

## **Introduction**

### **Public Safety**

2017 proved to be a challenging year on the public safety front. While we saw a 5.3% increase in violent crime, property crime was down 3/4%. Our overall increase was only 0.43%.

Faced with police officer shortages, I am happy to announce that those have largely been eliminated. We hired 81 new officers in 2017. With 25 vacancies at the end of 2017, we started a new recruit class of 18 in February. We developed a new and faster recruitment process and still reported under 17,000 UCR part one crimes to the FBI for 2017. This makes 6 years out of the last 10 that we have recorded under 17,000. By way of comparison, in 1994 we recorded over 28,000.

Our Violent Crime Apprehension Team (VCAT) has been very busy taking criminals off the street. Since their inception in February of last year – 1113 people have been arrested resulting in over 2100 felony charges. 66 stolen vehicles have been recovered and 165 weapons have been seized. Over 253 pounds of marijuana have been confiscated, along with hundreds of grams of cocaine and methamphetamine and hundreds of illegal opioids. Our joint task force GET Rock has recently taken 49 criminals and gang members off of the streets.

Importantly, “Little Rock for Life” was launched in July, a multi-purposed approach to decrease violence and an action plan to re-build neighborhoods investing in our community and our people.

In addition to our prevention and intervention programs; street teams are engaging with young people in the streets, attempting to prevent violence before it starts and referring them to mentoring and job training programs.

Re-entry programs have been expanded; and we have aggressively partnered with Goodwill; Our House and our Workforce Development Board on felony re-employment programs. Our Youthbuild program is teaching young people carpentry skills and a \$1.5 million Department of Labor grant is being used to train and equip 150 recently released felons with job skills and soft skill training so they can successfully re-enter the community. Over 1200 Little Rock residents have enrolled in the City's Re-entry Program, 375 last year. 37 have been hired into our City Re-entry training program and placed in departments throughout the city.

Our AmeriCorps Neighborhood Safety program is targeting seven hot spot neighborhoods with safety assessments to make their homes secure, conducting weatherization improvements to save our citizens money and providing exterior house repairs all designated to improve the neighborhoods where they are located.

So far in 2018, it appears our efforts are achieving some success. Through March 20<sup>th</sup> our violent crime is down 25% from last year and our property crime is down 21%.

## **Education**

Education is critical to the reduction of crime. We have to work with our federal, state and local partners to expand access to education...particularly early childhood education, and career and technical training at the high school and post-secondary levels.

We need to ask the tough questions like – does a college degree get you what it used to? How do we create and support apprenticeships and alternative pathways to higher-wage

jobs that don't require college degrees in fields such as construction and plumbing and electrical work? How do we support entrepreneurs in high tech AND low tech fields like food service and hospitality and entertainment? How do we ensure our children get a quality education, no matter their zip code or their families' income?

As a city we have been engaged in multiple ways with our Little Rock School District. We have school resource officers in every middle school and high school. We are teaching healthy nutrition and exercise in our elementary schools through our Love Your School program. The City's police and fire departments are teaching future new recruit hopefuls in the school district's Vo-Tech program. The Black Police Officers Association is beginning mentoring of young students at Watson Elementary and the City's OK Program and its mentors are reaching out to two hundred at risk youth attending our middle and high schools.

The City's summer recreation and education programs are located at schools within the District. We are working with the administration on the new Southwest Little Rock High School (Go Griffins!). The District, working with Rock Region Metro, is providing bus passes anywhere throughout the city to LRSD students and the library is providing ID's to allow students to access additional data-based resources.

Jobs are available if people have the skills to fill them...we must come together as a community and create a system where we increase the odds of every child succeeding instead of being beaten by the odds.

## **Workforce**

As we look to the future, it is important that we focus on workforce readiness in the present tense and the job needs of 2030, 2040, and beyond.

