

# DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE'S BREAKFAST

**JUNE 6, 2001**

**ALAN G. HEVESI**

First, thank you very much ladies and gentleman. Sorry that we're rushing this along, but it's not just ten thousand people, it's ten thousand happy people who are not angry at me when I step in front of them. So you'll understand, it was a long term commitment.

I am a graduate of Queens College; served on the faculty there for twenty seven years. Let me give you a little bit of background: I am born and bred in Queens; first in my family born in the United States; I am married, three kids. My wife and I have been married for thirty three years and moved five times all within one mile in Forest Hills. So, what works in favor in your world view and how I share that world view is, number one, as a home owner I am concerned about the preservation of residential communities in a city where the pressures are constantly to make change and make profit. That's what New York City is historically. I recall reading about the day that the Dutch looked out their windows and three British men-of-war floated into the harbor to take down the Dutch flag and raise the British in Sixteen-Forty something or was it Sixteen-Sixty something -- I don't remember -- and Peter Stuyvesant said, "Let's get our guns and defend ourselves," and all the burghers said, "No! No!" We have business to transact today and profits to make, so we don't really care who governs us." And, they surrendered. The British took over, raised the British flag and they kept on making profit.

That's been our history in the City. And what you do is extraordinarily important in preserving the character, not only of residential communities but historical communities. The second thing I hope gives you comfort, at least with respect to my attitude on these issues, is that I am an academician. As I mentioned, a Ph.D. from Columbia University; trained to be, and did serve as a Political Science Professor but a history minor all my life. So when I got elected Comptroller I didn't rush to the financial studies, I read the history of New York -- tried to get a sense of who we are as a people. That being said, we have some huge pressures on us, and they are, in some respects, good pressures. It takes some rational thinking -- and another novel idea I'm going to lay on you about governance in order to strike the balance between our being able to produce the revenues in this city that are required for us to meet the mission, on the one hand, and preserve the quality of life, preserve the character of our city, preserve our history, and preserve our residential neighborhoods -- and this is a balance. Let me tell you what that novel idea is. It's called planning and it is a novel idea for elected officials. If you think about it, every profession has its own mindset, its own value system, its own way of thinking. People go to law school -- some of you in this room -- not to learn the law but to be trained and socialized to think like lawyers -- and when you finish and go into a corporate law firm,

that's reinforced, and your ways of thinking, your attitude, your mechanisms are all approved by the career in law profession. Likewise, if you go to Paris Island and they shave your head and you become a United States Marine, when you get out you're different than other people. Brain surgeons are different than pediatricians -- their skills and mindsets are different. Elected officials have a very short term view because the pressure is on to make a decision at two o'clock and then another one at three o'clock and another one at five o'clock and you hope you have enough knowledge and experience where the staff has handed down an appropriate memo so it's the right decision. And, if you're a legislator, you're sitting at your desk voting three hundred times a day for seven months a year. I voted twenty-two thousand times a year in the New York State Assembly each year -- I'm sorry, two thousand times a year -- about twenty-two thousand times over my lifetime. So the idea of planning ahead and looking long term is sort of strange to people and it's reinforced by term limits. Term limits does not help -- now the decisions are made, what do I need to do to accomplish a goal immediately.

Having said that my attitude is the following: There are plenty of places in this City for substantial economic development for building large residential facilities, for building large commercial facilities, areas in this city that are desperately in need of activity of any kind -- so that we do not have to destroy our historic districts, or our historic buildings, or our neighborhoods. Now obviously, there's a debate in the balance. Using preservation artificially as a method to push away all kinds of development is something I don't subscribe to, but, having developers present plans that are so restricted in their scope that they never take into consideration the character of a neighborhood or its historical value, is also unacceptable. So there's got to be a balance. It means institutionalizing the role of preservation groups. It means strengthening the Landmarks Commission. It means working with the expertise of the Municipal Art Society, the other organizations. It means institutionalizing the exchange of information and having a mayor who doesn't go on either gut instinct or political relationships, but institutionalizes the exchange so that when a plan is before us, it takes into consideration as a first priority what will happen to communities, what will neighborhoods, what will happen to the historical value that may be threatened by development. But, we all do understand that the City of New York must continue to generate jobs; that the City of New York must generate economic activity; that we've got to attract the biotech industry to come to New York as a symbol; that we do want to encourage the movie industry and the dot coms because the surpluses that flow from that economic activity allow us to meet our mission -- and our mission is preservation -- but our mission is also to understand that we have more poor people than any other city in the world. We have more millionaires and more poor people. I guess if I'm oversimplifying what you're all about is to say we need to have more than millionaires and poor people, that we have to have decent neighborhoods for middle class people and upper middle class and professional people because that's really core of our City. But on the other we have 40 percent of New Yorkers are immigrants; we have people who come in here without skills, without jobs -- and I'll give you an anomaly and then sort of wind up -- this is stream of consciousness. I didn't even make a Merrill speech.

