

## STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

MARCH 5, 2009

Good afternoon.

Thank you to the Flint City Council and City Clerk for hosting this state of the city address. Your leadership and commitment to the city of Flint is appreciated.

It is an honor to be here today to present our state of the city.

Before we begin let us pause a moment to honor veteran Flint police officer, David Williams, who died last week after sustaining serious injuries while investigating a traffic accident on I-475 just over a year ago.

Officer Williams' life is a story of courage and public service. If there are any members of his family here, please stand and be recognized.

Know that our thoughts and prayers are with you.

Let us also take a moment to remember the men and women of our armed forces who are in harm's way, some of whom from the greater Flint area have given their lives in service to our country. We salute each of you and thank you for your commitment to our country.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the elected officials who are present today, with a special acknowledgement to Ted Henry, chairperson of the Genesee County Board of Commissioners.

Would our elected officials please stand?

I stand before you today at the helm of a great city with significant challenges.

The key question is in which direction are we headed.

Is it in the direction of renewal and revitalization? Or in the direction of the continued erosion of our physical, economic and civic infrastructure?

As a community, we have a choice.

As we ponder our choices I am reminded of a quote from Mahatma Gandhi, who said:

“the future depends on what we do in the present.”

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So what are the challenges we face as a community?

Number one is the city's financial crisis, defined by:

- A \$14 million general fund operating deficit
- A \$10 million sewer judgment
- A \$6 million judgment on Genesee Towers
- A 25 percent increase in water rates from Detroit
- And a number of other lawsuits and financial challenges that threaten the stability and solvency of our city.
- Meanwhile, income tax collections are declining and our property tax assessments will be lower next year.

Because of these realities, I am directing the appropriate departments to freeze all hiring, purchasing and travel.

In addition:

- Our population continues to decline
- We have high unemployment – roughly 20 percent in the city of Flint
- We have witnessed significant erosion of our industrial base
- We have deteriorating infrastructure
- We have an inefficient and ineffective governmental structure

As we consider these challenges, let us view them in the context of national challenges outlined by our new and inspiring President Barack Obama.

President Obama tells us that we are confronted by the deepest economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930's.

He reminds us that we are at war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Too many of our young people are ill prepared to compete in an ever changing global economy.

More and more of our citizens are denied access to quality health care for themselves and their children.

In the face of these obstacles he offers not just words of hope for our future, but a practical plan to lift our economy out of this recession.

We, too, require a realistic plan of action to move our city forward.

We have no time to waste. In addition to the financial actions outlined above, we intend to:

- Deliver a deficit reduction plan to the State of Michigan by the end of this month
- Present a new budget for 2010 fiscal year by the first week in April
- Ask our bargaining units to come back to the table to discuss wage adjustments and other items, such as:
  - Mandatory and/or voluntary unpaid days off

- Paying overtime only on actual hours worked
- Job sharing
- Exploring part-time employment options
- We will continue to set a new tone of respect and collaboration with our stakeholders, including our federal, state and regional partners
- Work hard to boost employee morale in the face of the dire financial reality
- Instill transparency and accountability at all levels of city government

This six-month period represents an opportunity.

It demands action not vacillation.

It demands that we look ahead, not backward.

It demands that we cooperate to build and strengthen partnerships to serve our citizens in host of areas, including:

Partnership between the administration and city council

Partnership with our neighborhoods, block clubs and human service organizations

Partnerships with other governmental units and private sector entities

In relation to these partnerships, my administration will work to expand cooperation and efficiency in government across the boundaries that separate us.

We have an excellent example how intergovernmental cooperation can work. In 1983 Mayor James Sharp had a vision for Bishop Airport.

He recognized it was a great asset for Flint but he also recognized that Flint alone did not have the resources to develop and expand that asset. He with other community leaders created an airport authority.

This asset today serves the entire mid-Michigan region. Indeed, it is a model for cooperation and development.

Now let's examine some of the key departments in the city government crucial to our progress.

Public safety is a central concern in our community. Although overall crime fell from 2007 to 2008, it remains far too high.

Among the Police Department's top challenges and opportunities are:

- Boosting morale
- Improving response time

- Partnering with community groups and institutions to reduce violence, stem the tide of illegal narcotics and disband gangs that threaten the future of our young people.

The Fire Department is challenged with how to maintain a high-volume, high-operation fleet.

- We need to upgrade our emergency communications network so that the city is able to communicate on the same 800-mega-hertz frequency that the rest of the county operates on.

That will allow the department to communicate seamlessly across the entire county with other emergency response units.

- Demolition of vacant and abandon buildings that are targets for arsonists.

In the area of community and economic development, the University Avenue corridor redevelopment nears completion connecting Kettering University with our assets throughout the heart of the city.

