

Wow! What amazing stories. I am grateful for each of those residents who've shared their gifts, their grit, and gratitude with us tonight. We've highlighted some of the best of our city. From business owners to essential workers, healthcare workers to first responders, educators, parents, and students, you have endured so much this past year. Having seen your dedication and durability during this pandemic and all the other challenges that have faced our community across the past year, I am more honored and humbled than ever before to be your mayor. After a tumultuous 2020, if there is any doubt of the resilience, revival, and renewal of Little Rock, this year will be our answer. Our recovery belongs to each of you, and we are poised to **REBUILD THE ROCK** in 2021 to be better than our beginning.

Last year, I stood before you declaring our bold plans to Lift Little Rock to high heights. Shortly after I cast that vision, the world as we know it changed. We immediately suspended our initiatives to Lift Little Rock and focused squarely on navigating the COVID 19 global pandemic. And to truly rebuild, we must continue our concerted efforts to combat this virus. We still encourage you to wear a mask... wash your hands... physically distance yourselves... and get tested whenever you believe you need one. But we've also placed a major focus on a swift and equitable distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine in our city. I acknowledge and understand the hesitancy or even the distrust of the coronavirus vaccine, rooted in a painful history of abuse towards people of color. But I'm disheartened by the data that show Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians are at a higher risk for contracting COVID 19, needing care in a hospital, and even dying from the disease. This is personal to all of us. The vaccines are our best chance at keeping our community healthy, restoring normalcy, and rebuilding our city. So I am urging all Little Rock residents to take the vaccine as soon as it is your turn to do so. We will ensure the vaccine is available to all communities, especially those impacted the most by this virus. I am asking our COVID-19 task force to shift its efforts to a comprehensive plan for the City to get this crucial task completed. We must educate our residents on the vaccine, recommend community outreach initiatives, and use data to ensure an equitable distribution of vaccines and other resources in our city to curb this virus immediately. Defeating the pandemic will allow us to move forward to an even brighter day for the Little Rock we know and love.

Looking to the future, I'm asking the Little Rock Board of Directors to pass an ordinance, creating Little Rock's Health and Wellness Commission that will launch this year. This Commission will focus on improving the quality of life for Little Rock residents by promoting physical and mental wellness, providing resources and programs to promote healthfulness, and recommending policies to address health disparities and other detrimental issues. For far too long, the City of Little Rock has been hands off when it comes to public health. Because of this pandemic, we know, now more than ever, that local government plays an important role in the health of its residents. Moving forward,

this new standing Commission will allow us to both react quicker to health crises and be proactive to better serve the healthcare needs of our diverse community.

As we know, there have many challenges we've faced that show the power of climate change. The historic flooding of 2019, unprecedented snowstorms just a month ago, and other natural disasters demonstrate the importance of being a good steward of the environment. City government must lead the way, and this year we will commit to an energy reduction plan across city operations, including a fleet of electric vehicles with accompanying infrastructure by 2030. We'll purchase electricity from renewable sources, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and make energy efficiency upgrades in our facilities. We have a long way to go, but we plan to do our part to preserve the environment for our future. In this rebuilding of the Rock, let's be big, be bold, and be brave in our efforts to UNITE, GROW, and TRANSFORM our city.

My personal mission since deciding to run for mayor of our great city has been to **UNITE LITTLE ROCK**. To do that, we will continue to make equity the central theme of everything we do. Many ask - what is equity? To me, it's the customized efforts taken to ensure adequate access, opportunity, and representation despite one's circumstances. In short, equity is meeting people where they are so they can be who they are, where they want to be all at the same time. Equity at work is the city's re-entry program, our community schools model, our South of 630 East of 30 Revitalization Incentive Plan, or our down payment assistance program. It's ensuring diverse voices are elevated at the table and varied viewpoints are heard. It's good for business; it's good for innovation; and it's necessary to **REBUILD the ROCK**. Because this is such a priority for my administration, I'm excited to announce the City's new Chief Equity Officer in the coming weeks. This individual will first assist us in getting our house in order, then help us expand these efforts throughout Little Rock. And thanks to the leadership of Director Kathy Webb and Director Capi Peck, this year, the Little Rock Board of Directors, city executive leadership, and various staff will undergo training from the National League of Cities and its Race, Equity and Leadership Department to normalize racial equity as a key value in our city. This work will strengthen our capacity to make Little Rock a more equitable place to live, work, and play.

