

**Presidential Speech by City Council President Kevin Jourdain on the occasion
of his Re-Election to his third term as Council President.**

Inauguration Day January 4, 2016

In City Council Chambers, Holyoke City Hall

Firstly, I would like to thank my colleagues for re-electing me as President of the City Council. It has been an exceptional honor and privilege to serve you, the institution, and most importantly the people of Holyoke in this capacity.

I would like to thank my Mom Kathy, my wife Shari and my son Kevin Jr for being here today. I love each of you very much. My 2 daughters are in school today and cannot be with us.

Today is Inauguration Day; therefore, today is a glorious day. With Pomp and Circumstance, and robust with splendor, we to whom the people have chosen, has come a great honor but also a great responsibility. The origin of the word “inauguration” comes from the Latin word “augur.” In ancient Rome, the Augur’s responsibility was to determine by means of ancient rituals if it was the will of the gods for a public official to be deemed worthy to assume office, or if some official action already taken was pleasing to the Gods.

The Augur would interpret the will of the Gods by watching the flight patterns of certain birds interpreting their movements, noises, and conduct. The ancient Romans entrusted great faith in the Augurs to determine the pax, fortuna, and salus (peace, good fortune, and wellbeing) of the Roman people in taking their official actions.

Today, we have no Augurs to determine if we are the right people to serve, all we have is the supreme best hopes of the electorate to determine if we are the right people to serve. Each of us has stood before the people of Holyoke and has been chosen. Each of us is willing to serve with the best of intentions guided by our visions for a better Holyoke.

As Council President, I will seek to harness that collective energy in each of us so that the City Council may be a positive force for the Common Good.

I too like you have a vision.

My vision is one of a prosperous city, vibrant and dynamic. To achieve that we must embrace opportunities to grow the community economically, grow our tax base, and expand the job opportunities for our residents. We must continue to embrace policies and projects that are consistent with this spirit.

We also need to continue to give special attention to our downtown core. It is vital to our success. We must continue to expand on our investments there.

My vision is also of a city that has a government which is responsible to its mission by being good stewards of its resources. Stewardship does not simply mean preserving that which we have, but also about maintaining and growing our reserves for the continuity of our mission for many generations to come. It is unjust and selfish for us to spend for today with no plan to serve for tomorrow. Preservation of services at current levels today without consideration for our need to reform and re-tool and at the further expense of our city's long-term financial vitality is not in the public good.

To that end, the City Council and the Mayor must once and for all fix the structural deficit in our city budget. Difficult choices need to be made, so let us make them. The city must in a sustainable manner develop a plan to retire the \$156 million unfunded Retirement Fund liability. The current plan to pay it off by 2032 is impossible to fund under the current budget framework. I engage the Mayor and Retirement Board to work with us to develop a real solution. Solving this will free up millions of dollars in working cash flow to preserve services and protect our cash reserves.

We must not deplete our current Stabilization Fund balances any further. To do so jeopardizes the city's future against significant emergencies, significant unexpected capital needs and to maintain our excellent bond rating. It is a travesty that no money has been put into this fund since 1999, and now we take it as routine that we need to make withdrawals from it.

A permanent home for the Holyoke School Department must be found that is in the final and financial best interests of the city, its children and staff. I once again renew my plan for the eminent domain taking of 57 Suffolk Street if other more reasonable terms cannot be met. This solution could save the city of Holyoke millions of dollars. I look forward to continuing to work closely with Dr. Zrike with whom I am thus far thoroughly impressed.

Since it is likely that our tax levy will remain close to its current levels for the near term, or with small growth, it is only proper that our departments' expenses also remain level. Good stewardship requires that we not spend more than we have coming in for revenues. Our departments must realize it is not business as usual.

To support this principle, I have co-sponsored a new government reform measure in the form of a proposed new ordinance to implement greater restrictions to require the Mayor to submit a budget which is balanced to the City Council when he initially proposes it, as opposed to the current practice, which is to be millions short, and then only balanced half way through the fiscal year. It is improper practice, which predates the current administration albeit continued by current mayor, to have the chief executive submitting a budget to the City Council that is \$4.5 million in the hole and expect the City Council to figure it out. I expect the Chief Executive to

submit balanced budgets to the City Council. The current practice makes it nearly impossible to balance the budget through spending reductions because half the fiscal year is already over.

To support this initiative and the remainder of my government reform goals, it is my intention to leave my seat on the Finance Committee and to join the Ordinance Committee for the purpose of assisting in this critical work.

I have also joined the call for a hiring freeze for all non-public safety personnel until such time as the budget situation improves. This is common sense.

In like manner, I shall request of the Mayor a capital bond for the purpose of funding important capital projects that the city desperately needs, including, important improvements to parks, sidewalks, our schools, and the city hall annex. We have decaying and dangerous traffic intersections that need our immediate attention and I will advocate for those dollars in this bond. Moreover, we need to consider bonding for items that we have traditionally expensed in effort to free up significant dollars in our operating budget. For example, items such as police cars, that are hundreds of thousands of dollars, need to be purchased on an annual basis. Under this capital plan, these costs would be covered by the bond instead. The city's important capital needs cannot be ignored during these tight fiscal times, this offers us a solution.

Over the coming weeks, we will be filling a number of important positions vital to our government including filling the 3rd Assessor position and the City Auditor position. It is critical we get top quality people in these positions.

We must continue to work in earnest with our Water Department to provide us a proposal to merge their department with the sewer department under their Special Act framework. The Water Department Manager tells me very soon they will have a proposal for your consideration. I have made this a top priority of mine over the next term.

It is also my intention to continue to lobby for the permanent location of the Sheriff's Alcohol Treatment Center here in the City of Holyoke. The city would benefit greatly from a lucrative long-term lease with the state for the use of the former Geriatric Authority property. We can achieve even better terms than we have presently. This is the one certain way for the city to re-coup the millions lost to the former operations while providing a valuable service to the people of Hampden County. In a related manner, I will be advocating for the adoption of legislation I have filed to regulate the use of licenses for city property use which have been used to circumvent the City Council's lease granting authority.

As you know the bulk of our work occurs in our committees, and I will work hard to make our committee system more efficient and vibrant. Later this week, I will announce the new committee assignments for all Councilors for the new term. It is my intention to give some new Councilors opportunities to serve in the leadership of the Council and bring their fresh perspectives and energies to the committees.

I also have an ambitious agenda of improvements requested by the residents of my ward 6. The list is too long to mention here but I will continue to be working with you on achieving these improvements together.

As promised, I kept my word to serve just 6 years as Council President. I am so very pleased in how much we have been able to achieve over the last 4 years. In my last term as President, I will be sprinting to the finish with an ambitious plan of reform and improvement. We will not just be marking time, but rather making history and I am very fortunate indeed to have this opportunity.

Inaugurations are about new beginnings. But in the end, we will be judged by the results we produce. I will do everything in my power to assist each of you to be a success in your duties and for our city to prosper. Let us begin our work.

May Almighty God keep Holyoke within His Divine Providence and may He Bless the work of our new Mayor and City Council.

Thank you.