

**2016 State of the City Address
City of Little Rock, Mayor Mark Stodola**

I am honored today to present to you the State of the City. To my fellow colleagues on the Board of Directors, to City Manager Bruce Moore, City Attorney Tom Carpenter and to the many employees and citizens assembled, thank you for being here.

Jasmine, that was excellent leadership on the Pledge of Allegiance and Officer Walton, thank you for the wonderful singing of our National Anthem.

Vice Mayor Hines, thank you for that gracious introduction.

I want to start by recognizing my colleagues who are here with us today. These are dedicated public servants who are constantly in communication with their constituents and addressing their concerns – and I would just like to say that this is the hardest working group of public servants in the State.

As I was preparing for today, I wanted to make sure and recognize each of you throughout the speech for the passion you show for different issues facing the City, but instead I think I will do that right now and then we will get on with the speech.

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Director Erma Hendrix – Your dedication to the alleviation of blight in our neighborhoods has been a service to our City and your passionate advocacy for projects in Ward 1 is a testament to your constituents who work hard to elect you.

Director B.J. Wyrick – You are the constant fighter for Ward 7 drainage and street issues and Southwest Fire Station and I am thrilled at the growth in Southwest Little Rock with Bass Pro and the Outlets of Little Rock.

Director Ken Richardson – Director Richardson is the stalwart on the 12th Street Corridor, the UALR neighborhood, connecting War Memorial Park, and our youth prevention programs.

Director Dean Kumpuris – Dr. Kumpuris, the guardian of Riverfront Park and the architect of public art throughout Little Rock, you continue to be a strong voice for Little Rock and cultural growth.

Vice Mayor Hines – Our free market conscience on the Board, who is a strong advocate for children, youth and families and is a master in understanding complex zoning and planning issues.

Director Doris Wright – You are a bulldog for enhancements to Ward 6 – including the West Central Community Center and improved streetscapes throughout the Ward.

Director Joan Adcock - The consummate neighborhood advocate throughout the City who continually advocates in earnest for our four-legged friends at the Animal Village.

Director Brad Cazort – In addition to his love of Ward 4, our lover of all things Zoo...and the resident Council zoo keeper of the City Board.

Director Kathy Webb – Director Webb is dedicated to the many Ward 3 neighborhoods, feeding the hungry, helping our friends experiencing homelessness, and standing up for equality regardless of a person’s sexual orientation.

Director Gene Fortson – Constantly offering sage wisdom to the Board with incisive comments and questions and one who has guided the A&P Commission to great decisions on Robinson Center and the Arkansas Arts Center.

Economy

We continue to be blessed by low unemployment rates, lower than the State of Arkansas at 4.3 percent. This past year, we have seen over 430 new jobs created, \$11 million dollars in new payroll, and \$137 million dollars in new capital investment. 2015 witnessed the opening of the Creative Corridor, representing a tremendous return on public investment. Over \$100 million dollars in private sector development has occurred on Main Street by leveraging approximately \$2 million dollars of state and local funds – a 50 to 1 return on investment.

The opening of the Creative Corridor has re-energized a street that had been dead for 30 years. It also spells great excitement and economic development for the future with the the Technology Park and various arts organizations locating along our famous downtown street.

We have seen expansions of FIS Global, one of the largest financial services companies in the world, the location of a INUVO and Privacy Star, National Custom Metal Door, Plastic Ingenuity, Essick Air, ATA International, the major expansion of Dassault Falcon Jet and Federal Express Freight opening which is a \$ 50 million dollar capital investment and employing 160 people.

Our entrepreneurial technology efforts became a reality with the opening of The Venture Center downtown. The Venture Center is the place where entrepreneurs, innovators, business and community leaders, and investors gather to network,

connect, and create real companies. This economic incubator allows companies and individuals to be in an environment where ideas are created, cultivated, accelerated, and brought to life. This has led to the graduation of several high tech companies such as Apptegy, Bfonics, Merger Match, and Zuni Learning Tree. The Venture Center has held several pre-accelerator classes with over 31 different organizations, has conducted dozens of seminars, weekly meetings, 1 Million Cups events, mentor sessions, member mixers and start-up weekends. The effort in just a few short months has supported the creation of over 50 new jobs with the companies raising a collective \$1.5 million in capital. This year a partnership with FIS will bring a group of up-and-coming FinTech entrepreneurs to Little Rock for several months as part of a world class FinTech accelerator program that will pair these groups with the financial ecosystem already in place here. These are the jobs of the new millennium, the jobs that will be filled by our sons and daughters and our grandchildren.

