

I am happy and relieved to be with you here today in Edmonton. Relieved because airlines and weather attempted a conspiracy to make it impossible to get here. Several cancellations, wind alerts, and flights later I arrived here late last night.

Now, I must confess that, as I sat in Ottawa looking at the departure board which features not only the destination city, the time of departure, but also the temperature, a cold chill ran down my spine. There listed among all other Canadian cities was Edmonton.

Was I reading this right, I wondered? Was there a misprint? Was that minus sign actually only a dash in front of the temperature?

Was it really 29* or -29*? I was trying to remember if when you moved to the metric system, you went there for temperatures as well.

29°F didn't sound that bad. I had already dismissed 29* Celsius. I know we're on the lookout for global warming but that seemed too much, too soon.

Of course I came to realize that it wasn't a dash and it wasn't Fahrenheit. -29* Celsius. I tried for the life of me to conjure up that high school indoctrinated formula. Something about 5/9ths or 9/5ths plus or minus 32*.

When I couldn't summon it to mind, I asked an attendant at the airport. She said she didn't know the equation, but as she said, "Sweetie, you don't need no equation to understand that's cold, real cold, bone chilling cold."

When I asked another passer-by, he said he wasn't sure of the translation either, but he had heard with the wind chill it was minus 50*.

I tried to remember if my long johns were in my suitcase.

But that reminded me that I was recently in Phoenix for several days. And every day the weather person would say that "today it will be 107*."

Lo and behold I found a much more optimistic meteorologist.

She said "today it will be 107* in Phoenix, but with the wind chill factor it would feel like only 103*."

That's optimism.

I'm also happy to be here with you today because I am living up to an ancient adage in my nation's capital. Wisdom that I've come into contact with during my 6 year exile in Washington. Wisdom that's been passed down generation to generation. It goes like this: "Any day out of Washington, that's a good day." Lately it's been a really good day.

Today is a good day, an historic day here in Edmonton.
And I am proud to be invited and honored to be here with you.

I bring you greetings from Washington and the White House. I want to commend Mayor Mandel. Without leadership from mayors, from jurisdictional CEO's, plans won't work. His heroic work on housing is exemplary and a model for mayors on both sides of the border.

As you know there have been many task forces, committees, commissions on homelessness. Without political will they migrate to shelves and are covered with dust and encrusted with cobwebs and subject to some future public policy archeological dig.

The political will of the CEO is the most important correlative factor for successful implementation and substantial results.

So I commend Mayor Mandel and his ownership of the process with City Council. Councilor Lebovici deserves commendation for her support and commitment.

But the Mayor, following best practice in hundreds of plans, understood the process wasn't his alone. No one would be sitting in a corner office in City Hall writing the plan. To the contrary, while the plan is to be jurisdictionally- owned, it must be community-based.

That's why the Mayor has brought together 28 of your community's leaders to shape and fashion the Plan. And that's why the Committee will host community sessions where an even broader inductive input can be received.

This Plan is being launched in accordance with the best practices of cities that are achieving results. That's good for your City. Good for the homeless person. Good for the taxpayer. More about that later.

Your city has a big heart. That's well known. That heart has opened the doors and resources to many cultural and social achievements and you should be proud to be "Edmontonians."

You in many ways and for many years have opened that big heart to homeless people. But you've learned, as so many cities have, that just opening your heart does not correlate with remedying the problem.

In fact in many communities there is so much frustration and fatigue, the cynics say that an open heart had only made the problem worse.

Well, today, Edmonton has decided that its big heart isn't enough. Now supplementing the heart response, Edmonton is applying its smart mind to the issue as well through the creation of a strategic plan that is shaped around the best business practices, innovation, performance, and results.

That just makes sense. If the current strategy isn't working, you need to do more than just repeating the same thing and offering the same status quo responses.

It was no less than Einstein who taught us that the very definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and over again, expecting different results.

That's why you're moving forward with a Plan. We've learned over the past quarter century that without a Plan, things only get worse. Worse on the streets, Worse in our neighborhoods. Worse in emergency rooms, police stations, libraries, on the streets and in our shelters.