Much of my time as president of the National League of Cities has been spent on “the future of work” and how as mayor, and as a city, we can ensure our citizens possess and are equipped with the skills and know how to give them meaningful opportunities in life. As president of NLC, we in the city have the benefit of some of the best thought leaders in the country.

The future of work breaks down into three areas –

- While the unemployment rate is only 3.8% overall in Little Rock, within that number, particularly with our people of color, the unemployment rate remains in the double digits. The area that represents the biggest missed opportunities and often contributes to the largest challenges in our communities – are the hundreds of what we call “opportunity youth” that are not in the workforce or enrolled in school, coupled with the adults who need to be reengaged in school, reconnected to the workforce, and given a chance to advance beyond low-wage jobs that can’t cover the rent or put enough food on the table.
- The second, concerns education and career and technical training and retraining that will build the skills our communities and employers demand. The current workforce is aging out and there are not enough skilled workers available to take their place;
- And the third are the jobs that will embrace the technology advancements, automation, artificial intelligence, and the shared economy that

you read about in the headlines. – Robotics will absolutely change the jobs narrative.

As city leaders, we need to be asking the right questions and bringing the right people together to address these three critical elements of the future of work.

Our community needs to look inwardly at the natural strengths in our city. We need to create an asset map, and then, think outside the box on how to support and grow these strengths.

We've got a wonderful medical corridor and eight hospitals, so obviously the health care industry is something important that we ought to explore. Our number one export in Arkansas – surprise,– is aviation and aviation-related products, so we must look to opportunities there for the jobs of the future. We're also located right in the middle of America with road, rail, runway and river, so we should be looking at the whole supply chain and logistics opportunities from a workforce readiness and business recruitment stand point.

### **Economic Development**

The Little Rock Tech Park which opened in March 2017 has 45 businesses within its walls. The \$ 10.6 million phase I has been completed and phase II is in the design phase.

The Venture Center's Fintech Accelerator has been a stellar success and we are looking forward to the third accelerator starting in May of this year, partnering with one of Little Rock's great companies, FIS, who provides banking software for 80% of the banks worldwide. Last year over 300 startup businesses competed for the 10 coveted positions.

In fact, four of the Fintech businesses selected, loved Little Rock so much they have elected to move their offices here from such places as New York, St. Louis and Atlanta. One of these companies, Bond A.I., which provides a financial growth platform that uses conversational artificial intelligence, decided to relocate its headquarters to Little Rock because they love the wealth of resources, talent, social amenities and support they have found here.

Speaking of loving Little Rock, 2017 saw the launch of the “Love Little Rock” Economic Development Campaign which the city was an integral part of. As an outgrowth of the nationwide feeding frenzy of exorbitant incentives offered to Amazon by 238 cities across America, Little Rock decided to go another way. Sending a “Dear John” letter, published in the Washington post, owned by Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, Little Rock touted quality of life amenities, our talented technology workforce and our ease of commuting as attributes which frankly 50,000 employees would screw up. However, we left the door open closing our letter with the following:

“If another expansion opportunity comes up and you’re ready to join in the visionaries, dreamers, romantics, and idealists who know that bigger isn’t always better, give us a call. We would love to find a way to make “us” workout.”

Now some people, they didn’t get it. They must be living under a rock! We received rave reviews from economic development consultants across the country. We received over \$2 million worth of free publicity, over 870 separate articles and an audience of 1.5 billion people. Most importantly we sent our new website to economic development consultants throughout the country. And guess who checked out our website? Amazon, Apple, Ford Motor Co., Accenture, Boeing, Dell, Microsoft, Twitter, Intel, Cisco, General Electric,

General Motors, Deloitte, HP, KPMG, Oracle, SAP, Symantec, Bloomberg, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Truly a great success thanks to a team of citizens who love Little Rock and believe in our success and future!

Over 102 businesses and industries have become financial partners with Little Rock in MetRock Now which has led to the recruitment and expansion of Welspun, Tublar, All Weather Insulated Panels, Ace Glass, and Ring Container Technologies, to name a few. Our economic development efforts this past year have resulted in 1100 new jobs and a new payroll of \$47 million.

