

This is a special day.

I'm tremendously excited. Today we begin to reform Hamilton County government.

Let's be clear. We have great challenges in front of us. Over the past decade, this County has lost population and businesses at record rates. Crime levels have soared. Property taxes have been allowed to reach virtually the highest levels in the State. And citizens have too often been the victims of intra-governmental infighting, turf-wars and a failure to cooperate.

We start to reverse these trends right here and right now -- Our challenge is over the next few years to transform Hamilton County into one of the best run County governments in the country.

After the election, Phil Heimlich and I set out to look at the best run county governments in the country.

We found a quiet revolution in county governments. We found that the counties who are doing well had a lot in common.

First, they had a strong customer service focus -- a dedication to treating customers with respect. In Phoenix, we found a government that consistently measured customer satisfaction with government and used this input as a tool to hold government officials accountable. In Miami, citizens can not only submit building permits on line, but schedule an on-line conversation with a building inspector and receive an inspection within 24 hours.

The counties we visited all were relentless about stewarding taxpayer dollars. In Charlotte we found a vigorous managed competition program where a citizens committee evaluated government services to determine what should go through a bidding process where the private sector competed against the government. In Maricopa County, we found a gainsharing program that had saved hundreds of thousands of dollars by incentivizing employees to achieve unprecedented savings by allowing the employees to keep part of the money we saved. And in all the places we visited we found government officials willing to undertake the hard work of merging services across political boundaries. We also found budgeting processes in all the places that we visited that were based not on bureaucratic turf – or the status quo – but on careful strategic planning, on goals and priorities and careful measures of results.

We learned a great deal . . . but I think what struck both Phil and I the most was how few of these things our County was doing. While other places were revolutionizing government, Hamilton County remained trapped in the mindset of “this is the way we have always done it.”

Well that all changes today.

Today, we begin to reform County government:

- This week we will put the first pieces of our customer service program in place: A **secret shopper program** where volunteers go as customers to county departments. The

program will help us measure the quality of service we are providing and allow us to hold county departments accountable

- We also announce today, that this year's budget will include a **gainsharing program** to incentivize and reward employees who save taxpayers money. Under the gainsharing program, employees who figure out how to do their job for less will be able to earn for themselves a part of the savings
- We also will begin this year a **managed competition process** where the County guided by a group of citizen volunteers will systematically examine County services as prospects to be put out for bid.
- We have already, in cooperation with the City of Cincinnati, begun to look at how we can improve the **building permit process**. We are looking at combining County operations with the City's one-stop permitting center – and ultimately bringing that permitting process entirely on-line, so that for typical permitting approvals, homeowners and contractors will never need to visit a governmental building to obtain their required approvals. We intend to invite every single city, village and township that requires building, zoning and planning permits to join us in this centralized and ultimately internet-based service. Where possible, we will even further expand the ability of citizens to use these services on-line without ever needing to physically visit a government agency.

We need your help. We have incredible talent here in Cincinnati -- this town is full of bright people, with vision and common-sense who can help us reform the bureaucracy. Over the next few weeks, we will be asking many of you to get involved with us in the reform process. We will be setting up several citizens reform commissions to look at changes in the way County government operates. In addition to the citizen-based effort towards managed competition, I also want this year to fulfill Todd's initiative to thoroughly study and improve County-funded health care delivery and spending and Phil's initiative to properly define and enhance the County's role in regional economic development activities. We also intend to continue to reform the tax levy process so we can end Hamilton County's distinction as the highest taxing urban county in the State.

Our plan is that each of these four important initiatives must be guided by knowledgeable community leaders, leaders who are committed to common-sense change to make our community competitive once again. Thus, we will need your help – your active involvement – to make these happen. If you know of volunteer leaders qualified and interested, we are accepting applications.

- Finally, we intend to finish some of the work that Phil has already started and put in place real performance measures for every County department. And by the end of the year, every citizen of this County will be able to get a report card so that they can measure the services they are getting for their tax dollars.

This is just the beginning. The next four years will be an exciting time for Hamilton County. We have big challenges ahead of us. But with your support, I know that we can meet them.

My goal is that in 5 or 10 years when some newly elected County Commissioner is looking at counties for models of how to do it right, they will come and visit Hamilton County. My hope is that when my children reach adulthood Hamilton County will be a place they and others in their generation will want to work and raise a family.

Together I have every confidence we can make this the best run County in America.