2020 made us take a hard look at racial injustice in our country. Little Rock, like every American city, experienced civil and social unrest due to the continued wounds at home and across the United States. Our city remains divided - physically - by manufactured boundaries like interstate 630, and - economically - by systemic disparities. This has resulted in a city split between north and south. I know the numerous gifts of those living and working south of 630 and in my neighborhood in southwest Little Rock. But, those hard-working residents too often lack the resources to allow their gifts to shine. We cannot have a unified city until we have a city in which **ALL** residents - whether from Southwest, Pleasant Valley, East End, John Barrow, or Chenal - can thrive.

After last year's census efforts, we have an opportunity to redraw our wards to reflect the united city we strive to be. Instead of homogenous wards with arbitrary boundaries like interstate 630, I will propose wards that reflect the overall makeup of our city. And I'm asking the City Board to ensure our wards look like microcosms of our diverse city.

As we **REBUILD THE ROCK** into an equitable community of opportunity for all, we unite when we strategically address our economy. Over 60 years after integration at the historic Central High School, racial wealth gaps along with economic immobility remain too prevalent. We must honor our rich civil rights history by acting with urgency to address these ills. Last year, I announced a lofty goal for the city to increase its women and minority spend to at least 25% by the end of 2022, and we will **CONTINUE** to leverage our purchasing power to support local companies to kick-start our economy post-pandemic. This year, I'm taking it a step further by calling on our fellow public entities and even private companies to join us, making a larger collective impact. By October 1, we will issue Little Rock's Equity Challenge, asking entities across Little Rock to sign on to this initiative to promote equity in their businesses through supplier diversity and other corporate policies. We know that no one organization can solve our systemic issues, but collectively, we can work together to improve our city. Together, Little Rock will become a place where the American Dream is alive and well for us all.

Quality of life and place will be the basis for equitable economic development as we rebuild the Rock. And I must pause here... because we've experienced historic jobs growth during a pandemic... with nearly 4,000 new jobs... hear that again, 4,000... announced since I took office. This is more than mere numbers. These jobs mean more resources for families in Little Rock. It's the ability to put food on your table and clothes on your child's back... to pay the bills. As you see... yes... economic development is truly our mission and a ministry.

While we will continue our efforts to attract new jobs, we know that entrepreneurship also builds wealth and provides stability for families and communities. New businesses are the lifeblood of a city, but the pandemic has exposed the disparities in who's able to get ahead. This begs the question: what can we do to create new jobs, level the playing field, and reduce economic injustice during this recovery? Little Rock's answer is **BUILD Academy**, a 12-week small business incubator to serve as a front door for current and future business owners in our city. This will be a game changer. We're taking economic development into the neighborhoods that have historically been left behind in order to create, build, and sustain more companies here at home. **BUILD** is short for businesses united in leadership development - that connects potential with opportunity. Throughout Little Rock, the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well. Through strategic location and design - in the heart of the 12th street corridor at our very own, soon to be renovated, Willie Hinton Center - **BUILD** aims to create opportunity by addressing wealth gaps and access in one of the most economically disadvantaged areas of Little Rock. We know the sacrifice it takes for an entrepreneur to step out on faith to pursue a dream. We want to be a city that supports the sheer grit of business owners.

We'll provide resources and create conditions necessary for businesses to launch and expand. BUILD will empower our entrepreneurs to scale their businesses, address income disparity and access to capital, fill education gaps through technical assistance, and decrease unbanked and underbanked populations right here in our city. On April 15, we will begin accepting applications at [littlerock.gov](http://littlerock.gov) for BUILD Academy's first class later this year.