- New construction permits in the city were up 44% from 2016.
- Single family housing was up 9.8%;
- multi-family housing up 80.5%;
- office construction up 226%; and
- industrial up 92.4%

Our own Bank of the Ozarks announced plans for a new 247,000 sq. ft. headquarters which will ultimately house 800-900 employees. Bank of the Ozarks is one of the top 60 banks in the US and with this expansion will be quickly moving up the list.

Our airport and port are thriving! We have runway, rail, river and roads all together. Transportation logistics must be a focus for future business development in our city. American Airlines has taken over the 50,000 square feet maintenance hangar of Hawker Beechcraft. Enplanements are up and three new destinations with direct service have been announced. Frontier is bringing non-stop service to Denver; American is bringing non-stop service to Washington, D.C. and a new airline, Via is bringing non-stop service to Austin.

\$25 million worth of concourse renovations have been accomplished including new jet bridges and concourse gate seating with the fastest free internet in the country all the while maintaining retained earnings of \$15 million.

Our Port Authority can also boast great accomplishments. Over 3500 jobs exist at the port working for 41 companies representing three continents. The 3500 acre industrial port added 600 acres last year, handled 12 million tons of commodities valued at \$3.9 billion including steel, fertilizer, sand, and aluminum on two full service river terminals. As a first time applicant, the Port was awarded \$6.1 million TIGER grant from the Department of Transportation which will allow construction of thousands of linear feet of rail track to assist in barge transfers and will allow the port to develop new docks and warehouse facilities. Several companies including Sage V Foods, LM Windpower, and Boyd Metals have undergone expansions this past year. One exciting new business that located at the port this past year, that I had a chance to recruit is TY Garments, a Chinese Company that manufactures Adidas sportswear and Armani clothing. This foreign direct investment of \$12.5 million will be employing over 450 employees.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

In my role as president of the NLC, I am in a position to speak out about an important issue for Little Rock and indeed for our nation. It involves our aging infrastructure both locally and nationwide. In many places, our nation's infrastructure is structurally deficient, nearing the end of its useful life, or failing completely.

Whether its tragedies like a bridge collapse in Minnesota or lead pipes in Flint, or the replacement in Little Rock over the last 3 years of four major bridges, including the Broadway



Bridge, the Arch Street bridge, the Roosevelt Road bridge next to the State Fairgrounds, or the planned I-30 bridge replacement, the infrastructure of 100 years ago is in serious need of repair or replacement.

We are spending \$172 million on street and drainage improvements over the next ten years, yet we have more than \$1 billion worth of needs.

Reliable roads and transit are critical to get our residents safely to work and school. Reliable water and sewer systems are critical so our citizens don't have to wonder whether it's safe to drink water from the tap. The Society of Civil Engineers gives our U.S. infrastructure a D-

And who is bearing the brunt of the cost of maintaining or improving these systems? You, the citizens of our city. Compliance with the lawsuit over sewer overflows is costing our citizens \$500 million. Water rate increases have been required to replace 100 year old mains accounting for \$2 million per year with needs closer to .

To meet these needs and other capital needs, we have passed local sales taxes, issued and re-issued local bond issues. We have passed dedicated millages, tourism taxes, and we have developed improvement district assessments. Yet, this is not enough.

So, nationwide, cities have turned to the federal government asking for a true partner. President Trump's administration has responded, calling on Congress to come up with \$1.5 trillion for a vast nationwide infrastructure program. It calls for \$200 billion to be set aside as a match to state and local government projects. No one knows yet where this money is coming from or how much will come from the federal government, state and local governments, or the

private sector in some form of public private partnership. But one thing is certain, the first infrastructure marker of \$21 billion is in the budget bill that was just signed into law Friday.

