

Good evening, and thank you all for your attendance at our 2020 State of the City Address- whether here in person, online, or at one of our three community centers. I am especially impressed by our Symphony Youth Orchestra Quartet—Sucely Mayora, Dayton Strick, Kelton Barnes, and Michael Bridges—Thank you for lending your talents this evening, and I hope you hear something tonight that will excite you and your peers, causing you to be involved, ***now or in the future***, with your city government.

I would also like to thank the leaders and staff of Heifer International for allowing us to address our residents from your headquarters.

The amazing work you all do globally from right here in the East End of downtown Little Rock is a distinct honor for our City.

We appreciate you.

Thank you to my colleagues - the members of the Little Rock Board of Directors - for being here this evening. Because of your commitment and service, Little Rock is inching closer to reaching our true potential.

Last, but certainly not least, I appreciate you - the residents of Little Rock.

Those of you in the nearby neighborhoods of Hangar Hill and Pettaway, to those of you in the South End, Stift Station, Hillcrest, and the Heights.

To John Barrow and Chenal Valley, from Pleasant Valley to my home in Southwest Little Rock and everywhere in

between:

***I remain grateful and humbled to be your mayor.***

We enter City Hall every morning and exit every night with each of you top of mind, striving to do the work necessary to **LIFT LITTLE ROCK** to new heights.

Last year, we hit the ground running to unify our City and create new opportunities for our residents. After 395 days on the job, I'm pleased to announce the State of our City is **STRONGER** than it was a year ago. We are more financially stable, more organized, and more accountable to our residents. **AND**, we are more unified, and on course to becoming a true catalyst for the New South.

Over the past year, we've witnessed growth and improvement throughout city government. Our Police Department has made great strides to improve community relations under its new chief Keith Humphrey, who began his tenure this past April. Building upon the Department's community policing goals and its new mission and vision, we passed Arkansas' **FIRST** Citizens Review Board ordinance and appointed its inaugural members last fall. Little Rock's Citizen Review Board will complete training and begin their work for our City next month. But our commitment to improving and ensuring accountability did not stop there.

The Little Rock Police Department also implemented a new no-knock warrant policy, and, as promised, we've secured grant funding for officers' body-worn cameras. The City also hosted its first Public Safety Summit, convening

federal, state, and local law enforcement partners who serve our city. We remain grateful for the work they do to protect and serve, and we look forward to continued partnership to ensure safety for all of our city's residents. For the first time ever, the Fraternal Order of Police and the Black Police Officers Association will party with a purpose, together. The LRPD Unity Ball, to be held at 6:00 pm, March 28th at the Robinson Center, is a direct extension of talks between these two groups that occurred, also for the first time, with my office, just one year ago.

I've seen our police department working diligently to build more connections with the communities they serve. Events such as Coffee with a Cop, Pizza with the Police, National Night Out, and expanded Neighborhood Crime Watch programs are the type of interactions needed to get us to a better state of police relations and reduce our crime rate. It takes all of us to make our city safer; we need YOU to be engaged, and if you see something... say something!

Our goal of making Little Rock the safest city in the South is not far-fetched, and the changes being implemented within our department will put us well on our way to reach that goal.

The Police Department is not alone in their pursuit of a safer Little Rock. The brave men and women of the Little Rock Fire Department work around the clock to protect our City, and we are blessed and grateful our City experienced **ZERO** fire fatalities in 2019. In addition, we are proud Station 24 on Stagecoach Road is scheduled to open next month, helping to reduce response times for those

neighboring communities.

We've also lifted Little Rock by providing down payment assistance to 17 Little Rock residents last year AND by completing more than **30,000** service requests all over the city through our Housing and Neighborhood Department.

Our Community Programs Department continues to serve residents through various enrichment initiatives, such as providing free bus passes for residents under 18 and assisting qualifying residents with free tax preparation.

We also launched the City's Summer Frankly Reading Summer Series last year, and we look to improve and expand the program this summer.

Last year, Public Works led our efforts in managing our response to a historic flood while continuing its Sidewalk Replacement Program, constructing more than 74,000 square feet of sidewalks and curb ramps. We continue to focus on areas with high infrastructure needs like south of 630 and east of Interstate 30, because these areas have been neglected for too long.