Here's the anomaly. We have five hundred and eight thousand more jobs in the City of New York today than we had in Nineteen- Ninety three and I think that's terrific and they're high on jobs; they're professionals -- if you have credentials, if you have a graduate degree, if you have a college degree, if you have skills, there's a job for you. And, at the same time we have the second highest unemployment rate of any city of America, which is sort of anomalous. -- and we were number one. Miami moved ahead of us. The second highest unemployment rate. If you're unskilled, and you're a school dropout, if you're poor, if you have a language difficulty because you're an immigrant, there're no jobs for you. because we don't have the entry level jobs. We used to have one and a quarter million people doing manufacturing, now its two hundred fifty thousand. We used to have a port where you could be a stevedore. Now, there's no port -- it's all in Jersey, and, with technology, we don't need the human bodies, we have a crane picking up a container off a ship from Europe putting it on a train that goes out to Ohio. You walked into a store ten years ago and said, "I'm unskilled but I'm able bodied make me a stock clerk." And, if they liked you, they would do it. Today they won't touch you unless you answer the question, yes. You answer yes to the question, do you have computer skills, you have telecommunications skills -- the whole revolutionary time. And, a mayor has to maintain that balance. Now I think it is not fair for a mayor to be making decisions along with the Council that ignore what you're about. But we also have to take into consideration that there are these economic development needs. What I believe is the case is there's plenty of space and plenty of opportunity if we change the commercial mindset that that development goes on in the border of Queens. There's plenty of room for commercial development in Long Island City where the Citibank building, that green huge, monstrous building, is supposed to be an anchor. There're places to expand Metrotech a little bit; there's the South Bronx which needs this kind of economic boost. And, there's some -- not some -- we need massive long range planning for what's sitting out there as a magnet for development which cannot be haphazard because it destroys everything you're about -- and that's the west side of Manhattan. It cannot be haphazard. It requires sitting down with the long range economic planners, with the budget people, with the preservationists, with the community leaders and work out a system that we can provide a balance to preserve our neighborhoods and preserve the historical character of this City. I'm willing to enter that process and I'm willing to tell you that that's who I am, where I come from as an academician -- and as a home owner I really emphasize that. Home owners have this point of view that we don't want our neighborhoods threatened for somebody's quick buck that dissipates two years later.

So let me stop there and take your questions and thank you for your consideration allowing me to participate in this event.

Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much. I will turn instantly to questions. I guess I will abuse the privilege of the chair, and having in mind Mr. Hevesi's comment on his determination to strengthen the Commission. Perhaps, just point his attention to the fact that the Commission which has jurisdiction over literally tens of thousands of protected buildings, let alone the additional thousands of unprotected buildings. That's a grand

total of forty-five employees -- a budget of less than three million dollars -- some thousandths of one percent of the City budget.

Could we look to you for a strengthening, an enhancement of the professionalism of the Commission to address some of these issues ?

HEVESI: The answer is yes. I will not commit to a formulation because you know as a mayoral candidate you go to the Parks Council, or Parks 2001, and they say one percent of the budget. Then you go to the affordable housing constituency which is quite considerable and they say a billion a year for ten years. And you go to every group and they want a commitment. I won't make the commitment -- and let me very frank with you and candid. I believe the Landmarks Commission helps to define the character of this City in the same way that the arts and culture community defines New York, and I have always supported the very substantial investment by the City in that community -- not only the great institutions but the incubators. But, having said that I don't know what our budget is going to be. I believe the era of the surpluses is over.