Based on my conversation with the President's lead counsel on infrastructure, D.J. Gribbon, the money will be made available to cities, counties, and states directly. The Administration is interested in speed and entities, such as cities, that have come up with sufficient match funding for their projects. While the exact percentage match is still being debated, it is clear the government is willing to bring this new money as a match to the table.

The opportunity for cities to find new match money from the federal government is now and the opportunity for Little Rock to find new match money is now.

It is time to think big and to be creative. Therefore, I am announcing today that the in the next few weeks, I will be calling together our major municipal utilities; our airport, port, and other commissions and our capital heavy city departments, along with our business sector partners to do just that with regard to capital projects to do just that -- think big and be creative.

What do I mean by being creative? Here is one idea. Cities typically have untapped assets of significant value with great potential for income generation.

In many instances cities are unaware of these assets, don't realize the potential value that exists, and are not leveraging these assets to their full potential. We need to inventory our assets as commercial or policy assets. The policy assets should be set aside. However, the commercial assets identified could generate a fee if professionally managed. The idea is to turn

dormant, stagnant assets into assets that provide value and a return that could provide significant revenues to invest back into the city.

Whether its streets and drainage, improved transit, bridging over the I-30 Crossing, building a railroad to the south of the Port to open up a major supersite, or completing the River Trail, the time is now to be aggressive, positive, and creative about the growth and potential of our wonderful mid-sized city and all that it can be.

One thing is sure, it takes a committed partnership of the city, its citizens, and the business community to make it happen. The federal governments says they want to help, so let's give them the opportunity.

### **Creative Corridor**

Speaking of dormant assets put to new uses, redevelopment continues on Main Street. Phase II of the Creative Corridor has begun. Three new restaurants are locating in the 300 block. The 500 block is being completed with 34 new apartments over an expanded Ballet Arkansas location. Expansion of existing businesses is occurring on Main Street and a new 112 room boutique hotel is being constructed around the corner on Capitol Avenue. Apartments, restaurants and new tenants are giving the Repertory Theatre dozens of friends in the 600 block as well. Downtown is alive with excitement.

We have created that 24/7 environment that will attract millennials and other creative young talent to live and work in our downtown core. The collision of arts and culture with science and technology has become a reality!

## **Tourism**

Tourism continues to be the #2 economic industry in Arkansas and Little Rock is the largest contributor to the state's tourism impact. 6.4 million people visit annually and Pulaski County represents 25% of the state's total travel expenditures and 22% of the state's visitors.

The importance of the city's Advertising and Promotion Commission cannot be underestimated. 865,000 people attended events at our LRCVB facilities last year contributing to the \$1.9 billion dollars generated in travel spending in Pulaski County, underscoring the importance of the amenities and excitement found downtown in the River Market district, the Creative Corridor, and South Main. City sponsored events such as the Little Rock Farmer's market, Jazz in the Park, Movies in the Park, and new events such as "Locally Labeled" highlighting the growing craft beer industry and a new television cooking show called "Chop the Rock" along with our military concert series, and 2nd Friday art night all makes for exciting downtown events that our citizens are flocking to.

2017 featured two important anniversaries – the 60th Anniversary of the integration of Little Rock Central High School and the 25th Anniversary of William Jefferson Clinton being elected as President of the United States. Both celebrations brought positive national media coverage about our city.

Ticket sales have doubled at the newly renovated Robinson Center and concert hall with the center receiving LEED Gold status for its sustainable green building construction.

Our Little Rock Zoo continues to be one of the largest attractions in the state bringing in over 300,000 visitors each year. This year we will be able to literally see the "Pride of the Zoo" with the two newly acquired lionesses in our upgraded lion exhibit.

Recently the Arts Center unveiled the new design for a \$70+ million upgrade of the museum, art school and children's theatre. Managed by a commission of the city, we are so excited about this 21st century vision of a futuristic expansion that blends the new with the old. Most importantly, the new building and expanded galleries will allow the wonderful Arkansas Arts Center's permanent collection to be viewed by thousands. I am confident our new Arkansas Arts Center will rival Crystal Bridges – demonstrating that our own Central Arkansas culture is extremely healthy.

