

## New decade needs to be better

**Colin Read: Everybody's Business**

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— Having been born late in the 1950s and now celebrating the 2010s, I have dipped my toe into seven different decades. I can safely say that the 2000s were the worst of all. Good-bye and good riddance.

We started that decade the same way that it ended. The year 2000 saw great heights for the NASDAQ, only to plunge into a terrible dot-com bust.

A little while later, the entire psyche of the nation came crashing down with the twin towers.

The end of the decade was even more painful. Let's be especially thankful that 2009 is over. Plagued by economic trauma, missteps, false steps, and steps too small.

2010 happens to be the Year of the Tiger (not that Tiger!). We hope it will bode well for us.

Now what do we do?

Gov. Paterson recently pointed out that New York is second only to California in research into leading-edge areas like nanotechnology, biophysics, agriculture and energy. Yet, we receive less than a tenth of the level of venture-capital funding that goes to California.

The first thing we need to do is to stimulate technology transfer. Our network of higher education in this state is unparalleled in both its size and its failure to live up to its potential. It is certainly extensive enough to ensure we can offer an affordable education to anyone seeking higher education and willing to accept the responsibility that goes along with a subsidy.

Surely, we can do a better job in providing this education to a broader public if we focus narrowly on the goal of education as an economic engine in addition to an avenue for enlightenment.

And if we do, the savings should go toward the creation of large-scale technology creation and technology-transfer institutions. These institutions cannot be designed to offer a steady stream of patent profits to the home institution. It is about time we view education subsidies as an investment that will pay dividends to the same state that so heavily subsidizes the education.

If we demand more from our students, and if we demand more on behalf of taxpayers, we must also demand more of those who will be engaging in this research and technology transfer that will benefit us all.

We need a selfless drive toward innovation, much like the spirit created in response to Sputnik in the 1950s and the perception that the Soviets were ahead of us in technological advancement.

In the same vibrant decade in which we put a man on the moon and brought him home safely, New York

created and built up the State University of New York system. This time around, the Soviets aren't pushing us to innovate. Instead, Second Economic World countries like China and India are rallying and have the potential to overtake us, based on sheer population and hunger to succeed.

With these new global players on the field vying to share in the quality of life we have taken for granted, can we accept the challenge to put our self-interests aside and bring out that same energy we were able to muster in other historic eras?

New York has historically been on the forefront of innovation and progressiveness, even if it also languishes at times in dysfunction and special interests. Our state has a place in history in a way no less substantial than California's calling. If California can be the hotbed of technology transfer and venture capital, well, so can we. Our potential should meet or exceed that of the West Coast given that we are also a hotbed of the mobilization of capital.

I expect an essential ingredient of this mobilization will be in the creation of incentives that will motivate our researchers and teachers of tomorrow. This does not need to cost money.

Someone asked me the other day how an area like the North Country can manage to attract high-quality young professionals when we cannot necessarily match the salaries offered elsewhere. I responded that salary is only part of the package. People are also motivated by opportunity and vision.

I firmly believe we would have no shortage of people interested in coming to our region if we give them the sense we are really on to something. We all know a fair salary here can purchase a very nice quality of life. People want more than that, though. They also want a certain X factor.

This X factor is the sense they are coming to a place that is better than they are. I know this sounds counter intuitive. Why would someone want to come to a place that is a bit smarter, a bit more experienced, and a bit more ambitious than they are? Think about it. If you could join a club in which all the members are less able, less interesting, or have less to offer than you do, would you want to join? On the other hand, you would be eager to join a club whose members make you a better person because of their drive, intelligence, competence or social skills.

Humans yearn to be part of something bigger than they are. And the Empire State, of all places, has a reputation for the biggest and the best. This is our calling card, and this sense of amazing progressiveness should once more be bottled and marketed.

At the same time, we have to create a system that asks not "what can the Empire State can do for you," but rather, "what can you do for the Empire State?" We need people to be eager to contribute, not mediocrity or complacency. That is the greatest challenge for all developed nations. Overcoming this challenge offers the greatest opportunity for those who understand that complacency means demise.

I think we are up to the challenge, though. I propose an Empire State New Year's resolution to replace a sense of entitlement and complacency with a drive toward opportunity and destiny.

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