

2017 State of the City Speech Address
Mayor Mark Stodola
March 29, 2017 – Noon
West Central Community Center

Welcome

Hello and welcome. Thank you all for being here today and I am honored to have you join me to present the State of Our City. To my colleagues on the Board of Directors: thank you for your continued service to the City of Little Rock. I am truly proud to serve alongside you. To the hardworking employees in every city department: thank you for everything you do for Little Rock's residents, businesses, and visitors. Our city manager, Bruce Moore says it often and I see it every day, you are truly a family and that bond shows through in the work you do. It has been a rough couple of weeks for many of us with the loss of our friends Houston Metzler and Toya Robinson, but they and their families remain in our thoughts and prayers. To our businesses, small and large, to our non-profit partners, to our faith-based leaders and to the countless volunteers who give your time – thank you for all that you contribute to the life of our community, a 2016 Volunteer Community of the Year I might add. We truly could not do all that we do without your help. And to the citizens of the City of Little Rock: thank you for giving me the privilege of serving as your mayor.

You know, this past year has truly been a year of construction in the City of Little Rock. We've seen the completion of the Broadway Bridge, the opening of the Robinson Center's Second Act, we cut the ribbon on the Josephine Pankey Community Center and Police Substation, we opened a state-of-the-art \$12 million ambulance facility, moved into a new Technology Park, and of course christened this beautiful West Central Community Center. Thank you City Director Doris Wright and your colleagues who voted to approve the construction of this center for the residents and children in this area of the city.

It has been a very good year. Of course, there are always challenges to tackle. Today, I want to talk with you about some metaphorical construction work we have been doing as a city these past few years. Our foundation is strong, the frameworks are being expanded and upgraded, and now the work remains to make sure that we are investing in our citizens so that the capital city is the crown jewel it is poised to be.

Foundation

All good building projects have to start with a strong foundation and we have set out, together, through various efforts to shore up our City foundation.

You will recall that in 2008 during the recession, we refunded and extended our park bonds to accomplish improvements in every ward in our city – including the acquisition of Western Hills, a facelift for War Memorial Park; soccer fields out West; and major improvements to Crump Park in the South End.

Then in 2011, we came together as a community and realized that we simply could not be the community we wanted to be without an additional investment in infrastructure, streets, drainage, police officers, fire fighters, the West Little Rock fire station, the 12th Street Station, and more.

We've seen millions of dollars invested in infrastructure projects that improve our city that would not have been possible without the support of our citizens who love our city. Together, that foundation has been stabilized one

penny at a time and we still have half a percent less in local sales tax than virtually all of the cities in Northwest Arkansas and many of our immediately surrounding cities.

Part of the foundation for a city is also a healthy heart. Downtown, in the heart of the City, we are seeing a renaissance. Take a moment with me and picture yourself walking East on Markham from City Hall. Twenty years ago you would have seen a row of mostly vacant warehouses and buildings. Now picture it today. We have a brand new iconic Broadway Bridge with improved pedestrian and bicycle facilities soon to open connecting to our Arkansas River Trail. There is a world-class performing arts venue in the Robinson Center with a brand new convention and meeting space overlooking the Arkansas River and a newly renovated Doubletree Hotel. Restaurants and businesses abound. Institutions like the Old Statehouse, Marriott, and Capital Hotel remain. Continue on through a vibrant River Market District and Ottenheimer Hall to the Clinton Presidential Center flanked by Heifer International. Our Statehouse Convention Center is stronger than ever with an annual attendance of 308,931. Now you can look South down Main Street and see inviting streetscapes, outdoor art, renovated historic buildings with restaurants and businesses, and new infill on vacant lots. Beyond that, you can picture SoMa, South Main, an eclectic array of businesses South of I-630. The heart is beating stronger than ever and isn't slowing down any time soon.

Frameworks

Now, once a solid foundation is in place, that allows us to get to work on framing our metaphorical building. What are these frameworks?