In 2015, we also saw the opening of the Outlets of Little Rock, a 325,000 square foot open-air lifestyle destination with 75 stores including such names as J Crew, The Loft Outlet, Wilsons Leather, Zale's, Lane Bryant, Gearhead Outfitters, Restoration Hardware, Nike, Tommy Hilfiger, Underarmor, Brooks Brothers, Cole Hann and others. Dave and Busters, an entertainment venue of 30,000 square feet is about to open in the same area in Southwest Little Rock. This translates to more jobs for our citizens and brings new economic activity into our City.

One other job stimulator that occurred this past year that I am most proud of resulted from a grant that I submitted through the US Conference of Mayors to the "Wells Fargo Community Wins" grant program. The competition was stiff and I am happy to say that we received the first place monetary grant of \$150,000 given to the Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind. The grant will provide employment for more than 40 individuals who are blind or visually impaired. These funds are being used

by the Lighthouse to produce inclement weather outerwear for the US Army. It is a tremendous compliment to the city and to the Lighthouse for the Blind that we were able to win this national award.

Our Little Rock Port and the Authority members have embarked on a very important strategic growth plan currently underway and are reaching out aggressively for new businesses to occupy existing properties and land located there. I am extremely pleased that we are giving greater attention to the economic stimulus that the Port provides. Arkansas is one of only 24 states to have this unique inland waterway and ranks third in the number of navigable waterway miles. 12 million tons of cargo are shipped annually with a value of \$3.9 billion.

I am truly honored to be recognized at the US Conference of Mayors as the chair of the Metropolitan Ports and Exports Task Force. With the expansion of the Panama Canal and the expected approval by Congress of the Trans Pacific Partnership, tremendous opportunities await for the businesses in our city and state, allowing us to connect to the deep water ports of the Gulf of Mexico.

Youth Employment

The City has long recognized the importance of providing a great foundation to our young people as they begin to enter the job market. I am extremely pleased that this past year, the City and the Department of Community Programs was recognized with a City of Distinction Award for our Youth Employment program. This past year, 625 jobs were made available for young people participating in this program. Unfortunately, we had more than 1,200 that applied so I want to speak to our business community and ask them to reach out this summer and employ a young person. Give them an opportunity to demonstrate responsibility, teach them the

importance of hard work and how with discipline and dedication it will pay great financial dividends in the future.

Information Technology

The City of Little Rock has been very busy this past year embracing technology in a variety of ways. Last year, Little Rock rolled out its paperless option for businesses where business owners can now go green with the City of Little Rock through a new paperless e-notification system that enables users to receive reminders when it is time to pay license fees at each stage of the business cycle. This convenient option is part of the Little Rock Business License payment system, which allows businesses to access their account, pay fees, and acquire a license, all without ever needing to visit City Hall. This paperless notification system is expected to save nearly a thousand hours of staff time.

Also, we have just rolled out the new 3-1-1 mobile app which allows our citizens to send in mobile requests for a variety of city services. Our citizens can now turn in requests and take photographs of abandoned vehicles, missed yard waste, pothole repairs, cars parking in the yard, street lights out, and give us the opportunity to have these systems tracked. The system allows us to report back to our citizens when we have completed the service. These are great features and we are seeing tremendous use by our Little Rock citizens.

The use of big data has also seen tremendous growth and application in the private sector, and now we are seeing it in the public sector where its true potential is beginning to be realized. As mayor, I am thrilled that the City of Little Rock is making smart use of technology to become a leading technology city of the 21st

century. Little Rock is now the first major municipality in the state of Arkansas to embark on an open data initiative which creates a framework for usage readily available to the city.

