

Mayor Jim Strickland's remarks at Rotary Club of Memphis weekly meeting; May 15, 2018; Clayborn Temple.

Opening/acknowledgments:

- *Members of the City Council, other elected officials*
- *Rotary Club of Memphis*

So it is a bit warmer than last time we were scheduled to meet.

But now that we've had a few months since we were supposed to have delivered the State of the City address here, I have a few updates.

For instance:

- In January, there was a line in my speech that said “we are getting closer” to a solution to fund **Pre-Kindergarten**. Well, in March, we announced our joint plan with the council, the council passed it, and I signed it last week. This is a huge step forward in providing every Memphis child the right start in life, which will help our community in so many ways.
- In January, I said we were spending \$18.5 million on street paving — double what we did just four short years ago. Well, in April, we increased that to **\$19 million** in our proposed budget, which the council is combing over right now.
- In January, I said there was more than \$11 billion in recent, current or planned development in Greater Memphis. Well, that's no longer accurate — it's now more than **\$13 billion**, according to Cushman & Wakefield. (I think FedEx's \$1 billion announcement had a big role in

that.) And here's the best part: For the first time in decades, we can safely say that the majority of this is happening *inside* our city limits.

- In January, I said we were about to reverse our seven-year decline in police headcount. Today, I can report that's happened. And while **we still have a long way to go** to rebuild MPD, and while our anti-crime efforts are **so much more wide-ranging than just policing**, we've seen some encouraging reinforcement to what we're doing: The Crime Commission reports violent crime was down **5 percent** in the first quarter of the year, with murders down **38 percent**.
- In January, I said that when we took office, it took us 59.7 seconds to answer a 911 call. That's unacceptable. And in January, I said we had just reduced that wait time to under 8 seconds. Today, I can share that we've now done that for **four straight months**.
- In January, I said that some 12,000 Memphians were employed who were not on Jan. 1, 2016. Today, that number is **now 15,000**.
- In January, I said we were continuing to amp up our efforts to fight blight. Well, in March, we tore down a significant blighted property, an old church in Frayser. And just this month, we started tearing down a blighted apartment complex in Fox Meadows.

In just these recent successes alone, I hope you see the central theme of how we get things done at City Hall: We tune out the noise and work every day to improve the services we offer our citizens. To make life better for every Memphian, every single day.

We don't get involved in the partisan politics of the day, or the shouting matches that far too often define politics these days. You probably know by now that's not my style.

Our team shuts up, rolls up its sleeves and takes action.

I often say that Memphis has momentum — everywhere you look, there's new life. But I also think this: **City of Memphis government has momentum.** We're showing a track record of success, of transparency, of citizen-first decisions. And I'm proud of our team.

We stand at a critical juncture in this time in our city. Yes, more and more attention is being focused on our city — not just by City government, but by the private sector. And as that attention comes, it happens at some pivotal moments in our history — like this year's commemoration of MLK50, when we opened the I AM A MAN Plaza just next door.

And next year, we will celebrate the 200th year of Memphis — a city whose originality and soul has changed the world, and continues to change it.

That great milestone has only sharpened our focus to cast the City we want for the next hundred years — what Memphis in our third century will look like.

We can't do that without knowing where we've been.

For years and years, **population loss has been our No. 1 challenge.** I remember sounding the alarm about this back when I was on the City Council. And I may well be the first mayor to even say that phrase — “population loss” — out loud.

But, it is reassuring now to hear more and more people talking about it and strategizing how to reverse the trend.

Fortunately, it is less of a trend than it was. For years, we were losing as many as 5,000 people a year. In recent years, that number has been under 2,000.

But it's not a sustainable course.

This is our time in Memphis: Not merely to end population loss — but to reverse it. Not merely to stand still, but to hit the accelerator.

This is our time in Memphis. Where *growth* is more a part of our civic vocabulary than *just getting by*. Where our collective vision of a prosperous and growing third century dictates all we do.

So here's what guides my vision of our third century:

- We will **build up**, not build out.
- Our growth will be anchored on the strength of our core and our neighborhoods.
- Our growth will enable opportunity for all Memphians.

So, how do we achieve that growth? A few items...

+ Over and over again, we know this: **Workforce development** is a major key to developing the kind of thriving Memphis we all want — and the No. 1 criteria used by companies choosing where to locate.

Do we have as many trained and ready workers as we all would like? No. But don't let that solely define the issue. The more you dig deeper into site

selection and economic development, the more you see where having a plan to get there is important. And I think we're at a unique time in Memphis, primed for success.

As the only state in the nation with free community and technical college, we have an amazing opportunity in front of us to not just improve our workforce, but accelerate it in a relatively short period of time.

Thanks to Gov. Haslam and the state legislature for making it a reality — including the entire Shelby County delegation. It's up to us now to raise awareness and continue to ramp up what we're doing with our Workforce Investment Network, and we're doing just that.