Earning a Living

One key framework for the building of a world-class city is the ability of citizens to earn a living. To do this, we first had to weather the Great Recession and I am glad to report that the Little Rock Metro Area unemployment rate now stands at 3.6%, less than half of the 7.4% in 2011 and currently stands in a tie for second lowest in the South. That leaves our unemployment rate lower than all other Southern cities: Nashville, Memphis, Atlanta, New Orleans, Louisville, Chattanooga, Tallahassee, and others. Nationwide, our unemployment rate is lower than that of Des Moines, San Antonio, Dallas Fort Worth, Oklahoma City, Minneapolis St. Paul, Indianapolis, Seattle, Kansas City, Tulsa, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and more.

This economic growth continued in 2016 with the Little Rock metro area adding more than 750 new jobs, over \$25,609,200 in new payroll, and \$43,854,000 in new capital investment. Average wages have grown 28% since 2005 and personal income has grown 25%. In the past year we've seen:

- Federal Express open a 303,000 square foot distribution center – a \$50 million capital investment – that employs 175;
- TY Garments USA close on a building at the Little Rock Port that will be the first Chinese company to manufacture clothing in the U.S. and create 400 new jobs – a \$20 million capital investment;
- Sprint open a Regional Headquarters that brought 100 new full-time employees;
- Envoy Air locate at the airport with a \$2 million investment and 60 new jobs;
- HIA Velo announce that they will be making high-quality bicycles right here in Little Rock with 50 new jobs - HIA stands for "Handmade in America.;"
- LM Windpower expand with their new 44,000 sq. ft. facility at the Port;
- ATA open their new new \$12 million international headquarters keeping them in Little Rock;

- Bank of the Ozarks break ground on their new 180,000 square foot facility to keep up with their phenomenal national growth;
- And we have seen Main Street jump alive with activity with over \$125 million in new private sector investment.
- We also continue to see growth throughout the city in retail with additional construction and stores and restaurants opening at the Gateway Town Center in Southwest Little Rock and other spots throughout the city.

Innovation

You know, as a mayor we love these big projects, but as a 21st Century city we also have to have a framework to breed Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Creativity for the jobs of the 21st Century.

Little Rock is embracing this calling like never before. With the Venture Center and the opening of Phase I of the Technology Park, a \$25 million investment, I look forward to seeing the collaboration and success that is going to come from the collision of ideas between the entrepreneurs, technology companies, artists, and creative talent inhabiting the Creative Corridor on Main Street where soon hundreds will live, work, and play. We have started Phase II of the Low Impact Development streetscape construction adjacent to the Repertory Theatre, Ballet Arkansas is in its new home, and we look forward to the location of a University of Arkansas Executive MBA program in the Corridor in the near future. Housing is being constructed on Main Street and the Donaghey Building is under contract for 155 apartments – all told there will be nearly 400 housing units in the Creative Corridor, truly transforming Main Street into a 24/7 environment where ideas and creativity can flourish.

Now, that’s the “physical framework,” but through the work of the Venture Center, the City, and individual entrepreneurs and companies, an “intellectual and creative framework” is also being built that is going to foster the growth of the city’s new economy in the coming decades. It’s already taking root with Venture Center member companies alone creating 286 jobs and raising \$19 million in capital in just two and a half years. They have served 112 businesses and generated \$12 million in revenue.

One of the most exciting things to happen this past year was the FinTech Accelerator put on by the Venture Center and Fidelity Information Services [FIS] who brought ten companies in from around the world to Little Rock for a rigorous 12-week program designed to accelerate the growth of early-stage financial technology services startups. These companies received access to the FIS C-Suite, intense mentorship from across the city, and \$50,000. Then the top 3 received a further share of half a million in investment dollars. It was an immense success with three of the companies, Pfiter, Mortgage Pier, and Lumo Exchange, choosing to be based in Little Rock permanently. FIS is so committed, FinTech 2.0 will start in May. This year, 295 companies from around the world are competing for the ten coveted spots.