What a plan seeks to do is meet the community where it is in its response. Recognizing that there is a gap between what we currently do and where our knowledge is on ending homelessness.

The 10-Year Plan will narrow that gap between knowledge and practice in your community and move you away from the demoralization of the seemingly intractable to the remoralization of the solution-oriented innovations.

So what have we learned about homelessness over the past 25 years that informs our planning response, that contextualizes our strategic thinking.

Here are some of our learnings:

1. During periods of economic boom, counter-intuitively homelessness gets worse.
 - ❖ 80's and 90's booms in the United States
 - ❖ Why?
 - Cost of housing – renting and buying goes up
 - People moving in
 - More single person tenancies
 - More “over-housing” – 1 person to room

Not unique to Edmonton or Calgary
More cities reactive to crisis.

2. Current system of response, well intentioned, well meaning, often believes that if they just had more money to do what they're already doing, maintaining and expanding, they could get the job done.

Here's the reality: We've increased federal resources in the United States over the past 20 years by 1100%. In 1987 about \$400 million. In the President's budget for 2008, more than \$4.47 billion proposed. Yet for 20 years the numbers went up and the misery increases.

3. For those of you from the business community who will serve on the Committee, you need to understand that those on the frontline in non-profits and faith communities may know more about homeless people and programs that you'll ever know.

Do not be intimidated by that incontrovertible fact.

You, in turn, with your business mind set, on the front lines of solving problems, may know much more about how to end homelessness.

You need each other. But don't concede the business approach.

For 20 years we looked at homelessness through a social services frame. When we looked through that lens and saw homeless people, we wondered, "how can we serve those people." And we did. Served homeless people for 20 years.

Now for the past 4 years through 10-Year Plans, we've added a business frame. When we look through that lens and see homelessness, we wonder, "how can we solve the problem."

That evolution from serving to solving is creating change and forwarding a momentum that drives political will to solutions and results.

Your business acumen cannot be left at the door.

4. Your mission in creating the 10-Year Plan is to end homelessness in Edmonton. You are not crafting a plan to end poverty. Now, ending poverty is a worthy objective and has notable adherents. Jeffrey Sachs and Bono and many others. And we, of course, wish them "bonne chance."

Your plan will be to end the homelessness of your poorest neighbors. It conspires to end poverty for them. That is a different mission. Plans that confuse the mission fall prey to past responses and plans that have not relieved or remedied homelessness.

Ours is a focused mission. A targeted objective. Others are working on poverty and that will be an antidote to future homelessness.

In some ways, our goal in ending homelessness may indeed create a Tipping Point to end poverty. Reading the Tipping Point by your great export to the United States, Malcolm Gladwell, one could indeed build that case.

5. No business would set out to solve a problem for its consumers without first receiving input from them. For many years we did not consider homeless and formerly homeless people in the formulation of policy or targeting of resources. In fact we mis-identified the consumer as the programs we were funding rather than homeless people themselves. Part of the myth and stereotyping of homeless people was that they could not identify what they needed.

That turns out to be a myth itself. When homeless people are asked, they never want a program, pill, or protocol. They want a place. A place to live. They refine for us our target. The product we are creating to end their homelessness. What they want is what we want for them in a 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness.

Isn't it about time that the expectations of government and providers aligned with the aspirations of homeless people?

6. The failure of our well intended deinstitutionalization policies led not only to the unintended consequences of pervasive street homelessness, but also to the myths and stereotypes that have followed homeless people and affected policy for two decades.

First responders heard that the people who were hitting the streets had recently been in housing and lost it. They proceeded then to dismiss housing as the solution, not understanding that the policy failure of non-delivery of community-based services had more to do with loss of housing than the failing of the people. For 20 years that misunderstanding has haunted homeless people.

7. Finally, no community, state, or province could or would connect the verb "end" to the noun "homelessness" if solutions weren't present to accomplish the mission. How naïve and foolish would that effort be!