Just this week, the Board of Directors approved a Resolution of Intent that will move us forward on an open data project of significant impact. Through the “What Works Cities Initiative,” sponsored by Bloomberg Philanthropies, we are partnering with several national organizations to make this a reality. We are learning from the best tech organizations in the world. We are organizing our data into sets, creating a governance team and taking a strategic approach to getting the information out for all of our citizens to use. Open data opens doors for all of us, our citizens to be empowered to not just find, but to also use publishable data that is freely provided by the City of Little Rock. What used to take a trip to City Hall can now be accessed instantly from anywhere in the world in a more usable format. Our city officials and departments will be able to make more informed decisions, stream-line processes and improve operations. Data will be used to measure performance and to show it in an easy to understand format.

Open data will also be used by the City to help make better procurements on contracts as well as to track vendor performance. In 2015, the foundation was laid for this open data work and now in 2016 we are about to implement these policies, best practices and tangible results in the form of open data portals.

Currently, we have developed 20 different data sets using data topically organized. Information such as Planning Commission action items, lists, maps and permits, public safety data, 311 call history and the like.

One of the greatest challenges we have to making sure that all of our citizens prosper is to conquer the digital divide. Our goal is to make sure poverty, and limited income

is not a barrier. Our challenge is to make sure that all our citizens have access to broadband and the wonders of technology as we continue to learn by use of the internet and all the information contained therein.

I am very proud that the City of Little Rock has chosen to partner with the Metropolitan Housing Alliance, as well as the Clinton Foundation, on a Federal HUD program called ConnectHome, where we have announced the opportunity to bring broadband into our public housing authority facilities. This includes a training program with our partners at Best Buy using the Geek Squad, and working with our legacy partners such as Comcast, AT&T and Verizon to provide affordable internet service to our residents for \$9.99 a month. Families that complete a certification course through Best Buy then have an opportunity to purchase a computer for \$50.00 or to be given one through the Little Rock School District. Little Rock is one of only 28 cities participating in this program and I am proud to say we are leading the implementation nationwide.

Public Safety

LRPD

Of course one of our most important obligations as public servants is to do everything we can to try and keep our citizens safe in their homes, in our schools, in our parks, and on the sidewalks and streets of our city. So how are we doing? I'd like to report that we have been making great strides each and every year to reduce crime. We have a very hard working police department that is using every skill and technique and technological invention available. With the advent of social media, the internet, and a 24/7 news cycle, our citizens now know or can find out about virtually every crime that occurs in our city.

Annually, we report to the FBI all Part 1 offenses that occur, which I like to call the Big 8. We report 4 violent crimes: murder, rape, robbery, and assault, and the four property crimes: burglary, larceny, vehicle theft and arson. I am happy to announce that this year we have submitted to the FBI as Part 1 offenses the lowest number of occurrences we have had in 15 years. By comparison, in 2003 we reported 21,341 Part 1 offenses and this past year we are reporting 15,699 offenses. This represents a 26% reduction in the number of Part 1 offenses reported to the FBI, and it also represents a 4.7% reduction from our previous year, 2014. In 2014, we recognized a 5.8% reduction. I am pleased to say that while we have certain hot spots of violence, last year we reported a 30% reduction in the number of homicides in our city.

This past year, I formed the Capital City Crime Prevention Task Force, which has been meeting monthly to examine different best practices and system changes that would help to further reduce the amount of crime that occurs in our city. We will be concluding our efforts shortly and coming out with a draft report in the fall of this year. We have investigated the increased need and use of electronic monitoring and recognizing that nearly 80% of the individuals in prison have a drug or alcohol problem, we explored making drug and alcohol services available for people who have pending criminal cases through the Affordable Care Act. We have investigated various specialty courts in the state, reviewed felony re-entry programs, and studied the predictive policing technology techniques that our police department uses in their regular CompStat meetings.