While the aforementioned departments work to serve our residents, others provide the necessary support to effectively run City government by acquiring grants, setting and passing our budget, upgrading IT infrastructure, maintaining the city's fleet, and caring for our personnel.

For example, our grants team secured more than 2 million dollars in grants that will be used for park equipment, body-worn cameras, crime-fighting technology, and crime victims' services. We will continue to leverage every resource to Lift Little Rock to its full potential. We returned

to the former practice of hosting community budget sessions throughout the City, giving our residents a first look at our budget and allowing them an opportunity to ask questions and share concerns.

I am extremely proud that we were able to pass a balanced budget on December 3, 2019, the earliest our City's budget has been adopted, since 1988.

Our Administration made bold promises on the campaign trail and upon taking office, and we are committed to keeping EVERY ONE of them.

I pledged to be our City's Chief Growth Officer, securing jobs for our city's growing workforce. In 2019, working with the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce and the State, we announced over 1000 jobs will be coming to our city, which is 54 million dollars in new payroll, and 174 million dollars in new capital expenditures. We hope to DOUBLE that number of jobs in the first quarter of this year! The growth and improvement we are experiencing within City Government is boosting our economy.

Not only have we seen more jobs, but I'm pleased to share our sales tax revenue has increased more than 5 percent compared to the same period last year, resulting in approximately FOUR MILLION DOLLARS for our city's budget. To further leverage economic development and growth in our city's center, the City of Little Rock hosted our Opportunity Zone Roundtable with guests from the White House and other federal agencies, and later convened the #LittleRockOZ Task Force, that has been meeting since October.

I am proud to announce the Task Force is wrapping up its work and will provide recommendations for Little Rock's Opportunity Zone strategy, which includes hosting an Investor Conference this year to display our City to investors across the country.

And, because community engagement is top priority, I requested an anti-displacement plan to ensure Little Rock's Opportunity Zone strategy is not happening **TO** our communities, but, instead, **WITH them**. Accordingly, we will have robust community engagement over the next four weeks to hear from residents in each of the four Opportunity Zones, with the first community meeting held next week: February 6th, 6 pm, at the Hillary Clinton Children's Library. We hope many of you will attend.

We also hosted an Education Roundtable last year to coordinate education efforts in our City. From that roundtable, various stakeholders committed to a series of meetings to provide recommendations for Prenatal to 5 Initiatives, Social Services, Literacy, and Workforce Development. I am extremely proud of the collaboration of our city's organizations, working together in the best interests of our children. Last fall, we took a bold step into education by proposing a plan to return the Little Rock School District to local control. We appointed the City's first Chief Education Officer, Dr. Jay Barth, and targeted city funds to focus on education through a community schools model, helping provide wrap around services in our city's public schools... because we know what happens outside the classroom affects how students perform inside of the classroom.

Last year, one of our city's brightest highlights was our Bridge to Work Program, thanks to the vision of Directors Webb and Peck. We are proud that some of our homeless residents, like Mr. Alexander Williams who is here with us today, were able to earn wages working for the City of Little Rock.

Because of Bridge to Work, Mr. Williams served as a supervisor in the program and eventually transitioned from homelessness, becoming Depaul USA's FIRST affordable duplex recipient.

Not only are our homeless brothers and sisters earning an honest living, they have cleaned nearly 130 miles of city streets. Innovative, effective, and feel-good initiatives like Bridge to Work are exactly what we need to Unite Little Rock and ensure we lift all residents so our city can reach its full potential.

Change requires intentionality. And we've been intentional with diversity, equity, and inclusion within city government. For instance, we've made a conscious effort to ensure our city's boards and commissions adequately reflect our city. While we have continued work to do, I am proud to share our women and minority appointees have increased over the past year.

City government needs your voices, and I encourage our residents to consider serving our City.

While we are proud and excited about the accomplishments we made over the past year, we cannot LIFT LITTLE ROCK alone.

Our public partners are also doing great work to move our city forward. The Central Arkansas Library System provided more than 6,700 meals to students through its partnership with Be Mighty and engaged 27% more children in summer reading than in 2018.

In 2019, our City's very own Clinton National Airport saw more than 2 million passengers, a nearly 5% increase over 2018. The airport also completed \$7 million in upgrades for travelers.