Sprinkled throughout the city you will see several beautiful public sculptures in such places as Chenal Boulevard in West Little Rock. Sculptures at our library locations, sculptures in mid-town and Central High School, sculptures up and down Main Street, and a truly magnificent sculpture garden in Riverfront Park that boasts 90 works from artists around the country.

This is one of many reasons why Little Rock was recently named by *US News and World Report* as one of the Top 50 best places to live in the US, coming in at #38 and besting such cities as Orlando, Chattanooga, Louisville, and Kansas City. Citing Little Rock's booming tech scene, our quality of life cultural amenities including a burgeoning craft beer industry, along with our lower than national average housing costs – it is no wonder we are attracting millennials to our city and seeing our children return to Little Rock after college.

### **City Operations**

Some of you may or may not know that the City's general operations are performed by 14 different departments. These departments are like holding companies that have several distinct functions or "businesses" within each department. The City's general fund is annually over \$265 million to fund these several distinct operations.

From an operational stand point several different city departments have excelled. Let me highlight a few of their accomplishments. In 2017, in working with our neighborhoods we saw 15 new or rejuvenated crime watch programs developed bringing the total crime watch programs to 67.

Our community policing continues as we strive to add community police officers to our ranks. During the course of this past school year, our school resource officers conducted classroom presentations teaching various topics throughout the year including smarter choices, better changes, bullying, drug education, conflict resolution, and the like.

In 2017 our Little Rock Fire Department achieved a major goal by being awarded International accreditation from the Center for Public Safety Excellence. LRFD becomes the 57th fire department out of roughly 30,000 departments in the US to have both an insurance service office ISO rating class one and an international accreditation designation. These highly acclaimed designations place our fire department at the top two percent of all fire departments in the US.

Our Community Programs department added 39 new work sites for our city's summer youth program which employed 700 youth over the summer. Those that participated were trained and received an emphasis on topics such as preparing resumes, workplace expectations and we were ultimately awarded a DollarWise Summer Youth Grant Award in recognition of the city's outstanding commitment to financial education. Our Re-entry program consistently wins national awards and most recently won a local government and excellence award from the International City Managers Association.

Our Department of Public Works has been working hard to execute the hundreds of capital infrastructure projects that are a part of our capital improvement program based on our sales tax and millage allocations. There have been a total of 145 infrastructure projects which have been designated. The city has never had this many projects taken on at once. Of these, over 110 have been complete or are under construction with the rest to be completed in 2018. We will be going out this spring for the 2019-2021 projects. I am happy to announce that we are highly optimistic that the Kanis Road project will begin construction before the end of this year, 2018.

Our capital improvement projects have provided for over 147 streets in Little Rock to be re-surfaced and our sidewalk replacement program has replaced over 61,403 square feet of sidewalks in Little Rock this year alone. Since the beginning of the sidewalk program, we have replaced 12 miles of sidewalks in the city of Little Rock virtually all South of Interstate 630.

The City continues to increase our bicycle and pedestrian friendliness for the safety, equity, health, and economic vitality of our community. In 2017, we added 4.7 miles of bike lanes. We made our BikePed Coordinator a full-time position. We were awarded a \$2M grant to fix the Arkansas River Trail. All told, Little Rock boasts 50 miles of bike lanes and paths

And, we're not done. We will continue to work to get the necessary easements from Union Pacific to construct the Southwest Trail from the river to the Capital Mall. We are improving the Arkansas River Trail along Riverfront Drive and are in the final throes of trying to gain an agreement from Dillard's to close the loop around their Headquarters. We are leveraging the I-30 Crossing project to improve bicycle and pedestrian facilities in our downtown improving east and west connectivity. And, in cooperation with Metroplan, we will

launch a bikeshare system that will set the standard for other Arkansas communities. Our bikeshare operator, is here with us today with one of our bikeshare bikes, the BCycle Dash. Initially, 200 of these bikes will be distributed throughout the downtowns of LR and NLR. Please check it out later.