+ Our efforts to **recruit jobs and growth** from out of town are increasing. In the past couple of months, I've been in New York and Chicago to market ourselves to site selectors. We won't know the fruits of some of these efforts for a while, of course. But that doesn't mean they aren't happening.

As I've been on the ground with the people who make these decisions, I've learned how important it is to **cut red tape** with government. I've learned how important it is for potential businesses to get an answer quickly — whether it be a need to improve a street, a sewer line or utility service, or whatever it may be.

Because if we're taking a few weeks to research an issue, they're moving on to another city.

In the past two years, Doug McGowen, our chief operating officer, has played this role — and as anyone who knows Doug will say, he played it well.

Amazon's fulfillment center off Lamar wouldn't be here without his effort. *But Doug needs to find time to sleep!* So I'll tell you here today that we're exploring how to stand up an officer or office to do this full-time — not just to respond to those questions, but to be proactive in doing it ourselves.

Because just as much as a potential new business may not have time to wait, **neither does Memphis.**

+ We must make our economy work for **every single Memphian**. Sixty-three percent of Memphis is African-American, yet African-Americans only receive 1 percent of the business receipts in our city. That's unacceptable, that's wrong, and it's unsustainable.

At the City of Memphis, we're leading by example: When I took office, 12 percent of City contracting was going to minority businesses, and we had two offices heading up the work.

I eliminated those two offices, formed a new one, hired Joann Massey, and now we're at 21 percent. That's a **60 percent improvement** in just on year.

Please know this, though: We are not finished. Not only do we plan to increase our share of City spending, but we've launched initiatives to help stand up more and more minority businesses so they're better equipped to get contracts in the private sector — so they can truly grow by leaps and bounds. And in the next couple of weeks, you'll hear yet another major announcement about what we're doing on that front.

People outside of Memphis are taking note. In January, Black Enterprise magazine named us the **No. 1 city in America** for black businesses.

You will always see my administration committed to landing the big fish — the hundreds of jobs in one announcement. But our focus is also on the true, organic source of our growth: the **small businesses** that are our engine.

+ We can't grow unless we have the **infrastructure** to grow. I mentioned earlier that we're paving more streets. If our \$19 million budget for next year is approved by the council, that means in our first three years alone, we'll have paved as many streets as the six years prior.

And then there's our sewer situation. For years, we **subsidized our own population loss** by allowing sewer taps in unincorporated Shelby County. I've put an end to this. We're here to improve the sewer infrastructure we have now, not overextend ourselves for years to come.

+ And of course, how can we spark our growth without a plan? That's where **Memphis 3.0** comes in. You've probably heard of it — a comprehensive plan for our city designed to bring opportunity for all. It's 100 percent privately funded, and it's our first comprehensive plan in nearly four decades. Think about it: For a generation, our growth has not been guided by any overarching plan.

Shortly after we took office, we set Memphis 3.0 into motion. And it is comprehensive — from land use, to job growth, to transit, and everything in between.

For instance: We are quite literally close to running out of good land for developments, which means that the job growth of our future in Memphis will be less and less in distribution industries. How do we adjust and move forward?

It's on all of us to determine, but Memphis 3.0 is working on it every single day.

So, is what we're doing having a real impact? Well, so much of this is a work in progress. So much of this is an investment into a future we won't see for years and years, and decades and decades.

But, we're seeing momentum. We're seeing that \$13 billion in development in Greater Memphis. And we saw an example just last week: We signed a letter of intent with a partnership to bring a Loews hotel to or near the old **100 North Main** building and as much as two new 30-story office towers around the building. It's a game-changing development that would not be possible had the developers not bought into our vision for our third century.

Make no mistake about it: Our administration is doubling down on our core and our neighborhoods. Our administration is reinvesting in Memphis. And it's delivering results.

In closing, I'll say this: From day one of walking into the mayor's office, I've viewed my job as equal parts celebrating our momentum and being clear-eyed about our challenges.

We can walk and chew gum at the same time. We can prioritize public safety while we plan for a more prosperous future. We can invest in our kids while keeping the tax rate low and running an efficient government. We can pave streets while we pave a pathway for more equity and opportunity for every single Memphian.

Memphis deserves nothing less.

No longer must Memphis accept the status quo. We cannot afford to.

We're a *city* that's changed the world simply because *we* have challenged the status quo. Sam Phillips and Elvis challenged the status quo, and rock-and-roll music was born on Union Avenue. Fred Smith challenged the status quo, and the business world has been changed every single night at our airport.

Our 1968 sanitation workers challenged the status quo, and human dignity was respected. Danny Thomas challenged the status quo, and more kids are surviving childhood cancer than ever before.

So let's turn same spirit inward. Let's use that on ourselves. Once we do, there will be no stopping Memphis.

Thank you.