Unfortunately, in many places the response to homelessness exists without reference to the innovative strategies and initiatives that now exist that move beyond servicing homeless people to solving their homelessness.

It's as if no innovations have been created in our response to homelessness, while on numerous other fronts innovation has changed the way we live and work.

How many of you seeking information have recently thumbed through the Encyclopedia Britannica?

Or fumbled for change in your pocket to feed into a pay phone?

Or click-clacked away on your Smith Corona typewriter?

Or adjusted the antenna on the top of your television for a better picture?

Or when sick had prescribed by your doctor the application of leeches to suck out the bad humors in your blood?

Why would homelessness be the one area where we've done the same thing over and over? Twenty years ago our best technology might have been breadlines, soup kitchens, basement shelters, warehousing people. Two decades later if that's the best we can do, if that's where we still are unaffected by innovations, shame on us.

That's the backdrop of your creating the Plan.

I'm not certain that here in Canada you had the emphasis we had in education – the mantra of the three “R's” – reading, writing, and 'rithmetic. The thinking was that you could make it in life if you mastered these three.

In homelessness we have now been able to identify the 3 “R's” that inform plans and create the right trajectory.

They are, of course, research, resources, and results. That combination of themes assures that plans have what they need to accomplish the mission.

Here's what we've learned about the nature of 10-Year Plans to End Homelessness that create the straightest path to getting the job done:

1. No one level of government can accomplish the mission alone. Even every level of government partnered is not enough. The private sector must be involved. The business community, the Downtown Association, the Chamber, the United Way, corporate leaders, philanthropy, the faith community, providers.

That's why we've constellated a National Partnership that begins in the White House and extends to the streets including Cabinet and agency leaders, Governors, Mayors, County Executives, the private sector, and homeless people themselves.

You are fortunate that your Provincial leaders are partnering here in Alberta.

10-Year Plans are inductive. They begin and are formulated locally in public private partnership, but need support from a partnership with state and national government.

And the spirit of that effort is that partnership trumps partisanship. On this issue there is no D or R – you fill in your own initials. We're simply Americans – Canadians partnered to end a national disgrace.

2. Jurisdictional leadership and ownership correlates with success. In the Plans that are achieving measurable outcomes in the States, they are owned by the Mayor. Mayor Bloomberg in New York, Mayor Daley in Chicago, Mayor Nickels in Seattle, Mayor Diaz in Miami.

3. While jurisdictionally led, Plans must be community based. We've dramatically expanded the notion of "stakeholder" or "community shareholder" in recent years. From the notion that only those who could pass a moral and spiritual "sniff test" could be involved at the table of homelessness, we now acknowledge that economic and self-interest are legitimate concerns to offer a place at the table.

And, of course, homeless people who have the greatest self-interest of them all. Along with the business community who wants a better business climate, or the hospital administrator who wants relief in the emergency room from uncompensated care, or the librarian who wants to spend resources on books and technology not on security and bathroom maintenance, or police who no longer want to be quasi social workers, or the taxpayer who no longer will tolerate the waste of shuffling and cycling homeless people through expensive health and law enforcement systems.

They all belong at the table as legitimate stakeholders just as assuredly as faith communities and NGO's who have been on the so-called "frontlines" for years. Well, they've all been on the frontlines for all those years. And now, for differing motivations and from divergent perspectives, they are all at the same table with the same purpose, to end the homelessness of the most vulnerable, the most disabled, the most visible, and the most expensive.

4. A jurisdictionally-led, community-based plan is needed because the status quo can't get the job done. As is so often the case the status quo needs disturbing and that's just what the best plans do. And in disturbing the status quo, people are disturbed, too. That's why political and civic will expressed through 10-Year Plans needs to be confident of the objectives and strategies.

The reality is that if good intentions, well-meaning programs, and humanitarian gestures could end homelessness, it would have been history long ago.

Or if punitive approaches worked on the status quo, homelessness would have been ended.

They don't accomplish the mission. If the mission were job security for people in homeless programs, we're doing great. But it's not. Homelessness is not a growth industry that supports the economy or healthiness or morality.