You can learn more about that program at our Ninth Annual Sustainability Summit happening right here tomorrow morning with Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler as the keynote! You'll hear there all of the updates on our 2020 Sustainability Roadmap.

Our Parks department continues with the restoration of Coleman creek within War Memorial Park and the development of Western Hills Park master plan. The Little Rock Marathon continues to succeed and break records every year with over 10,000 people participating this year. Year after year the marathon brings an enormous economic impact to our city.

During the past year our Animal Services department adopted, rescued, or sent for transport, or returned to their owner over 3200 animals. And celebrated its 10th anniversary of bringing wonder and joy to citizens who come to the Animal Village and find a wonderful pet to become part of their loving family.

On the technology front, our new performance and innovation coordinator has worked with our IT department to provide useful data on the city's open data portal and has met with many organizations and neighborhood groups to explain how to use the portals. We now have many different data sets available to the community to allow for full transparency of our many city operations. Other cities in AR and in the US now look to the City of Little Rock's efforts and improvements in this area.



## **Community Outreach**

I've been working with cities for a long time, as an activist, city attorney, prosecuting attorney, and of course as your mayor. I understand that our neighborhoods are the heart of our city and this year we continue to prioritize a number of efforts that focus on community outreach. I want to take a moment to thank NUSA, Neighborhood Connections, and our Housing and Neighborhood Programs Department for the exceptional job done at the inaugural Neighborhood Appreciation Banquet earlier this month.

Our housing rehab program is helping to spur investment in historically disadvantaged neighborhoods through investment by the city, and our Land Bank, an effective tool for fighting blight in the city, continues to grow and mature with 91 lots re-entering commerce and another 27 acquired. Our Community Development division continues to do a fine job of aggregating CDBG, HOME, and other federal grants to make a huge impact here in Little Rock with these programs assisting almost 8,000 individuals in 2017 alone with things like home repairs, wheelchair ramps, health services, and emergency grants that can help renovate a home.

We are also continuing our work in revitalizing the 12th Street Corridor. We have seen more than \$40 million invested in the area since Jump Start began. I am also optimistic about the potential of leveraging the proximity to our medical corridor to the neighborhoods south of I-630 capitalizing on our Invest Health program that is developing a "Live local, work local, buy local" medical collaborative.

We enjoyed a banner day in July when Arkansas Children's Hospital opened its Southwest Little Rock Community Clinic, which brings care closer to home for many Little Rock families and offers a bilingual staff to make Spanish-speaking families feel welcome. Located on

city property, the clinic joins the Southwest Community Center, Southwest Police Substation, Pulaski County Health Unit, and Dee Brown Library as Southwest Little Rock resources, all within a short walk of each other.

I am happy to report that Little Rock is a national leader in connecting our residents in public housing to the Internet through our ConnectHome Initiative where we have partnered with providers to bring to the residents low-cost high speed internet (\$9.99/month). The city has helped provide hardware – placing over 100 computers in public facilities and we have had over 300 residents complete digital literacy trainings. We know that this connectivity is vital in looking for jobs and in closing the “homework gap.”

We continue to work to improve our delivery of services to individuals experiencing homelessness. *Tell story of naming Jericho Way.*

Since that time, I am so proud of the work being done by Mandy Davis and her DePaul USA team including volunteers. A welcoming community has grown there and the focus is on exiting homelessness and understanding that our homeless neighbors have always been a part of our community. Jericho Way has helped 392 individuals reach greater housing stability. They serve around 7,500 clients each quarter.

I was glad to help secure generous private donations to help with the expansion of facilities that brought additional showers, toilets, sinks, and washer-dryer sets to the renovated basement. And I am thrilled about the projects on the horizon as we seek to add permanent housing near Jericho Way with large private donations secured from generous donors seeking to give back to the community. Plans are also underway to locate a medical clinic in the facility’s basement.