As we continue to invest in education, we are proud of the accomplishments of the Little Rock School District students who amassed a total of \$23 million in scholarships. We look forward to this year's opening of Little Rock Southwest High School, which will be one of the largest state-of-the-art secondary campuses in Arkansas, a shining star in my beloved Southwest Little Rock.

The Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau continues to showcase our city to visitors from all over the world and hosted nearly 360 events and conventions that brought more than 330-thousand attendees to the city, totaling more than 75 million dollars in direct spending here in Little Rock. To provide our downtown patrons another recreational option in our city, we were pleased to work with LRCVB to launch the River Market Entertainment District in August.

Little Rock is a city on the rise, and the nation is taking notice. In 2019, we were recognized for being the Nation's first LEED Zero Energy building at the company, Entegriety, and we ranked #7 of "America's Top 10 Small Cities for



Prosperity,” “Top 12 Places to Live, “10 US Cities to Watch in 2020,” and “Top 100 places to Live in the U.S.”

Collectively, we’ve done some incredible work in 2019, but we have so much work to do to LIFT LITTLE ROCK in 2020.

For our 2020 Vision, we are charting the course for a bright, bold future for our city. Little Rock is overflowing with hope, promise, and purpose. And we are proposing BOLD actions as we embark on this new year and this new decade.

YES, we are shooting for the moon.

While we will continue implementing our ACT Plan in the new year: being accountable, clear, and transparent in all we do, we must execute for our present, and plan for our FUTURE.

That planning and execution includes our City’s new mission and vision statements, derived from our city staff through surveys and focus groups.

Tonight, we unveil them both.

Our mission statement says “The City of Little Rock is dedicated to improving our residents’ quality of life by providing exceptional service in an efficient and equitable manner.”

And our vision statement reads- “The City of Little Rock is a leading southern city—vibrant, safe, and innovative—that provides an excellent and sustainable quality of life where all families, individuals, and businesses can thrive.”

These statements will guide our efforts to Lift Little Rock into our foreseeable future. You’ve heard me say it many

times before, and I want to restate it here tonight-intentional efforts bring about desired results. For that reason, we will redefine our culture at city hall and throughout city government by having an improved focus on customer service and employee training. I remain committed to making City government work harder for each of you. We will continue building on the great work the City is doing to ensure we move from being disconnected to connected. Because we know, to unify this city, we must FIRST re-unite city government to YOU, the people.

To do that, we will launch Little Rock's Resident Academy this year, allowing residents from across our City an opportunity to learn about and engage with their city government.

I am also excited to issue the #ExploreLR challenge! We all get into our habits of spending our time in the neighborhoods around our homes, offices, and schools. But in 2020, it's time to explore what other communities have to offer. Between March 1st and December 31st, residents are encouraged to visit various Little Rock attractions, and share your visits on social media for a chance to win a small prize. This is an opportunity to experience more of our great city as we strive to unite our residents and neighborhoods. Be on the lookout for the #ExploreLR challenge on our City's website and social media platforms soon.

Our City's form of government should also foster the unity and the representation we all desire. Before I was elected, our City Board of Directors passed a resolution to study Little Rock's form of government. This study group made

recommendations to the Board last year, calling for additional mayoral authority and restructuring at large seats to regional districts-which encompass and overlap existing wards. The people have spoken, and we WILL act. Tomorrow, we will present two ordinances to my colleagues, incorporating the suggestions made by our study group appointees. In order to Lift Little Rock, our government must work for the people it represents, and this ordinance will better allow us to work for you.

My internal why is to Unite Little Rock, which means we need an increased focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts within our City. For that reason, I am proud to announce we are now accepting applications for Little Rock's FIRST Chief Equity Officer. The Chief Equity Officer will lead and manage our Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, oversee our diversity and multicultural initiatives, and create a diverse vendor purchasing plan for Little Rock's women and minority businesses.

Without creating a new position, our Chief Equity Officer and existing staff will liaise with members of the LGBTQIA+ community and provide training and recommend equity-related policies for the city.

This campaign promise and recommendation from my 2019 transition board will soon become a reality in order to better serve our staff and our residents. To lift our city to its full potential, we must also make efforts to drive economic empowerment for ALL our residents.

Accordingly, we will have an increased focus on equitable economic development in our city, connecting our small

businesses to education and information, while striving to increase the City's discretionary spend with women and minority businesses TO at least **25%** over the next 3 to 5 years.