Additionally, as a city, we have joined the Department of Justice's Violence Reduction Network, which provides a comprehensive approach to reducing violent crime by using every tool in the Justice Department's toolbox. These resources are used in a targeted, strategic, data-driven way. Through the VRN, the Justice

Department makes available to us the expertise of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the FBI, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF), the U.S. Marshals Service, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), our U.S. Attorney's Office, the federal C.O.P.S. program, and the Office of Violence Against Women. In collaboration with the other cities involved, we have the opportunity to share information and best practices through a variety of vehicles including peer-to-peer exchanges, webinars, and the most up-to-date technological tools available.

Last year Chief Buckner and I were honored to serve on a national Mayor-Police Chief working group to discuss proactive community policing in the aftermath of the issues and tension that came to light in Ferguson, Missouri and other communities around the country. The result of our Working Group was a report we issued focused on the importance of building trust between police and community. It also focused on improving police department practices in a variety of areas and metrics and insuring timely and accurate communication, including assuring to the public comprehensive investigations of police-involved shootings.

Our police chief knows how important it is for our police officers to be a part of the community, interacting with our citizens, so that we may do everything possible to keep our citizens safe. This must be an effort which engages all citizens to assist our police officers in making sure that our streets are safe. Just yesterday it was reported that use of force was down for a fourth year in a row and has decreased 42% since 2009. Combine that with the decrease in Part 1 crime and it tells us that Chief Buckner and his team's approach of proactive, community-oriented policing is working.

In a related area, we have been working with the National League of Cities on juvenile justice reform, having recognized in the past that many of our juvenile arrests were occurring actually during the school day in our schoolhouses. Many of

these issues are issues that should be diverted and we are working on trying to make sure that our young people are not made a part of the criminal justice system when there are other alternatives and diversions available.

Nationally, we have joined the Cities United Initiative and the President's M.B.K., My Brother's Keeper Program and also have teamed up with the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation for the Boy's and Men Opportunity Success Team-BMOST, which is a network of organizations and institutions creating a "better now" for boys and men of color. We have several partners including the Little Rock School District and Arkansas Baptist College and have created mentoring programs through the City's OK program and GEMS which stands for "Girls Empowered by Mentoring Sisterhood." Every week up to 375 young people take advantage of these mentoring programs. Our partners include the faith-based community as well, such as Saint Mark Baptist Church, which is opening a new 50,000 square foot children and youth center.

We have made a serious outreach effort to engage our Hispanic community and to recruit Spanish-speaking police officers. We now have 10 bilingual officers with another 5 currently in the Academy. We recognize it's important to be able to build trust within our various minority communities.

This past year we saw the opening of the 12th Street Station. This building is the largest the City has built in decades. It's over 46,000 square feet and encompasses a full city block. The 12th Street Station has earned a LEED certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, but most importantly it serves as notice to all of our citizens that public safety, revitalization, and economic growth South of Interstate 630 are priorities for the city. It is the largest of our capital projects from the 2011 bond issue. We also are in the midst of remodeling the Josephine Pankey

Community Center to include a police substation in West Little Rock, a long-needed addition for the growth of the population in that part of our City.

This past year the police department added 44 recruits to the department including an officer dedicated to responding to domestic violence situations and we are planning 2 recruit schools in 2016 with a goal of hiring 80 additional officers.

LRFD

A couple of days ago we swore in new fire department recruits, who have now become part of a top-notch organization who in 2015 attained a Class 1 status rating through the Insurance Services Organization (ISO). Our Little Rock Fire Department is one of only 147 departments in the U.S. to achieve this distinction out of 3,000. This resulted from years of hard work and dedication by the men and women of the Little Rock Fire Department. It is important to note that insurance companies use these ratings to establish fire insurance premiums, which generally result in lower costs to our citizens.

The fire department responded to nearly 30,000 fire and emergency calls in 2015. The men and women of the fire department did community outreach to our Hispanic citizens holding a Hispanic Fire Safety Day. Held in conjunction with Cinco de Mayo, smoke alarms were installed in many of their homes. Our firefighters as first responders, save the lives of literally hundreds and hundreds of citizens each year. Virtually 80% of the calls our first responders receive are for life-saving measures. In light of that, the Little Rock Fire Department has created the Crisis Intervention Team in collaboration with other fire service agencies in Central Arkansas to better serve as first responders.