Last year, in an effort to better understand how we as a city and other cities can help with this framework, I conducted the Mayor’s Summit on Entrepreneurship in conjunction with the Kauffman Foundation out of Kansas City. It brought together over 150 local entrepreneurs, economic developers, mayors, and city staff for an open dialogue about the status of our startup ecosystem. You should know that we were one of four cities to be highlighted at Kauffman’s National Entrepreneurship Conference last year – a much appreciated recognition and a testament to the creative genius located here in our capital city.

For too long cities have left innovation to the private sector, but I am proud to tell you that Little Rock is part of a group of cities changing that perception by implementing “Smart Cities” strategies. To that end, we have been selected to be part of a national initiative called What Works Cities, working with cities across the country and

industry experts to enhance our use of data and evidence to engage residents, make government more effective, and improve lives. I am excited about the potential of our new Performance and Innovation Coordinator to help implement these ideas. You will be able to access this growing number of tools through the City's new interactive website, which was launched last year thanks to a great effort from our IT department. You can now find us at www.littlerock.gov. While you are there, you should click on the "E-News" section at the top and sign up for my weekly newsletter – Monday Mornings with the Mayor.

More of our citizens will now be able to access the new website thanks to our ConnectHome initiative, which is helping our city bridge the digital divide by leveraging partners such as the Metropolitan Housing Authority, Clinton Foundation, the Little Rock School District, Best Buy, and others to bring education, hardware, and affordable internet service to our public housing residents in the city. We were thrilled to be able to connect over 200 households to the Internet for the first time, have over 100 residents, including many with school-age children, receive a tablet or computer, and over 200 residents complete digital literacy training. We have even loftier goals for the second year of the program.

I am also working on a new project that will further define us as a smart city and put a wealth of information at the fingertips of residents and visitors, as well as provide strategic tools for our small businesses. Stay tuned this summer for more on this exciting Smart City project.

A Place People Want to Live and Visit

Another key framework for a successful city is positioning ourselves as a place where people want to be – to live, work, raise a family, and to have others visit.

The most tangible stride we made this past year in this regard is the opening...on-time and on-budget...of the completely renovated Robinson Center and concert hall. This gorgeous facility provides the city a world-class performing arts venue, a top-of-the-line convention and meeting space, and does it in the timeless façade of the original Joseph T. Robinson Municipal Auditorium. I look forward to the many new memories made by Little Rock residents in this space and to those happy memories that will be left in the minds of our visitors.

Pulaski County saw plenty of those visitors in 2016. It was a banner year with \$1.8 billion generated in travel spending, a full quarter of the state's total, 6.18 million visitors, 22% of the state's total, 140,500 room nights booked, and a 39% increase in A&P tax collections over the past 10 years.

It's also important for a city to provide quality of life amenities for its residents.

To that end, our Parks and Recreation Department had another stellar year. They successfully achieved re-accreditation through the National Recreation and Park Association and successfully complied with all 151 standards – a fantastic and first time achievement. They are the only accredited Parks and Recreation Department in Arkansas. They also put on another successful marathon with a record 14,000 participants during race weekend...and a \$6 million estimated economic impact, I might add.

The Little Rock Animal Village also had a record year with 1,830 adoptions. Speaking of animals, the Little Rock Zoo welcomed the opening of the new Arkansas Heritage Farm Exhibit in April of last year in conjunction with Heifer International, which allows us city slickers and our children to know a little more about rural farm life. They also acquired several new animals including a new gorilla to go along with Trudy who will turn 61 this June making her the oldest living gorilla in captivity in the world. What a fantastic place to spend a day...or an evening at our Little Rock Zoo!