To further unite and grow our city, we will continue investing in Little Rock's most precious assets - our youth. We have seen real promise and tremendous progress with our Community Schools Model in its early months, and we'll continue to bolster our efforts and programs this year with plans to expand the model to additional schools in partnership with the Little Rock School District. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has severely disrupted student learning. Many students are not showing up for class at all... or if they are, they're unable to succeed in the virtual learning experience. As we **REBUILD THE ROCK**, the City will harness the best of our educational programs to re-engage these students. For example, this summer, Frankly Reading will target those kids in elementary to be sure they don't have further learning loss over the long break. In addition to the expansion of community schools, our community centers will transform into opportunity centers, with a particular focus on reengaging students who fell behind during this pandemic. And it's not enough to focus on our youngest students. We must provide support for students who want to pursue an education after high school. I'm asking our Chief Education Officer and the Higher Education Council to identify potential partnerships with our local philanthropic and business community to fund a Little Rock Promise scholarship. This scholarship will do these three things: attract and keep families in Little Rock; strengthen our workforce; and ensure access and opportunity to those who need it most.

As we've already seen tonight, Little Rock has amazing people. I love this city and its communities, cultures, and character. And while the Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau has done a great job promoting Little Rock to travelers, it's time to rebrand our city and build a unique narrative that sells Little Rock as a place for short term business and play but also as a place to call home and build a family. I recognize that, for many who already live here or those who reside just outside of the city, your perceptions have been shaped, in part, by misinformation and decades of inequities. As we look to the future, it's time that we rebuild hope in the hearts of those who call Little Rock home... rebuild confidence in those who look for Little Rock to lead, and rebuild capacity for placemaking that ensures equitable opportunities for everyone. It's time we **REBUILD THE ROCK**. Our City will undergo a facelift in the coming months. With a new logo, website, flag, and mobile app, we will continue to restore a sense of pride in this place we call home, while also positioning ourselves to attract businesses and residents to Little Rock.

Now here's a bit of nostalgia... In the days of RiverFest when I was growing up, where residents and tourists of all backgrounds crowded our streets, flooded our restaurants

on those hot summer days, and swarmed our hotels. Our rebranding will also give way for opportunities for people to sample our city again. We're going to create intentional interactions among residents and visitors, and become a premiere destination in the state, region, and nation. I'm calling on Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Little Rock Regional Chamber of Commerce, residents, and tourists alike to help us launch Little Rock's signature event in 2022 – LIT Fest: A Return to the Rock. This extended weekend festival will have a major economic impact. LIT Fest will promote business and technology with dynamic panel discussions, investor conferences, and networking opportunities. LIT Fest will also highlight the diverse art scene of our city, with live concerts from local and national artists while also featuring dynamic local food. I've heard too often from visitors, "I didn't know Little Rock was this amazing." Well, yes, we really are. It's time the world knows what we have to offer. And when it's safe to gather again, LIT Fest showcase the very best about our home. To pull this off, we will leverage the Little Rock network far and wide. If you were born or bred here, relocated here, visited once upon a time, or just heard about us... I'm asking you to return to the Rock in 2022 to witness the rebrand firsthand.

Now, over this next year, we cannot be satisfied with just recovering. No. We must commit to taking critical actions that catapult us into our future. Now is the time for Little Rock to innovate, not stagnate. We need your help-- help to rebuild by investing in our city through our **REBUILD THE ROCK** penny sales tax initiative. Time is of the essence as we position ourselves to emerge from this pandemic better than before. Little Rock can and will be the catalyst for the new south with a new sales tax comparable to our neighbors. Just one penny more will allow us to improve the quality of life for all of Little Rock.

A penny will help us **REBUILD THE ROCK** by:

1. Building an equitable economic development program that offers incentives to attract and recruit companies to Little Rock, increase jobs, and most importantly - assist with the growth and development of businesses that are already here!

Little Rock is well-suited to become an ideal destination for manufacturing companies, start-ups, nonprofits, and small businesses. I'm committed to my role as Chief Growth Officer, and these additional resources will allow our administration to be more aggressive in recruiting and supporting these businesses when they are here.

