to show respect toward veterans and their families.

As your mayor I will always have the deepest respect for the veterans of this community and that’s why today I call on the city council to use the \$24 million dollars of available FEMA funds to begin repairing this great memorial now, not at some future date.

Engraved on the black granite base on the steps at the 2nd ave entrance to the Veterans Memorial building are the words,

“OUR FINEST TRIBUTE TO THEIR VALOR WILL BE THE QUALITY OF OUR OWN LIVES”

It is time to get on with our lives. We have 7,900 people in this county unemployed. We have laborers in the construction trades that stand ready to work. Unfortunately we have a city council stuck in a culture of delay. Two months ago they announced an effort to begin a joint study with the school board and county to look at the issue of building a new government office structure. That was two months ago and the study still hasn’t started. We are losing an entire construction season. The delays have to stop.

Even the Grant Wood stained glass window, known round the world in the arts community, is a victim of the culture of delay. Every sixth grade class should be able to take a tour of this building, learn about veterans, learn about the value of culture and Grant Wood and be just a little prouder of the community they live in.

Just three hundred yards from here the county jail is being repaired at the other end of the island. Who can forget the image last summer of smoke coming out of the lower level of the building. That picture will be forever etched in our minds. I ask you does the county jail sit as this memorial sits? No. Our county sheriff didn't hire an out of state consultant; he didn't put up obstacles to rebuild. Instead, he showed leadership and next month the jail will be open. The irony is that our counties prisoners will be moving back in, but the veterans have to wait.

The leadership of our sheriff has created jobs and soon will bring back the revenue from the jail. No studies, no delays, no out of state consultant, just local people making clear decisions. Thank you Sheriff Gardner and the Board of Supervisors for your leadership. You chose the best deal for the taxpayers.

FEMA has \$24 million sitting in Des Moines waiting for us to take action. We have people sitting without jobs. It's hard to figure out the city council's agenda? Does the city council really want to build a new Taj Mahal dedicated to government? The least expensive plan is to rebuild and move many of the functions of city government back into the Memorial building. Lets bring back the revenue that has been lost.

Many years ago this site was chosen for city government because it was a neutral site between the communities of Cedar Rapids and Kingston. That decision brought people together and still does today. This memorial and home to city government has served us well. It is time to reach back to that same unifying spirit. It is time to show respect to the veterans, repair this memorial and put people back to work. Today, it is time to end the culture of delay and move this city forward once again.

These are my thoughts, but running for political office should be a dialogue, not a monologue. So please visit my Web site at RonCorbett.com and let me know what you think by visiting my blog. So I will end today by saying this:

You have all seen the signs around town. They proudly declare "We're back". You have to admire the resiliency and commitment. Unfortunately this is the sign we get from the city [sign held up]. That my friends isn't leadership. This is why we need a new game plan for Cedar Rapids, a game plan that shows leadership and says: "We're back"!