- Work is also scheduled to begin soon on a new \$2.9 million Social Security Administration branch that will be located on carpenter road between Fleming and Clio roads.
- The Swedish biogas project in cooperation with Kettering, which was identified by Gov. Jennifer Granholm as a center of excellence.

- In addition, \$2.4 million in federal stimulus money will make the Kettering Gateway Project a reality. The gateway would establish a direct connection to the Kettering University from I-69.
- General Motors' recent announcement that the Chevy Volt engine plant will be built in the company's high-tech Flint Engine South facility.
- The Durant Hotel renovation in partnership with the Genesee County Land Bank.
- The Genesee Regional Chamber of Commerce partners for progress projects with Uptown Reinvestment Corporation, Uptown Development Corporation and the Downtown Development Authority.

The Parks & Recreation Department is working hard to get the city's golf courses up and running, with particular emphasis on reopening the dining facility at Swartz Creek.

- Another top priority is to provide the best possible programs for the senior citizens using our three senior centers.
- The good news on the on the parks and rec front is that Kearsley and Swartz Creek, our "flagship" golf courses will open on time and are now accepting league applications.
- And we are working with community partners to find solutions for the Mott Park and Pierce Park courses.

Thanks to a grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, MSU's Prima Civitas Foundation is providing counsel and direction in several areas, including:

- The deficit reduction plan
- The 2010 budget
- An analysis of the law department
- And conducting an overall analysis of city government to improve operating efficiency

Other assets and partners include:

- A transportation infrastructure comprised of Bishop International Airport, major rail lines and a network of interstates that connect our community to major markets globally and in North America.
- Our health care partners, including Hurley, McLaren and Genesys; Mott Children's Health Center, Hamilton Family Health Center, and the MSU College of Human Medicine.
- Our K-12 and higher education partners including the Flint Community Schools, the Genesee Intermediate School District, the University of Michigan-Flint, Kettering University, Baker College and Mott Community College.
- The non-profit and human services sector, from the United Way organizations to institutions of faith, continues to deliver and inspire in countless ways.
- Lastly, our cultural amenities provide and reflect the rich tapestry that is the greater Flint community. They include the Crim Foundation, Children's Museum, Farmers' Market; McCree Theatre and the Flint Cultural Center.

These are tremendous assets that provide rich and varied benefits to our city and our region.

In addition, there are two partners who recently received national recognition.

- Members of the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Flint have received national recognition for several video projects, including the video, *Get Fit at the BGC*. One participating club member even traveled to Washington D.C. For a ceremony with the Secretary of Health & Human Services. Some of the youth who worked on these award-winning projects are with us today. Please, let's give them a hand.
- Baker College of Flint has established a new division called the Center for Transportation Technology, which will be housed at the Superior Pontiac/Cadillac dealership on Dort Highway. Renovation of the main showroom is set to begin in April.
- In addition, Baker IT students won the Third-Annual National Collegiate Cyber Defense competition in 2008, competing against teams from prestigious colleges and universities throughout the U.S., including the defending champion, Texas A&M University. The competition focuses on the operational aspects of managing and protecting the "commercial" network infrastructure. Members of Baker's cyber defense team are also here today let's give them a hand.
- The Summer Youth Initiative, administered by the Genesee Regional Chamber, places about 400 hundred teens in summer jobs and other career-building experiences with private-sectors partners.

- Mott College recently completed a \$1.5 million construction project for a new campus restaurant creating construction jobs and permanent food-service jobs. Later this year, Mott will begin work on an \$8.2 million renovation of the college library, bringing more construction jobs to the city and improve our educational resources.
- Kettering University, one of "America's Best Colleges," according to U.S. News & World Report, is also home of the Small Business and Technology Development Center. The center has helped almost 500 clients in Flint in the past 18 months, and has helped generate \$3.4 million in capital investments in Genesee and Lapeer counties.

This is just a sampling of the tremendous assets we have in our community.

In addition to getting our financial house in order, our primary goal in city government is to sustain and grow these assets as they will help spawn new businesses, create jobs, improve our human services and, most importantly, employ and educate our people.

Although these institutions are located within the borders of the city of Flint, they are assets for the entire region.

The challenges we face are significant, but we still have much to be proud of in the city of Flint.

We are a strong, resilient community.

We all in this together. We all have a job to do to renew and revitalize the city of Flint.

I also want to take a moment to recognize the hard work of our city employees who are on the frontlines every day, keeping our city running.

In closing, I will leave you with a quote from Bobby Kennedy from a speech he delivered in Soweto, South Africa, in 1966:

“It is through numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or strikes out against injustice, or acts to improve the lot of others that person sends forth a tiny ripple of hope and crossing each other from many different centers of energy and daring those tiny ripples build a current that can bring down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

Let us go forward today from these chambers and be those tiny ripples of hope for our community.

Thank you.

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Delivered by:

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