Community Programs

Our Community Programs Department continues to work on a comprehensive Master Plan for children, youth and families that is focused on improving and updating the programs and services that Little Rock's young citizens really need to thrive. A series of community forums have been held to identify priority needs and a Master Plan Advisory Committee has been assisting in making recommendations. Additionally, our Community Programs Department has been working closely with currently funded providers to develop and implement a Youth Program Quality Initiative so that we can better determine the level of effectiveness of our current programs and find ways to improve. The City continues to show its dedication to Prevention and Intervention Programs by continuing to spend \$5.5 million each year on programs that include after school programs, youth intervention for highly at risk individuals, mentoring programs, skill certification, and felony re-entry – all of which are part of the services currently being provided.

I am very proud that the City and several of its departments, such as Public Works, Fleet Services, the Zoo, Housing, and LRPD, along with our contract partners, Goodwill and Our House have placed 304 ex-offenders in various employment programs or permanent jobs.

Public Works

In 2015 the City responded to 130,420 requests for city services that utilized our enhanced 3-1-1 system. Of these, 7,700 were to the Public Works Operations staff who also cleaned 25,000 curb miles of streets. Our Public Works Department successfully administered a sidewalk replacement program using disadvantaged citizens and felons re-entering the work force installing 4,570 linear feet of sidewalks in Little Rock. This past year the staff coordinated the resurfacing of 94 street segments of our resurfacing program. These 94 segments accounted for a total

of 30 miles of city streets that were asphalted and resurfaced this past year. In 2016 we will continue work toward the goal of completing all of the design work for the remaining bond and sales tax projects and construction contracts. To date, 64% of all the projects in the current street and drainage improvement program have gone to construction.

Parks and Recreation

Our Parks and Recreation Department has been extremely busy this past year with the design and construction of a 22,000 square foot state-of-the-art West Central Community Center. It is targeted to be completed by the end of this year. When completed, the facility will serve as a major focus and community resource for the west central area of the City.

Our Parks department applied for and received several grants including a \$150,000 grant from the Coca-cola Company for major improvements to the skate park facility at Kanis Park. This is a unique program that has allowed skaters, in collaboration with the National Recreation and Parks Association, and the City to work together to design a park facility which will be the envy of many cities (and skaters) throughout the country. I look forward to joining Director Wright at the first competition.

The Parks Department continued its efforts to improve our trail system and completed a major link that connects the Southwest Community Center, the Southwest Unit of the Department of Health, and the Department of Human Services of Pulaski County to the surrounding neighborhoods.

Of course our Little Rock Marathon effort experienced another banner year with increases in both registration and revenue. We not only award to largest, but now

the heaviest medal on Earth. We had almost 13,000 participants in our Little Rock Marathon Weekend earlier this month from every state and 27 countries!

I am also particularly excited that our volunteer park ranger program has been re-energized and that we currently have 14 volunteer park rangers including a new junior volunteer ranger program.

Our Little Rock Zoo is a wonderful amenity of the City and tourist attraction for the community. Almost 300,000 citizens visited our zoo last year making it one of the largest tourist attractions in the state. We partnered with the San Diego Zoo Global Academy and Arkansas Children's Hospital to develop educational videos for use by Children's Hospital and the Ronald McDonald House. The Zoo was happy to announce the birth of 3 new penguin chicks this past year to contribute to the conservation program instituted at the Zoo. 2015 witnessed upgrades to the elephant exhibit and I am looking forward to the opening of our new Arkansas Heritage Farm Exhibit next month, which will give some of our city folks an opportunity to find out what life in the rural parts of our state is all about!