Little Rock has in recent years made sustainability a purposeful part of building our great quality of life. Our Sustainability Commission, Bike Friendly Community Committee, and Keep Little Rock Beautiful, among others, are volunteers who have done yeomen's work in helping us be a leader in the South. This year we were thrilled to be designated as a Bronze Bicycle Friendly Community by the League of American Cyclists. There is still much work to do, but this is a designation that took a tremendous amount of effort and advocacy from many in the community. Tomorrow, the Sustainability Commission will present its 8th Annual Sustainability Summit where the Sustain the Rock Awards will be presented and an update on our 2020 Sustainability Roadmap will be given. One thing that is sure to be highlighted is the Fresh2You Mobile Food Market, which we launched this past year. It is now rolling through the streets of Little Rock providing access to fresh fruits and vegetables in some of our most vulnerable neighborhoods where food deserts exist. This collaborative effort by the city with Rock Region Metro, the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, Blue Cross and Blue Shield, and Mosaic Church proves great things can happen when we work together.

Sense of Place

This metaphorical building of ours won't do anyone any good if its occupants don't have pride and a sense of ownership going forward. Another important framework for a city is the sense of place its citizens have in their homes and in their neighborhoods. Our city directors have always understood that.

That's why when stimulus funds became available, we chose to invest those directly into neighborhoods – particularly those in the area of Little Rock Central High School. And change doesn't happen overnight, but we are slowly seeing a sense of pride resurface as historic homes, in every sense of the word, are being renovated and neighborhood activity returns. This September, we will again welcome the world to that area of town to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the bravery of the Little Rock Nine and we will celebrate the progress we have made and be open and reflective about the progress that remains to be done.

We also continue our work to help make other Little Rock neighborhoods shine. The Wright Avenue Neighborhood Action Plan passed last year by the Board is growing in momentum thanks to the tireless and collaborative work of many of the citizens who live there. Plans call for improved sidewalks, tree-lined streets, improved lighting, street banners, narrower curb cuts, and improved facades to the many significant structures that remain along Wright Avenue.

We are also continuing to see progress in the 12th Street Corridor thanks to citizen involvement and our Invest Health and Jump Start initiatives. The Invest Health Initiative seeks to connect health related factors to the increased risk of crime, domestic violence, and the need to improve the streets and sidewalks in the area. The \$2.8 million from the Jump Start initiative through Metroplan is targeted to tackle these issues.

Our Landbank is starting to show progress in key neighborhoods across the city. The Landbank, administered through a citizen commission, seeks to bank vacant lots and homes requiring significant rehabilitation so that the City can spearhead revitalization in the neighborhoods in which they are located. Innovative approaches to neighborhood revitalization are being initiated by the City in other challenged areas with the City's acquisition and investment in rehabilitating houses in the Stephens and Love neighborhoods and now others are following suit.

Neighborhoods also need day-to-day upkeep and our Public Works Department has responded to the task. Our Sidewalk Replacement Program replaced 54,346 square feet or 10,869 linear feet of sidewalks in 2016 utilizing two felony Re-Entry Crews. They also repaved 2049.72 miles of roads! They are helped by our 311 system, which is our system that allows citizens to request services, whether by calling 311 on their phone or now utilizing the

continually improving 311 “App.” Our 311 department handled almost 152,381 phone calls in the 311 center last year and a total of 106,889 requests were entered during 2016.

Public Safety

Yesterday at Rotary, 240 police officers and fire fighters were recognized for outstanding service to our citizens, for acts of bravery, and for saving lives. Listening to the real life stories of these men and women selflessly doing these jobs should make us very proud of these professionals and the sheer dedication they have to public service. It is no wonder that the LRPD is one of only 100 departments in the country to be nationally accredited of the 1000’s of police departments in the nation and soon our LRPD will receive its national accreditation.

Our ISO Class 1 Fire Department continues to shine, answering 30,164 alarms last year and almost as importantly delivered 1,371 fire prevention programs including Fire Safety Day where thousands of children got to spend a day learning from their heroes and participating in educational activities. For those of you who don’t know, ISO or Insurance Services Office, Class 1 means that our department is one of only 144 to earn a “superior property fire protection” distinction from the organization and it means lower insurance rates for our citizens.