It compromises them all. It's wrong. Morally, spiritually, economically wrong. As we need to move beyond current efforts to end the long misery. That's why a 10-Year Plan.

5. Now the status quo might argue that if it just had more money to do what it's already doing, the job would get done. Here's the harsh reality: from 1987 to 2007 we increased federal resources by 1100%, 11-fold from \$400 million to \$4.4 billion and the researchers tell us that during most of those years until very recently, the numbers only went up. New resources are important. New ideas and strategies may be more important. We can't send new resources to the old ideas that haven't worked. That's why a 10-Year Plan.

6. Anecdote and conjecture must be replaced by data and research. After groping in the dark for 20 years with no data or research, with every anecdote, every whim, every subjective approach beyond the realm of evaluation, we are now able to evaluate and monitor. And we have a big appetite to know what works and what doesn't.

Data and research tell us that and much more. The era of conjecture and anecdote driving policy and resources is over. That's why a 10-Year Plan.

7. Resources should be deemed an investment. After 20 years of funding programs that served homeless people endlessly, our intent now is investing in the results of ending people's homelessness.

Following the President's Management Agenda in this is helpful. It says that any federal resources should be considered an investment. And each investment should be research and data driven, performance-based, and results-oriented.

Every investment should yield a return. The metrics of 10-Year Plans is a reduction of homelessness. That's why a 10-Year Plan.

8. Investments should be in a business strategy that conforms to the Killer B's. A business approach which includes baselines to quantify the magnitude of the problem; benchmarks that incrementally remedy what the baseline reveals; best practices that insure investments only in what works, what produces results; and budget which offers the realistic picture of costs. But also cost savings.

There are performance "P's" as well. Attention to prevention and place.

Without a focus on prevention, our success in moving people out of homelessness will be compromised by those falling in. We would simply be "bailing the leaking boat of homelessness." Some out. More in. Discharge planning, utility and rent arrearage initiatives stop the human tragedy from happening. And are less expensive interventions.

A business strategy will also lead us to concentrate resources to achieve results, rather than dissipating them to satisfy a status quo that is not working.

Gladwell's Tipping Point research tells us how to tip big social problems by investing modest new resources through intelligent action in the most visible expression of the big social problem. By creating change and results, the whole problem can be tipped. Concentrate, don't dissipate. Recognizing that you can't solve the whole problem all at once with modest resources. Prioritize.

9. Cost studies and cost benefit analysis of the economic impact and consequences of homelessness drive political will beyond expensive managing of homelessness to cost effective solutions that end homelessness.

65 studies. All show the same evidence. The cost of managing is greater than the cost of solving.

- Boston
- Reno
- San Diego
- Now, Seattle, Denver.

10. Investment should be made primarily in field-tested, evidence-based innovations that are proven to demonstrated results and outcomes in reducing and ending homelessness. Such innovations now exist and are demonstrating cost savings as well.

Now, no city has developed all the innovative ideas. So keep a good grip on those you've home-grown. And steal the rest. That's right, take the pilgrimages to see what's working and steal those ideas. The good news is you won't get sued for the theft of intellectual properties or be accused of plagiarism. In fact, other cities will be complimented that you've done so and will encourage you to do so.

Now none of us wants to be known as a thief or for stealing. So I call this initiative the Art of Legitimate Larceny. There are a finite number of ideas – Housing First, Assertive Community Treatment Teams, Street to Home, Project Homeless Connect, Discharge Planning Protocols – that achieve the mission. No city has created them all. Not New York, not San Francisco.

Some cities have become laboratories where you can visit a number of the innovations in one pilgrimage. And I do urge pilgrimages. There's nothing like seeing and touching and kicking the tires. The old spiritual regimen of pilgrimage has become a strategic innovation to refine 10-Year Plans with what works.

10-Year planners and writers have the responsibility to insure that only the most innovative ideas that produce results are in the Plan.

And you have to gird yourself against sentimentalizing programs that have been around for years that are doing “God’s Work.” Let’s be clear, God’s work is ending wrong, not managing it.