Housing

Our Housing and Neighborhood Programs department has continued to fill the vacant code enforcement officer positions that have been authorized through our LR Cent Initiative. Importantly, we have added Spanish speaking officers, with a goal to be able to better communicate with our Spanish speaking community. We have developed a Mobile Home Inspection team to address the safe housing needs in mobile home parks and we are using a new material called Secure View, which is a clear material, to board and secure vacant structures. Importantly, we have dedicated funding to help homeowners bring their houses up to code and continue to provide much needed home improvements through a wonderful volunteer program called

World Changers. Each summer a group of several dozen young college age kids come to Little Rock from all over the country to provide a variety of renovation repairs to homeowners who are retired, disabled or on limited, fixed incomes. It has been a true Godsend to have World Changers with us these several years and I am happy that in addition to World Changers we are now going to receive a National Civilian Community Corps Team from AmeriCorps. This team will be focusing its efforts on similar activities and weatherizing many of the same types of homes. They will be here in April and will continue through July. We hope to continue this program with additional NCCC teams which come to us out of Denver, Colorado. This National Community Service program should allow us to do similar types of work including the weatherization of homes throughout the year.

This past year, we saw the development and establishment of a Property Assessed Clean Energy Committee. Known as PACE, this committee is developing a creative financing mechanism to allow commercial property owners to borrow project costs for improved energy related capital expenses and pay for them as an assessment on their property tax bill with the savings that have been procured paying the assessment. It is a very flexible process that will finance all sorts of renewable energy and energy efficiency capital improvements. We have dedicated PACE commissioners who are working very hard to ensure the public is aware of how beneficial the use of this financing mechanism can be.

One of the more unique and interesting studies that we have conducted this past year, as we continue to explore and look for ways to redevelop the urban core of the city located primarily east of Interstate 40 and south of Interstate 630, is the use of a study tool called “ReLocal” which evaluates sustainable long range neighborhood strategies pertaining to the built environment. This report provides a challenge to the city, in that it identified 13% of all the buildings in the area as being vacant, with

22% of the areas in the study comprised of vacant lots. Thus the challenge that this 35% represents is to find ways to invest our scarce resources in locations that have the greatest impact. The ReLocal tool is designed to support a targeted planning approach and facilitate strategic decision making by assessing neighborhood strengths and challenges, identifying current physical conditions, and analyzing neighborhood trends. It is my hope we can take many of these vacant lots and make them available to home builders for re-development. I want to thank the many volunteers who helped make this effort possible. I know this will be an important tool for our Preservation Implementation Committee that is working hard toward full implementation of our citywide Historic Preservation Plan.

Importantly the report offers an array of database recommendations for each vacant building and vacant lot for development in the intermediate term of 1 to 5 years and it also establishes a flexible framework for local decision making for multiple entities with different roles and priorities. It is important that we as a city engage our neighborhoods and our citizens in how we can continue to re-invest in these very important neighborhoods. With our limited Home dollars through CDBG, our Community Development division was able to sell 9 new and rehabbed homes in partnership with our local Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDO's).

Speaking of housing, I want to talk about our Homeless Day Resource Center – Jericho Way and about the wonderful work that DePaul is performing for those less fortunate, who find themselves without a shelter over their head and often times without a job or food to eat. As you know Jericho Way has been providing breakfast, lunch, showers, laundry, computers, phone access and case management to our city's homeless population. In the 9 months that DePaul has been on board they have served over 1,737 individuals. 76% who are men and 24% who are women. Jericho

Way and DePaul is making a real difference. Over 104 of our homeless have found employment and over 226 have been housed due to the efforts of the staff of DePaul. Hundreds of volunteers have contributed to this effort and nearly 30,000 meals have been served. I look forward to the new programs in the offing which include providing further identification documents, support services for the newly housed, new transitional housing and workforce employment opportunities.

Sustainability

I am convinced that the City of Little Rock is a municipal leader in implementing sustainable practices that are good for the environment. In addition to the PACE legislation, which was passed by the Board this past year, the city board also passed a Complete Streets Ordinance and a voluntary Low Impact Volunteer Development ordinance. The Complete Streets Ordinance will integrate a variety of complete street concepts dealing with vehicular and non-vehicular use, pedestrian and bicycle access in our transportation planning and road construction efforts. The Low Impact Development Ordinance offers developers additional construction options for dealing with storm water run-off in a more sustainable way.