To lift our city, we must lift our students. While responsibility for running educational institutions is in the hands of educators -the school districts, the charter and private schools, and the institutions of higher learning across our city- we know that a city is only fully healthy when its schools are healthy. A "whole community" exists when students are "whole," and "whole students" can only thrive in a supportive community. Therefore, the City of Little Rock has a duty to support our students and do everything we can to see them thrive.

The City will continue to support this positive educational environment both through programs of our own and by promoting rich partnerships with and among the entities in the educational, nonprofit, and business sectors. Dr. Barth, our Chief Education Officer, will continue executing Little Rock's education plan which includes: early childhood education options in the city of Little Rock; our commitment to literacy training for underperforming students; although the financial investment will vary, implementing a Community School Model across the entire Little Rock School District to ensure kids like me, growing up in Southwest Little Rock, no longer feel disconnected and different from their peers in other schools.

There is ONE LRSD, and we are excited that the community school efforts will impact ALL its students. We will ensure the community is involved in the planning and

implementation of our model, and our community engagement will be underway in the coming months. Please bear with us as we work with you to implement the appropriate model for our City's children. And lastly, we will continue developing the next generation of leaders in Little Rock by promoting career readiness and partnering with higher education institutions to enhance opportunities in our city.

To further lift our students, we are revitalizing our Mayor's Youth Council to better provide our city's students, from all backgrounds, the chance to explore policy, business, non-profit, and government matters in Little Rock. I look forward to their first initiatives - leveraging their school networks to ensure an adequate count of their peers for the 2020 census AND to increase civic engagement by registering 1,000 new voters in our city this year.

We can only LIFT LITTLE ROCK by engaging ALL residents, young and old; and our Mayor's Youth Council will help us do just that.

We envision many great things for our city this year, but we are not doing our job as leaders if we are not planning ahead. That is why I will be sharing the City of Little Rock's 2030 Plan by March 31 of this year to cast a bold vision for our city's long term future. Our City can progress and reach its full potential if we dare to dream and dream big. Our 2030 Plan will be the strategic preparation for our City's bold future.

But, to achieve the desired results we envision for our City, we need your help.

If you haven't already noticed -- this pin I'm wearing will be a constant reminder that Little Rock must do everything in our power to ensure a complete count of every resident for Census 2020. The census is the baseline for determining millions of dollars in federal funding. It influences political representation and guides decisions related to public safety, schools, and infrastructure. In your seats, you have a pledge card that asks you to commit to being counted. This aligns with our Little Rock Counts Initiative, a robust plan, targeting hard to count communities. We have formed a local complete count committee and developed a targeted outreach plan that spans every city department, neighborhood, community, school, and online platform to inform residents that we must GET OUT THE COUNT.

Little Rock, consider this your call to action: please make sure you, your entire family, your neighbors, friends, and colleagues all respond to the 2020 Census between **early March and April 30**.

You may respond to the census online, by phone, or by mail.

Census 2020 is critically important for the future of our city.

As we embark on this new decade, we are empowered with a new opportunity to think big, plan ahead, and LIFT LITTLE ROCK to even higher heights. We must continue to move from being reactive to being proactive. We must proceed from prevention to progression. It's time we lift Little Rock to its full potential!

While this past year has been full of growth, it has not come without some difficult decisions. Last spring, we right sized city government to align ongoing expenses with ongoing revenue. This was necessary for us to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

Now that we have done all we can do to ensure our City is on stable financial footing, we need you to invest in a bold plan for our future. We have worked and will continue to work tirelessly to improve our City, **BUT WE NEED YOUR HELP.**

Without dedicated funding and intentional efforts to lift our city beyond the status quo, we cannot reach our full potential. So, I'm asking for your help to **LIFT LITTLE ROCK** by voting for a penny sales tax initiative that will raise approximately 50 million dollars annually for specific quality of life initiatives. We are asking you, the residents of Little Rock, to invest in our future by passing this initiative that would align our city's sales tax with those of our neighbors. For example, some of the leading southern cities like Birmingham bolster a sales tax rate of 10%, with the city getting 4%. At 9%, Little Rock even trails behind some of its neighboring Arkansas cities. Lonoke is 10.5%, Searcy is 9.75%, and Fayetteville and Springdale each are at 9.75%. Little Rock's portion of the overall sales tax is just 1.5%, while Benton receives 2.5%, and Bryant gets 3%.

