

|A Pledge for Tolerance & Understanding

As our great nation was born, we carved from its foundation of self-evident truths and basic rights the concepts of liberty, of freedom, of spirit and of hope as enumerated by our forebears, most of whom once had loyalty to a foreign crown. For more than two centuries now we have stood shoulder-to-shoulder as men, women and children of every color, race, nationality and background, building communities, building schools and building futures. We have chosen, wisely, an organic system of governance based not on our noblest traits but on our inherent tendencies: "But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary."

As always, painful debates over our shared civic life threaten to set us apart from one another. As a growing rift between those of means and those without deepens, as differences of color, ethnicity, race and religion gain heated prominence in our increasingly diverse society, and as debates over infrastructure, housing and other aspects of urban living become acute, we must not let our inclinations toward separatism undo good work undertaken by generations of well-meaning ancestors.

We turn our eye to Queens County, New York, to a birthplace of freedom and tolerance in the Western Hemisphere, to the words of the freeholders of Flushing in 1657 who condemned the creation of a law that would stop people from living free lives, and we say that though we enjoy our liberties and remain independent of tyranny, we must reaffirm our commitment to mutual dependence and prosperity based on the energy and dynamism of our multiethnic heritage.

Our greatest strengths lie in our differences, in the things that distinguish us from one another. Where one may fail another excels, and that knowledge of diverse experiences builds potency in us as a people. We have never been able afford simply co-exist, simply being tolerant of one another, but from time to time this truth – also self-evident – needs to be publicly reaffirmed. A focus just on differences divides us, splitting us under a veneer of unity, constructed by a continuous undercurrent of negativity. Our communities are better than this, and stand united in defiance of intolerance. Every man, woman and child of this county, this city, this state and this nation, regardless of ideology, history or philosophy, is our brother and our sister. Together we face an open future free from hate, bigotry, fear and persecution.

We, therefore, must be resolved to shun negativity and fear – the wellsprings of intolerance and hostility, embrace the new – a source of our strength and security, and seek enlightenment from those who do not act, speak, believe or think the way we do. It has always been through this commitment to interdependence that our communities and economies have prospered, and now, in our increasingly diverse city and county, it is how we will continue to progress.