I want to address the issue of crime for a moment. From 2007, when many of us took office, we saw an overall decrease in crime through 2015 of 18%. We went from 19,270 Part I incidents to 15,699. However, in 2016 we saw a 2% overall increase. Misdemeanor thefts constitutes 6,340 of those offenses, which is nearly 40% of the total. Particularly vexing is that while violent crime, which constitutes 14% of the overall crime reports, was down 1%, homicides were up 35%. Also troubling were increases in stolen vehicles and auto break-ins.

The use of social media allows us now to know about virtually every crime reported or suspicious activity occurring. So, as a city it is important for us to be transparent and tell our citizens what we are doing about it. Public safety is our number one responsibility.

So, what are we doing about it? Recognizing our police officer shortage, we have embarked on an aggressive plan of recruitment. We have shortened the application process, amended the interview structure; we are holding four recruit classes this year; we are aggressively going after police officers in other jurisdictions (currently we have 36 who have applied); offering financial incentive bonuses to become an LRPD officer; and additional bonuses to live in the city. I and my colleagues on the Board of Directors are absolutely committed to eliminating our police officer shortage while also making sure standards are not lowered and the recruits reflect the diversity of our community.

So what are we doing to stem the tide of violent crime? Of course it is nearly impossible to predict when or where the next battery or homicide will occur. Regardless, this year LRPD has mobilized a 16-member Violence Reduction Team. Since their inception six weeks ago, they have arrested 126 suspects; have filed 348 felony charges; seized narcotics in 31 cases, recovered 10 stolen autos; and confiscated 28 weapons. Quite a record in that period of time.

The Department is turning to technology as well, using the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network, or NIBAN, to analyze shell casings recovered from different crime scenes or shots fired calls. This information is provided to the Major Crimes Division for analysis and has already led to the arrest of suspects in two pending homicides. The Department is also using “eTrace,” which allows the police to trace the ownership of weapons that we have stored, seized, or recovered.

Reports of shots fired are being tracked by location and neighborhood, to be routed to patrol units. "Contact teams" of police officers are now being used to saturate these areas.

The police department has vastly increased the use of Field Interview Reports as a tool to share between various divisions along with mapping every suspicious vehicle or suspicious person report. All of these tools are routed to our five crime analysts in our Major Crimes/Special Investigations Unit.

We are also an active member of the Department of Justice's Violence Reduction Network – where teams of national experts provide advice on new ways to prevent crime.

It is important to note that violent crime is not widespread. It is in targeted zip codes and neighborhoods – focused pockets of the city. It is not a mystery. The areas are characterized by poverty; fragile families; limited access to jobs; easy access to guns and drugs; where a specter of mistrust and fear is constant.

Even with crippling structural issues, change can occur. But it first has to come from within, from the citizens who live in these neighborhoods. We need your help. People in the community know who are committing these senseless acts of violence. They need to step forward and help our police solve these crimes. That's why I am calling today on citizens who know information about a crime to come forward and make a difference. And I'm also calling on those citizens who know of someone going down the wrong path, to say something! Whether it's to the person directly or to someone who can get them some help. This means encouraging that nephew, or grandson, or friend who you know is up to no good and carries a weapon to put it up or turn it into authorities. Let's get these guns off the streets!

Despite the \$5.5 million we spend each year on Prevention and Intervention Programs which place youth intervention counselors in various neighborhoods throughout the city. We need more; and we need more volunteers and help from the community.

On the stolen vehicle and auto breaking and entering front, we saw substantial increases last year. I, along with city directors attended multiple meetings with neighborhood associations and citizens urging them to take all of their valuables out of their vehicles and to lock their cars. Most of our stolen vehicles and auto B&E's are based on easy opportunity – unlocked cars and valuables or keys or key fobs left in the car.

Oftentimes, these crimes are committed by groups of people from other towns. Our detectives have arrested several individuals from North Pulaski County and Jefferson County. One prolific individual, Barry London, was arrested on February 21 on 20 B&E's with another 10-15 that are probably going to be attributed to him, along with a couple of burglaries.