We have also developed an organic waste pilot program with UAMS and other hospitals in the area to recycle organic waste from hospital cafeterias. And we conducted the annual City-Wide clean-up where 750 volunteers from across the city held clean-up activities in their respective neighborhoods.

Our Sustainability Summit continues to be an excellent gathering of several hundred individuals who recognize the importance of a variety of sustainable and environmentally sensitive practices. In 2015, 17 specific goals were developed for

a 2020 roadmap. The city and its many partners are committed to making these goals happen over the next five years.

Working with the Hunger Relief Alliance, with Director Kathy Webb as its Executive Director, we will soon be ready to have a mobile food market roll down our streets offering fresh produce to our citizens who live in our food deserts. This past weekend the Friends of Fourche Creek along with the City of Little Rock and many other partners met to clean up Interstate Park and Fourche Creek, a wonderful inner-city waterway. It is a unique ecosystem right in the heart of our city, which needs our attention and it is a tremendous asset to the City. If anybody would like to take a float trip with me I would be happy to be your tour guide.

Working Together in the Community

Another area of outreach in our community is a program that has been working at our Southwest Community Center with our Spanish-speaking residents. I would like to compliment City Director Joan Adcock for her efforts in bringing together our Hispanic community with a program called “Working Together in the Community.” This is a group of individuals, business owners, government officials, educators, neighborhood association members, and concerned citizens who want to unite communities and make neighborhoods better. Many of our Hispanic citizens live in Southwest Little Rock. The group meets weekly at the Southwest Community Center with conversations had in both English and Spanish. Sessions include familiarizing our Hispanic community with the importance of public safety and how our police officers can be of assistance to them. It includes education about our resource centers and what they can do for our neighborhoods, and how code enforcement is an important element of neighborhood stabilization. The meetings also include discussion on acquiring business licenses, zoning, construction permits, and landlord and tenant responsibilities. This has been a great

opportunity to bring our Hispanic residents together with the City in a very direct way, which is reaping very positive results and making our neighborhoods stronger. This year we have high hopes to implement a municipal ID program, which will greatly aid in the providing of City services and benefits to the community.

Non-discrimination Ordinance

Another area where the City of Little Rock has distinguished itself and shown true leadership this past year was with the passage of the City's non-discrimination ordinance – the first ordinance passed in a major city in the State of Arkansas, which declared that it is the policy of the City to not discriminate in its employment and personnel practices for a variety of recognized constitutional protections including sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, and political opinion or affiliation. Importantly, it is also the declared public policy of the City that all contracts for goods and services provided to the City shall contain a clause stating that the contracting parties shall not discriminate based on those protections including sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability. All bid and proposal requests for City contracts include notification that such a clause and a requirement will be agreed to and followed prior to execution. (I want to commend the Board and the citizens for pushing for this important safeguard). Based on our leadership, many cities and counties throughout the state have adopted this language and passed similar ordinances. It is important for us to recognize that all citizens regardless of who they love, who they care about and who they spend their time with shall be treated with equal dignity and respect.

Quality of Life

Soon we will begin phase II of the development of the Creative Corridor. This is a design plan centered on arts and culture and now science and technology, which has won ten state, national and international awards, most recently receiving an Arkansas Business Cities of Distinction Award for Main Street preservation. We also have witnessed the establishment and development of our Tech Park in the Main Street Corridor, efforts to rejuvenate the Financial District of our city, and a new focus on an area now called East Village on the East side of Interstate 30 between 6th and 9th Streets. Neighborhood revitalization continues to be exciting downtown in the Quapaw Quarter District, the Governor's Mansion District, and now the Dunbar Historic District. Activities such as the Main Street Food Truck Festival, the Literary Festival, RiverFest, Pops on the River, Race for the Cure, the Cornbread Festival, the Little Rock Marathon, Movies in the Park, 2nd Friday Art Nights, and so many more all speak to the collective excitement and energy of a downtown with a strong beating heart. I am convinced that when the core of downtown is strong the rest of the city remains strong.