2. A penny helps us rebuild the rock by expanding early childhood education for infants and toddlers, while also investing in their future with a contribution to a 529 plan for every kindergartener in a Little Rock public school.

Too many of our community's children are left in care of family members at the age when early learning is critical. And often times young workers have to make tough choices to try and pay for high-quality early childhood education. A city investment will: Eliminate the financial strain on parents that need to work... provide technical assistance and training for providers... and expand quality early childhood centers across the areas south of Interstate 630 and Southwest Little Rock, which also supports our commitment to community schools.

If we have the will, we can make Little Rock the best city in the Mid-South for high-quality early childhood education and become a magnet for young families.

3. An extra penny helps us revitalize War Memorial and Hindman Parks and connect them with a state of the art trails system. It also makes critical improvements to other park facilities and expands offerings at the Zoo.

As a city in a park, as you know we are, Little Rock is a crown jewel for outdoor adventure, recreation, and entertainment.

While Hindman has the terrain for various activities like disk golf, fishing, and biking, War Memorial is centrally located and serves as a multi-use park for everyone to enjoy. Not only do we envision open lawn entertainment, and green space, the City could host revenue-attracting youth sports tournaments and local leagues at new baseball fields or the youth sports complex. Next door, our Zoo is suited to become one of the top attractions in our state and region with additions like the proposed giraffe exhibit.

4. What else does just one penny do? It creates an affordable housing fund to acquire, develop, and rehabilitate affordable housing in the heart of our city. Even today, wealth creation is tied to real estate and home ownership. This housing fund will allow us to address inequities and make the dreams of owning a home a reality for moderate income residents. This fund will also offer much-needed solutions to homelessness in Little Rock.
5. A penny helps rebuild the rock by revitalizing our neighborhoods with strategic infrastructure improvements. To become the city we are destined to be, we need better roads, additional bike lanes, and sidewalks in every neighborhood irrespective of zip code throughout our city. By rebuilding neighborhoods, we uplift and improve the quality of life and attract much needed economic development opportunities.

AND lastly,

6. Just one additional penny helps reform public safety by decreasing response times, investing in technology, and enhancing our community policing with data-

driven efforts to reduce crime. We will address critical needs by building a fire station in West Little Rock and hire experienced personnel to handle certain mental health situations.

We will appoint a Rebuild the Rock Committee to provide oversight for the sales tax. They'll evaluate spending, monitor ongoing projects, and recommend future improvements to ensure the utmost accountability with your sales tax dollars.

**REBUILD THE ROCK** will allow our city to: repair what we do; rebrand who we are; and recalibrate how we think.

As you can see, our **REBUILD THE ROCK** sales tax is appropriate, transparent, and a timely response to a pandemic that knocked us down but didn't take us out. It will allow us to generate revenue, create new jobs, support small businesses, expand educational opportunities, redevelop and reimagine parks and zoo, invest in underserved areas, upgrade critical infrastructure in our city, and improve public safety.

I think we all agree, it's time to rebuild. If we unite, grow, and transform our city through these strategic initiatives, we will chart a new course for the City of Little Rock.

Little Rock, we're resilient. I know we will **REBUILD** our city to be better than ever before. We, collectively, understand the task that lies ahead. We know the various challenges we have been faced with and more are also sure to come. But like always, we band together to overcome any obstacle we face. By rebuilding together, we can make Little Rock safer, more equitable, more business friendly, and more sustainable for our future. To the healthcare workers and first responders who saw us through a difficult year, let's **REBUILD THE ROCK**. To the ambitious entrepreneur and the laid off employee, let's **REBUILD THE ROCK**. To the student from any area of our city, or underserved zip code and the educators burned out from virtual instruction, let's **REBUILD THE ROCK**.

2021 is the beginning of a new era, a new chapter in our story- a chapter of unity, growth, and transformation for our great city. Together, we CAN and together we WILL - **REBUILD THE ROCK**.

I appreciate you.

God bless you, may God bless our great city of Little Rock, and let's rebuild together.