LRPD has authorized B&E auto details with overtime pay for both uniform and plain clothes officers. And department-wide in all divisions – Downtown, Northwest, and Southwest – a report card is being given to our citizens. These officers as they patrol neighborhoods are checking to see if cars are locked or if valuables are left in sight and a pass/fail report card is being given and left on the windshield.

Here is an example. You see this report card was given by Officer Bonner to Clinton School Dean Skip Rutherford. He passed on March 21, 2017. Again, if we all work together we can see a reduction in these numbers.

Investments in People

Most importantly, all these government structures are designed and built as an investment in our people. These systems are meant to engage and offer support to the people who need and depend on us. So, whether it is fixing potholes and improving streets for that everyday drive to work, or whether it is caring for the homeless through Jericho Way, providing case management and helping the least of us with supportive housing and finding a job. All of this really matters because it is an investment in our people.

Our biggest investment needs to be in our children and their education. We know that if we are going to truly excel as a city, then we need a framework for our young people to excel in now and equip themselves to be future leaders. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "If you want the most for this generation, you must focus on the next generation." That is why we continue to spend \$5.5 million yearly on Youth Intervention and Prevention programs. That is why we developed a new Youth Master Plan to ensure these programs are working. That's why we are employing over 600 young people every summer, giving them their first job and teaching them about responsibility and accountability – a program that received a National City Livability Award from the U.S. Conference of Mayors. That is why we have teamed up with our Little Rock School District on programs such as "Love Your School" – currently in eight elementary schools and addressing the childhood obesity epidemic. That is why we put firefighter and police officer programs in the School District's Metropolitan vo-tech center. That is why every year we recognize our National Merit Semi-finalists at City Hall each year, and that's why we need to vote to extend our Little Rock school millage in May.

The battles over turf, control, and power need to be set aside concerning this election because it is not about the adults, it is about the children. This vote is simply to extend the current bond extension, which will raise \$160 million without a tax increase for long overdue upgrades to every school in the district including a new Southwest Little Rock high school. Our children deserve this and we as adults need to deliver. When schools do well, the community does well. It really, really matters.

Embracing the diversity in our community also really matters. Extending a welcoming and open embrace to our burgeoning Hispanic population really matters if we want a safer community. We need this group of our citizens to trust the police – it will make our city safer. Thank you to Joan Adcock for her Working Together in the Community Group. Regardless of what happens in Washington, D.C., these are our neighbors/citizens who live with us and most importantly, are raising their families with us.

Despite our low unemployment rate, pockets of poverty exist in many areas of our city. This is often marked by houses that are boarded up or condemned or in need of great repair. So, it is vitally important we find creative ways to address these indices of poverty. Last year, as mayor, I worked with the Corporation for National and Community Service to design an AmeriCorps program directed toward helping the elderly and citizens on fixed incomes with their utility bills by instituting a weatherization program where AmeriCorp volunteers come and check for air leaks, seal cracks, and insulate homes. Last year, 41 elderly homeowners were helped in this way. Often, tears of joy welled in their eyes as they thanked the city and its young volunteers for this help. This year, a team of 11 is on the ground and they have contacted 120 Little Rock residents, completed 80 visual walk-throughs, reported 30 gas leaks, and completed weatherization on over 35 homes. Related to this, the City received an AmeriCorps Planning Grant that will allow us to develop a program to expand our current efforts and engage members in direct service in three areas – safety, energy efficiency, and housing and neighborhood revitalization. We are hopeful that our proposal for this full-time grant will be accepted and we will soon have 10 full-time and 20 half-time AmeriCorps members at work in seven targeted areas of the city creating personal safety plans, addressing security gaps, improving energy efficiency and rehabilitating homes. This summer, the

city, partnering with World Changers will also again provide much needed home repairs to approximately 35 more elderly homeowners.