For 20 years homeless people have been subjected to good intentions and well-meaning programs. The practitioners and volunteers may feel good when they go home. But if homeless people are left homeless, our good feelings are at the expense of not offering that person what we want for ourselves. A place to live.

So the work of the Committee is to create our innovation- infused, cost effective, results-oriented 10-Year Plan. That’s a hat trick good for all. Good for the homeless person, the librarian, the ER nurse, the business person, the pedestrian, and the taxpayer.

Here’s what such a Plan will do for your community:

1. 10-Year Plans affirm that we will be tolerant of our homeless neighbors, but intolerant of homelessness. The punitive has not worked – anywhere. Solutions that end people’s homelessness, that’s what worked.
2. 10-Year Plans improve the quality of life for everyone in the community – housed and homeless alike. Homeless people and all stakeholders gain by ending homelessness.
3. 10-Year Plans align the expectations of government and providers with the aspirations of homeless people. Planners and Implementers create the product that the consumer wants – a place to live. In your Plan you move beyond the soft bigotry of low expectations to the high aspirations of consumer preferences.
4. 10-Year Plans create a new standard of expectation on the issue of homelessness. We expect visible, measurable, quantifiable change on our streets, in our neighborhoods, and in the lives of homeless people.
5. 10-Year Plans leave behind expensive shuffling and cycling homeless people to create a trajectory to housing them.

Cost studies show that solving chronic homelessness is less expensive than managing it.

6. 10-Year Plans create results. In cities that implement jurisdictionally-led, community-based, strategic plans framed around business principles, and invest in their old and new resources in innovative initiatives that are field-tested and evidence-based, those communities are seeing reductions in the number of people living on their streets and languishing on their shelters.

7. Don't worry about creating the "perfect plan." There isn't one. Don't think of this plan as a bound dogma. Think of it as a loose leaf notebook. If something's not working, out with it. If something new is working, in with it. Your plan is a living document. It will evolve.

8. Don't worry about creating all the innovative initiatives. There are 300+ plans. They've done a lot of the work for you. Don't reinvent the wheel. Practice the "art of legitimate larceny."

9. Don't expect an immediate turnaround in numbers. The problem's been incubating in most places for 15 to 20 years. You're not going to turn it all around in a month, a year, or even a couple of years.

What we are seeing is that about 2 ½ years out in implementation, reductions in street and chronic homelessness are being achieved in cities large and small, coast to coast.

Muhammad Yunis, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize two years ago is out with another book. The work he did in Bangladesh disrupting the status quo of loans earned him earth's top recognition. Rather than following conventional wisdom about making loans - credit checks, equity requirement, collateral - Yunis made loans to the world's poorest to jump start their personal economies.

Against doubt, pessimism, even cynicism, his Grameen Bank focused loans on the poorest of the poor. Most said it wouldn't work. It was just a drop in the ocean. Their lives wouldn't change. And, isn't it naïve and foolish to think they'd actually repay the loans?

Against those voices, Yunis just did his work. Lives have been changed in Bangladesh and now around the world. Opportunity was offered and lives responded and moved away from poverty.

Oh, yes, the repayment rate – 97%.

In his biography Yunis tells us his mission: "My goal is that my grandchildren will have to go to a museum to see what poverty once was."

We have developed a couple of documents focused on 10-Year Planning. They are available on our website. A Step by Step Guide to create a 10-Year Plan. And a distillation of best practices associated with successful Plans entitled, "Good . . . to Better . . . to Great." Those documents are readily available to you and will help as you move forward.

Today, rather than recapitulating what is readily available, I'd like to spend our time together examining some of the insights we've gained from the four years of our efforts with cities across the United States.

Insights about the Context of 10-Year Plans.
About the Content of 10-Year Plans.
About the Contributions of 10-Year Plans.

All, I believe will be helpful as you set out to create a document that will move you from being demoralized that nothing is possible, that homelessness is an intractable part of the social landscape to being re-moralized that change is possible, that homelessness will yield to plentiful partnerships, innovative ideas, and strategic solutions.

###