Our homeless services advocate continues to work with a number of homeless service providers and I was encouraged by the distribution of informational pamphlets by our LRFD and LRPD when they come into contact with homeless individuals. I am optimistic that steps toward greater collaboration among service providers including the city will continue this year.

We have seen what this type of collaboration can do with our Mayor's Task Force on Ending Veteran Homelessness that was established in 2016 to meet the benchmarks of the HUD Mayor's Challenge. Through that group meeting regularly at City Hall, we will soon be submitting paperwork certifying that we have met the federal benchmark for functionally ending veterans homelessness in Little Rock. Veterans deserve no less than our very best.

### **Leadership**

During last year's State of the City Address, I spoke to you about a year of construction with the new Broadway Bridge, transformed Robinson Center, opening of the Pankey Center and Substation, West Central Community Center, and continued work on Main Street.

I want to take a moment this year to talk about leadership in the capital city. In Little Rock, that conversation begins with the Little Rock Nine – eight of whom took the stage at the Central High School in September, sixty years after they'd been prevented from entering those same doors. In 2018, they were greeted with a homecoming deserving of their actions. Their words were inspirational and poignant, dwelling not on how far we've come, but reminding us how far we have left to go. We thank them for the indelible legacy they have created and for again gathering in Little Rock to inspire us and a new generation of students. I also want to thank all of those who worked hard to organize commemoration activities including many community partners and many of our own city employees.

We have seen a transition in leadership in our Parks, Planning, and Fire Departments as new leaders have picked up where longtime leaders left off. These and other departments leads continue to be professional leaders, not only here in Little Rock, but nationally. Our police department has received national accreditation. In 2017, the Little Rock Zoo was reaccredited. As mentioned, in 2017 the Little Rock Fire Department achieved international accreditation. Our Parks and Recreation Department is nationally accredited. And our Finance Department received the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association this year. This is a true testament to professionalism and leadership exercised by our city department heads and their staff.

Last April, Little Rock served as host to hundreds of professionals from throughout the country at the National Forum for Black Public Administrators, FORUM 2017, an organization that helps develop leadership skills for many of our employees and that our own city manager Bruce Moore served much of last year as president.

And this summer hundreds of municipal leaders from across the country will make their way to Little Rock as we host the National League of Cities summer board meeting and NLC University. I am proud to have been elected president of this organization and to elevate Little Rock into the middle of national discussions on the future of cities. (I think they might be getting a little tired of me bragging about my city). When we advocate on the national level, there are real implications locally for Little Rock as we saw with the tax reform legislation and in the recently passed omnibus spending bill – where programs like CDBG, TIGER, HUD vouchers, and law enforcement grants were preserved and even expanded.

Leadership does not always come with an elected office or title – and I want to recognize the many community leaders who continue to lead initiatives surrounding the empowerment of our youth, working every day, often unnoticed, to help keep our neighborhoods safe. We will continue to work as a city to better support you.

As a city, this year we embraced exceptional leaders that serve on the new USS Little Rock. As I told the thousands gathered at her commissioning in Buffalo in December...:

"It is the crew who will man this vessel that bring true honor to our city's name. You come from all walks of life and all areas of our amazing country, united in your dedication to protecting America and all that she stands for. As you and those who come after you sail...you can be confident in knowing that the thoughts and prayers of the great and gracious people of Little Rock travel with you."

Today is also about recognizing leaders in their own right who are being recognized here tonight – those that serve on our Little Rock Boards and Commissions. Thank you for lending to your city your time, your talent, and your energy. We could not do all that we do as a community without you.

### **Closing**

Now I ask you, after all that you have heard, is this a glass that is half empty? Or is it a glass that is only half full? Or perhaps, it's more like this – full of energy, optimism, and commitments embrace by our citizens to make Little Rock all that it can be as the Next Great American City in the South.

God Bless this city and God Bless all of you. Please join me for our reception next door.