On the economic mobility front, our Workforce Development Board each year promotes the use of the Earned Income Tax Credit and provides free tax preparation. This year so far we have had 300 citizens take advantage of these services. On average, they have received \$2,500 in return. However, it is estimated that we have over 4,000 individuals who are eligible. We need to continue to publicize this program more so that all who are eligible take advantage and put these dollars back into our community.

Our Community Development Block Grant money assisted 155 homeowners with much needed repairs. These funds also provided medical assistance through a partnership with CHI St. Vincent Health System to 7,711 persons and regularly served 222 homebound senior citizens with hot meals through our Meals on Wheels program.

I mention these programs and how they help our people because this funding from the federal government is proposed to be eliminated by the Trump Administration. The Trump Administration also proposes to eliminate the AmeriCorps programs I just mentioned. We cannot let this happen. Other areas proposed for cuts or elimination include EDA grants and TIGER grants such as those we have received at the Port; COPS funding that our police department relies on; the Minority Business Development Agency; Low Income Energy Assistance; the National Endowment for the Arts; the National Institute for the Humanities (public radio and public television); and many, many more.

We must urge Congress, Republicans and Democrats alike, to reject this approach and listen to cities who send billions of dollars to Washington each year. One of my roles as mayor is to speak out both here in this state and nationally on policies that threaten the well-being of our citizens.

I am honored to serve in a leadership role with the National League of Cities where as its president in November I will be speaking out about policies that are not only affecting Little Rock, but also affect cities in the entire country – all 19,000 of them. I would not have achieved this important role if it weren't for the management and staff of the City; my colleagues on the city board; the programs we have created, which have brought Little Rock national recognition; and the several cities and towns in Arkansas who benefit from the wonderful programs provided by the National League of Cities.

Now, as the president moves on to tax reform, the tax exemption for municipal bonds will be threatened. If this exemption is eliminated, it means projects such as the Robinson Center renovation would never have occurred or would have cost local citizens millions of dollars more. The same with our street and drainage bonds, park bonds, and bonds that were issued for our emergency communications tower that 5,000 public safety personnel depend on. These issues before Congress affect each and every one of us and every city in America. Rest assured that I will speak out and lend my voice to do everything possible to ensure that vital programs are continued.

Another critically important issue both before our state legislature and the Congress deals with closing the online sales tax loophole. Nationally, \$23 billion in owed sales taxes go uncollected from our online sales transactions every year. The dollar growth from the actual 2013 figure of \$263 billion nationally to the forecast of \$414 billion for 2018 is 57.4%. For Little Rock, over a 36 month period from 2011-2013, \$2.3 million went uncollected. With online sales growing at a clip of 11% by 2018 the city will be losing over \$1 million yearly in uncollected and owed sales taxes.

Congress must take action to level the playing field between online and brick and mortar retailers. Online retailers enjoy a 5 to 10% advantage by not collecting the already existing tax. Main Street retailers cannot keep up as a result of this growing disadvantage. The ripple effect in lost jobs and revenue will threaten our communities sustainability.

Our legislature can help fix this problem too by passing SB140, which requires online sellers grossing more than \$100,000 to collect state and local sales tax, once the U.S. Supreme Court rules and by passing HB1388, which will require online sellers to send an annual notice of all purchases made. Passage of the two bills will help all 500 cities and towns in Arkansas.

Closing

As a city, we are defined by how we tackle our challenges. By working together as an active and engaged citizenry we can also be defined by our successes. Failure should not be an option. Failure cannot be an option.

We will be defined as a city by how we treat our people, how we provide opportunities to men, women, and children to learn, to grow, and to excel.

We will also be defined as a city by how we treat the least among us – how we treat the homeless; how we treat our immigrant community; and how we embrace equality regardless of race, gender, or social or economic status.

This is how we build our city. This is how we build a better future for our future. This is how we will make Little Rock the next great American city in the South. Let's keep moving and working together. Thank you and God bless our city and its people.