It's time for us to learn from our neighbors and invest in our future so we, too, can thrive.

Our **LIFT LITTLE ROCK** sales tax will improve our City's

quality of life by reinvesting in our parks, enhancing our Zoo, fostering public safety, improving infrastructure, investing in early childhood education, and bolstering our economic development efforts.

Here's how a single penny will LIFT LITTLE ROCK:

It will provide a designated funding source for our Parks and Zoo, implementing many of the recommendations from our R3LR Parks Task Force, such as repurposing War Memorial and Hindman Parks as true destination venues for our residents and visitors alike to include open lawn entertainment, an indoor sports complex, soccer fields, and a senior center with programming for our senior brothers and sisters on this side of the river, uniting residents from all over our city right in the center of our city.

We will also improve other parks and facilities, including the Jim Dailey Center, Rebsamen tennis courts, and a pool at West Central Community Center. We will also expand our trail system to improve walkability and connectivity in Little Rock.

Here's what else that penny will do:

Fund a much needed zoo expansion - returning giraffes to our zoo, a bear habitat, and red wolf and razorback hog exhibits. These improvements would make our City's zoo one of the top tourist attractions in the state, bringing additional revenue to our city.



A single penny will further LIFT LITTLE ROCK by allowing us to invest in public safety for our extending City.

We will support our public safety servants by acquiring adequate technology and other resources for our police and fire departments to decrease response times and strategically address crime.

The penny will improve our city's infrastructure by focusing on and COMPLETING specific projects in areas of high need, like east of interstate 30 and south of interstate 630, and will allow us to finally complete Bowman and Kanis Road construction, in accordance with our city's infrastructure study.

We would no longer have to piecemeal our projects, but we will make tangible progress throughout Little Rock; thereby, stimulating growth and development across our entire city.

The penny will also allow us to create an economic development fund like our friends in Frisco and San Antonio, Texas. The fund will generate equitable economic development in our city, while also working alongside the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce to recruit additional jobs to Little Rock. We will take ownership of our economic future to ensure our city is thriving so we ALL have an opportunity to succeed.

Lastly, this initiative will LIFT LITTLE ROCK by funding evidence based early childhood education for all Little Rock residents.

Thirty plus years ago, early childhood education for my family was staying at my grandmother's house on Wolfe Street while our parents worked to keep food on the table. We could not afford childcare, let alone actual educational instruction during those early years. This is still the case for many families today. Countless children are kept with family or otherwise not getting instruction due to the rising cost of quality childcare, and young families are having to make tough choices to address the expense. However, research has shown that the sooner a child is exposed to early childhood education, the greater his or her chances of educational achievement. And the more our students achieve, the more our City prospers.

Let's LIFT LITTLE ROCK together by ensuring our children are getting the early childhood education they need, irrespective of income. We all win when we all pitch in!

And we need each of you to pitch in to make Little Rock's potential a reality. Our LIFT LITTLE ROCK sales tax:

- generates revenue
- improves quality of life
- invests in underserved communities
- creates jobs
- and expands educational opportunities for our entire city.

Together, we can LIFT our parks and zoo; LIFT our neighborhoods; LIFT our economy; and LIFT our children, which in turn will LIFT LITTLE ROCK to a better tomorrow for us all.

For Little Rock to serve as a catalyst for the New South

and reach its full potential, we can't be afraid or apologetic about our bold future. I'm unafraid and unapologetic about shooting for the moon. I hope you will join me for this moonshot. We should be proud of all that we have accomplished in such a short time. But we still have hard work to do and loads to lift. And although I am a son of this great City, I can't do it alone.

Last March, I called on each and every one of us to get to work. Today, I am renewing that call to action.

Yes, we will continue to move from being disconnected to connected, uniting this city, knowing we are better together.

Yes, we will build a Little Rock that unleashes the untapped potential and ingenuity of our residents.

And YES, we will continue to build a Little Rock that will be a catalyst for the New South.

My fellow Little Rock residents, it's time we LIFT LITTLE ROCK to new levels.

It's time we think bigger and bolder.

IT IS TIME!

Join me in this important work to further improve our great City.

2020, we've got work to do!

God bless you all. And God bless the city of Little Rock.

I appreciate you.