

**Mayor Larry Morrissey Speech at Swearing-In Ceremony
(as prepared for presentation)
April 25, 2005**

I would first like to thank the voters of the City of Rockford for giving me this great opportunity and great responsibility to lead the City of Rockford. I would also like to publicly thank again my family: my Father, Joseph, Mother, Josephine, and brother Bill, and sister Eileen, and each of their families. I have been blessed with great mentors in my family who have taught me love, respect, and even conflict resolution. I also thank my girlfriend Stacey and her daughter, Seanna, for supporting me during some tough and stressful times.

I am confident tonight in leading this City because I know I am not alone. I do not have all the solutions; but I know that fact, and I know that working together, we will have the answers.

We are blessed with a great City Council and great people working for the City of Rockford. We will always be open for business because of the excellent city workers who serve us regardless of who is mayor. I am grateful for their work and I cannot say enough about the cooperation and professionalism of Mayor Scott and the staff to ensure a smooth transition. This City council and this Administration sworn in this evening must build upon the work of the prior City Council and prior Administration to achieve the greatness that we all know is possible.

Speaking to the elected officials and staff working for the City, I will tell you that our job now is to lead this City in a way that unites our people wherever they may live and whatever the color of their skin. We must leverage our efforts and our public investments with the efforts of everyone living in the City. We all must be involved if we are to achieve true greatness. We must recognize that every part of the City and every person in this City has value. Our job is to work to develop the physical and human capital that is our City.

To achieve that goal, we must be a City full of leaders. Churches, neighborhood groups, businesses and associations; our workers, our employers, and our volunteers; and our parents and students and residents throughout the City ...and even our media: TV news, radio, and newspapers. . . each of us have the opportunity and the obligation to lead. We must all be part of the team. . . we must all be part of the solution.

How will we, for instance, win the battle against truancy or become an award-winning City of great beauty? We will achieve those goals, not simply because we set high standards and enforce laws? We will achieve those goals and have an exceedingly high quality of life because our people have adopted those high standards, have great pride in the City, and will not tolerate disorder and disrespect. Each of us in our respective areas can and must lead. While we as City leaders can provide confidence and a clear direction to our people to help steer this ship, it will be the individual homeowners and the individual business owners who will be the engine that powers us to our destination.

And our citizens can and must realize their critical role everyday. I did have a disappointment in the results of the last election. . . ONLY 38% OF THE REGISTERED VOTERS VOTED. We must do better. A healthy community is one where the citizens participate and is a community where citizens police themselves. Our City leadership must work creatively to get our people involved in the process.

A beautiful city does not happen by accident. Litter does not find its way into our communities on its own; it takes a careless or disrespectful person to put it there. And litter does not get picked up on its own either; it takes a thoughtful and deliberate person to clean it up. We all make decisions each and every day. We must all do what we can to make the difference.

Look around this room or look around your neighborhood and realize, the answer to our prayers is each other. Indeed, we can and must save ourselves.

This is not to say we do not want help from the State or Federal government. In fact, I'll be flying to Washington as part of a Rockford delegation tomorrow to make sure that our federal leaders are responding to our Rockford agenda. But we must realize that our efforts to make a positive change start here and start with ourselves. We cannot blame or look to others to clean our streets, design our community, or enforce our laws. We must be responsible for ourselves. And this is a very powerful realization. We should rightfully feel empowered to take action by knowing that we have the ability to change our destiny by making the right choices.

Indeed, I think all of us assembled here as elected leaders hear very loudly and clearly the choice, mandate, and order given to us by the voters. We have no time to lose. We have much work ahead. Our community has made a choice. It is up to us now to execute on that agenda.

And we have great people throughout this City. Every homeowner, every business owner, every resident is part of the team. **WE CAN WIN. WE MUST NOT ACCEPT MEDIOCRITY. AND WE MUST START BY HAVING A WINNING ATTITUDE ON THIS WINNING TEAM. A TEAM UNITED BY TRUST AND RESPECT.** We can and must be united to achieve our goals as we act on the agenda the voters approved on April 5.

As an independent Mayor, I will work with both Republicans and Democrats to do the important work of our people. I do not believe there is a Republican or Democratic way to lead this City; rather, there is simply this question: what is best for our people? As a community and as a City Council, we may certainly have disagreements as to that question as issues come up. Those disagreements should be expected and welcomed. Spirited debate is one of the great traditions of democracy and one of the great ways to test ideas.

My commitment, my goal, and my obligation to this Community and this Council is that our debates will be respectful and the right to be heard will be honored and upheld. We will have our hearings, make our decisions, and live with the results without dishonoring or disrespecting one another. We can be a strong community despite our differences if we respect and trust one another. But we cannot be a strong community, if we lose respect and lose trust.

The trust that each of us on this City Council has for one another and the trust that we have with our citizens will help us create a strong team. And when we are a strong unit, we can successfully work with other political bodies to help this region grow. We must reintroduce ourselves and have a strong and ongoing relationship with our friends at the County, the Park District, the School District, and other local, State and Federal leaders. When Rockford is united and strong politically, we can ensure that our citizens are fairly treated and that we are adding value to our region. Rockford has the obligation to be the strong hub of our regional economy. We can and will fulfill that obligation.

My first order of business these past few weeks since the election has been to begin the work of evaluating the staff and structure of our organization. I have been meeting with the Aldermen and Department Heads. I have been seeking the advice of this City Council on these evaluations. You can expect that decisions and announcements regarding that work will be made over the next several weeks.

Ultimately, the decisions we make now will be critical toward our ability to achieve our agenda of bring more jobs and opportunities to Rockford by improving our schools, improving public safety, and creating the best infrastructure possible for our beloved City. Our citizens voted upon and approved that agenda. We must work quickly to see it achieved.

This night a journey begins. While we as a Council and we as a community will be chartering some new territory over the next four years, and while we will be tackling some tough issues, we can begin this journey with great courage and hope. We have a great charge from our people. Our direction and orders are clear. The people have given us their hopes and dreams and confidence. And we have many strong prayers and great community support. We have every reason to be optimistic and hopeful. Working together, we will do great things. May God bless us all.

Thank you again Rockford for your confidence in me, and in this City Council, and in this Great City.