Cities are defined by their arts and culture. They give character and soul to a city, which allow us to reflect on those human elements that make us smile, make us laugh, make us cry. So, in addition to the wonderful museums we have downtown including the City's Museum of Discovery, MacArthur Military Museum, and the wonderful state-run museums such as the Old State House, Historic Arkansas Museum, and the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center, we have the wonderful Arkansas Arts Center, which is now been injected with new life and the ability to provide a 21st Century home to a world-class art collection. Soon, we will be seeing plans of a dramatically renovated Arts Center in MacArthur Park, the City's first park, which will carry us on to the next century with wonderful exhibits showing the passion and brilliance of some of the most amazing artists in the

world. Not only will this bring in new tourist dollars, but it will also provide a wonderful redevelopment and integration of the Arts Center and the Military Museum into MacArthur Park and the surrounding neighborhood. I am truly looking forward with excitement to visioning what this new Arts Center will look like.

Likewise, our Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau has spearheaded the \$68 million renovation of Robinson Center Auditorium. Styled as Robinson Center's Second Act, the Joe T. Robinson Memorial Auditorium, which has long been a Central Arkansas landmark and is on the National Register of Historic Places, will be re-opening in the fall of this year with a state-of-the-art performance hall that will be truly transformational, and a magnificent new conference center overlooking the Arkansas River. The Advertising and Promotion Commission and the LRCVB have been instrumental in capitalizing in the past 10 years on what the opening of the William J. Clinton Presidential Center has brought to our City. It has resulted in an amazing amount of redevelopment, revitalization, expansion, and growth. Since the Center's opening, approximately \$3.3 billion in development projects have been contracted. Little Rock's annual tourism tax revenue over the ten year period has increased by 81% and more than 3 million visitors from around the globe have visited the Clinton Library and our downtown area.

There is no question that the travel and tourism industry is recognized internationally as a major economic force and is Arkansas's number 2 economic development engine. Little Rock serves as the State's largest tourism hub with annual visitor trips increasing by 5%, attributing to 5.7 million annual travelers in Pulaski County and total visitor spending increasing by 14%. Meetings, conventions, sporting events, motor coach and tour groups continue to increase the

number of hotel room nights in our City, which have led to the addition of five new hotel properties and increasing our local room inventory by 6.8%. This has also led to numerous hotel renovations in the past several years including the Marriott Hotel's \$16 million recent renovation and the DoubleTree Hotel's expected \$6 million renovation in 2016. All of this spells for exciting developments here in our capital city.

On the horizon for the future is a resolution of the I-30 Crossing project and its impact on our downtown. It is a decision of great importance – one which will impact on this city for the next 50+ years. It is a decision of monumental importance. I would like the public to know that I along with our City Board of Directors, and our staff are all working very hard to find a plan that will allow this city to continue to grow and prosper and connect our various neighborhoods in unique and uplifting ways. I continue to remain optimistic that such a goal can be accomplished.

As for the Arkansas River Trail, certainly the construction of the Broadway Bridge and the long-challenging efforts to traverse the Dillard's gap are projects on my agenda. We have had many ongoing discussions and I am hopeful that we will be able to see an agreed upon plan – and positive progress this year.

I'm excited that the U.S. Navy will be commissioning the U.S.S. Little Rock later this year and that a Commissioning Committee is being formed here in the city to help celebrate this new Littoral Combat Ship equipped with 21st Century technology that carries our City's name throughout the world as our military deploys in the name of freedom.

Finally, let us take a break this afternoon to see the wonderful Little Rock Trojans basketball team play Purdue. I am counting on the luck of the Irish for a big win.

Certainly, UALR and its many academic programs and in particular its basketball teams, both men and women, this year have given Little Rock an additional identity throughout the country.

In particular, let us wish them success and let us wish our City good luck and God speed with the following Irish blessing.

“May today we not only celebrate the luck of the Irish, but may we celebrate the luck in all of us.

The celebrations in our life for the community we live in,

The path of our teachers and the foresight of our leaders to make each and every day a better place to be.

The City of Little Rock is and will continue to grow and be a better place for you and me.”