Excuse my Laryngitis. I did have the occasion to have pointed out to me that for four days I had no voice at all -- and I went up five points in the polls.

I think what's happening now is with the national economy flattening out, with states like New Jersey which had eight hundred million dollar surpluses are announcing half a billion dollar deficits -- that consumer economy is slipping and sliding that it's going to catch up to New York. We're OK for this year -- this year ends this month. And the new budget is probably OK -- no deficit, probably a small surplus is what we're predicting for the next fiscal year. We're also predicting three, four, five billion dollar deficits for the next three years. In 2005, five billion dollar deficits. So that's the context of this. But the answer to your question is, generalized, yes.

(Question inaudible)

If I lose the election I am going to be rooting for your plan.

We did blow it! We had Governor's Island for a dollar year, and why we couldn't put some plan together I don't know what personalities or politics got in the way. My office is not involved in that. Ideally, for me -- I guess you're rejecting the idea of a casino, right? Some great educational institution, a huge park, an increase in the ferry line so that people go there for recreation, for enjoyment, and for an educational experience, some large campus, I believe is appropriate and maybe a great museum on Governor's Island. I don't have a formulized plan but it's such a wonderful asset that it's crazy that we didn't pick up the opportunity that senator Moynihan provided for us --and, it's very, very sad for us.

(Question Inaudible)

I believe Joe Rose's plan is dead. I believe there was not a development of support by the even competing constituencies for some set of principles. I know there were some

deals about air rights and so on. I think probably what happened was Joe Rose went to Mayor Giuliani and said “I want to do this”. The Mayor said, “Go ahead and do it,” particularly sympathetic to the development community. The plan didn’t catch on. I don’t know whether there was a failure to go out into the constituent communities, the community groups, the preservation community, to obtain support or trade-offs and I think the Mayor backed away from it when he discovered that politically this would have been a time bomb.

You renew this by a fair process of bringing into a room institutionalizing representation from every segment including the developers in order to see whether there’s some way to provide the balance that we’re talking about. But you don’t do that simply because the developers are your friends or they’ve been supporters and rammed something through that will cause a civil war in the communities and probably won’t be successful. If you’re going to do development, the west side that I am talking about, just as an example, forgetting the Broadway Theater District, you have to get the formal representatives of the recognized institutions that have interests here -- including representatives from each of these groups – at a table, regular meetings with an agenda to see whether there’s some plan that’s acceptable, long term, which takes into consideration the values that you are all about -- respecting residential communities and their historical value and their value in defining who we are as a City, as well as the idea that there’re opportunities for tax revenues from other kinds of activity.

QUESTION: I very much appreciate the sort of attitude you’re taking about the importance of planning on the west side, and including community groups and preservationists along with planners and developers in the process of thinking about what happens to our west side. Right now New York City’s Landmark Law calls for preserving our historical, architectural, and cultural monuments. We think that our neighborhood qualifies as all three. What is it going to take, and how do you envision your landmarks commissioner and Landmarks Commission approaching a neighborhood such as ours which is undergoing change, which is threatened, but can actually be an important resource to this city as it is changing sort of organically and new uses are coming in, just the way preservationists always like to see, with people who appreciate the buildings and are trying to preserve the buildings.

How can you help us?

Left to its own devices people are going to say; what a terrific opportunity to put my restaurant in, to put my lovely clothing store in, to change this neighborhood in a profitable way for me, and I think you would need some regulation to make sure that whatever changes occur are in the context of some values, historical and communal values that retain the historical character of a community that has this long history of involvement in the City. And how you do that is by some zoning regulations, or by some agreements with the commercial establishments that when they buy a property they restrict themselves to conforming the character of their buildings and their property to the historical values that we are talking about. You don’t put, where there are a lot of low rise buildings, you don’t put a fifty-five story building, you don’t put a Trump Tower into

that kind of neighborhood. And the City then comes in and finds some way to create a historical district -- the blocks where the meat market had its center; get the historians in to define for people who would be visiting the neighborhood, what went on here. Do what they did in Philadelphia. I was impressed twenty-five years ago when I went to down to Philadelphia with my kids to the historical districts that were created, that really conveyed to Americans what the revolution was all about. What that environment was all about, who these strange characters were who were all rich people launching a revolution -- rich people don't launch revolutions. That has to be part of any mix, and we have to put some restraints on the behavior of the commercial establishments that want to take advantage of the newly attractive neighborhoods. I think that's doable by a planning process and by some regulation by the City.

(Question inaudible)

HEVESI: I never considered that we would fold the Landmarks Commission into any larger agency. I can't even think of an agency where there's a logic to do that, other than a budget logic. The reason you merge agencies is because there's a logic or because you want to save money and you're reducing your costs. I never contemplated it. There are a number of things the Guiliani Administration has proposed that I think are not appropriate. For example, I think on January 1, we will open the fence to City Hall and allow our citizens to go visit our magnificent City Hall. Did I tell you a cheap applause line? Forgive me, I'm not being political. I didn't intend to make trouble. Once I went to a community group and I opened; "Hi! My name is Alan Hevesi. I am City Comptroller. I am in my eighth year as City Comptroller, which means under term limits on January 1<sup>st</sup> I can no longer be Comptroller and this was just stream of conscience, so I said, "And by the way, on January 1<sup>st</sup> Mark Green can't be Public Advocate, and by the way Rudy Guiliani can't be Mayor of the City New York -- and I got a standing ovation. It was cheap and I apologized for it.

(Question inaudible)

I guess that the logic is that if you have a value that is placed into zoning law, zoning regulations that includes some measure of preservation allowing the next block to destroy that value is probably inappropriate. I don't commit to any specific idea or plan but you don't defeat your own purpose and you don't allow that to happen. unless you're kidding people, and you're paying lip service to the one value while allowing its destruction next door. So there's a sort of phase. How you do that specifically with a specific project, I leave to the experts. I am not a planner, I'm an expert. I have an appreciation of -- "Yes, we'll do what you want and then put up the ninety story building a block away and it wrecks the environment.

MODERATOR: Speaking of the experts, we did prepare this morning by having detailed meetings with the staff of each of the candidates and the submission to them of detailed white papers on each of the legs of the preservation platform. Again trying to bring the process into substance and not just into a quick once silver ....

Question: (Inaudible)

HEVESI: This is something that you passionately feel. because this is not the first time you've spoken to me about this, is it? George, I read all your materials. I read the memos. You make a persuasive case. I give myself the option and the opportunity since I didn't know much about the proposal until you brought it to my attention and to confer with others including the local representatives who live there. In the same way that the Gansevoort Meat Market. I hold open the option to talk to Debra Glick and Tom Duane and Christine Quinn, and so on, who are close friends and allies. So with that caveat, I heard you, I read it -- and by the way, can I -- just another observation. The experience of running for office -- here we got to go before our audiences and try to create the impression we know everything about everything. We don't everything about everything. We need your expertise. We need to absorb. I'm comfortable doing that as an academician. You have a good idea, I will steal it.

With footnotes, I understand what happened to Senator Biden. But with footnotes, you come up with a good program or plan I will incorporate it. I have done it already.

MODERATOR: We will try and squeeze in one or two more.

QUESTION: I'm Christabel Gough from The Society for the Architecture of the City. I would like to know what kind of background and experience you would be looking for if you were appointing a chair and members of the Landmarks Commission. What kind of a balance would you be seeking?

QUESTION: There is a sub-text to the story.

HEVESI: Well, I'm completely blank as to the sub-Text.

(Inaudible statement from the floor)

The chair of the Landmarks Commission, as a generalization, I have no one in mind, and I have no one in mind for any office, I don't hire people until I get elected -- should be someone with a deep passionate love for the City of New York, for its history, for its ethnic diversity, for its culture, and also have professional standing in the, either planning, architecture, academic community with a great deal of expertise. And I presume there is in the community lots of folks who are doing this kind of work.

ANONYMOUS VOICE: A number of them right in this room.

HEVESI: I am not accepting resumes at this time. But I think is someone who loves the City, has a passion for the City, has a passion for its history, has a passion for its diversity, and knows some government and politics because if it's a person who is completely divorce from the reality of decision making then whatever good approach is taken will get buried in the combat of New York. Policy making is combat in New York -- better know how to win these fights.

MODERATOR: I have been instructed that was your last question. On behalf of all of us, from all the corners of the City of New York, we thank you very much for your substantive presentation.