

Lawrence State of the City
Mayor Dean Jessup
April 10, 2014

Thank you, Mike, for that kind introduction and for the wonderful job that you and your staff do to promote our great city.

Friends . . . and my lovely wife, Pam . . .

Good morning!

A few weeks ago, I visited with my high school football coach Bill Gray who said that Lawrence looked beautiful that day.

As I told Coach, Lawrence is beautiful every day.

Thanks very much for being here. I can appreciate just how busy you all are, and so your presence is especially meaningful to me.

It means that you care enough about your community to take time out of that busy schedule to be reminded of where we've been and hear our ideas about where we should go.

Most Americans are busy these days – so busy with pressing day-to-day issues that it's difficult to stop and think about the past or to plan for the future.

But right here? This setting? Here, we're steeped in history. We're standing on hallowed ground, on the exact site where thousands of brave young Americans prepared to defend our freedom.

So it's easy to harken to past heroes whose conduct serves as an example for us all.

I'm thinking this morning about several leaders whom – I have to imagine – we *all* admire.

Leaders who had strong beliefs and had no problem expressing them to political opponents but who were willing to set aside differences for the greater good.

No one fits that description better than Abraham Lincoln. And at this time when Washington DC seems mired in permanent gridlock, when some elected officials seem willing to do anything to get their way and to thwart their opposition, President Lincoln's willingness to compose his

Cabinet with three men who were his rivals for the Republican presidential nomination – as well as three Democrats – surely sets an example we all should follow.

At one of the most crucial times in our nation’s history, President Lincoln saw value in the opposition’s viewpoint. Instead of vanquishing his defeated rivals, he sought their counsel.

Instead of seeking to destroy would-be enemies, he built them up . . . and pulled them close . . . and, together, his team made astounding achievements that resonate to this day.

Cooperation.

That’s one of the reasons that we were able to balance the 2014 budget and made so many more advances in our city over the past year.

Our new controller, Oscar Gutierrez, who has been nothing short of wonderful, has helped us identify innovative ways to tighten our belt yet accomplish important measures, such as providing a 3 percent raise in 2013 for our hardworking police officers and fire fighters.

I’m happy to say that the careful budgeting we’ve undertaken in Lawrence has resulted in the upgrade of our financial rating from Standard & Poor’s. From an A minus with a negative outlook, when I took office, to A with a stable outlook today.

That’s quite a feat in just two years! And it’s heartening to see that the outside world recognizes and appreciates our work.

Still, we know there are challenges ahead.

Operating a city government in Indiana is never going to be easy. But we have made a great deal of progress toward righting our financial ship, and we can and will continue to make the tough choices that will keep it sailing smoothly.

One such decision was to contract with Republic Services – a decision that means we are providing the same, good trash-collection service to our residents but saving money for the city.

We also are making it easier for residents to recycle and, after just a couple of months, we have seen participation rise from 35 percent to nearly 80 percent.

We also ensured that any city trash collector who wanted a job with Republic could get one. Seven of the nine have gone to work for the company.

We were able to accomplish this important step in a bipartisan way because of the leadership of the council.

Cooperation.

The other reason that we've made great strides over the past two years was demonstrated by two other giants in the political world. President Ronald Reagan and House Speaker Tip O'Neill rarely saw eye-to-eye on anything, but they found ways to cooperate. Even stronger than their ideologies, according to O'Neill's son, was their "commitment to getting things done."

Cooperation and commitment.

Here in Lawrence, cooperation and commitment have resulted in economic-development successes such as Little Raymond's Print Shop, which – in exchange for a temporary incentive package – chose to locate its operation in Lawrence and grow its workforce over the next three years. That means 105 new jobs for our citizens and new revenues for our city.

Cooperation and commitment also have resulted in the establishment of Art's Skillet, a welcomed addition as we endeavor to make Pendleton Pike a more appealing destination.

Art Ugalde is a true success story, and he honors us by joining the Lawrence business community and by joining us today. Art, please stand up.

Art was laid off from his job in 2012, a victim – like so many others – of the weak economy. That, understandably, had to be a terrible blow. But Art decided to make lemonade out of that lemon – maybe literally! – and opened his breakfast-and-lunch restaurant at 8255 Pendleton Pike.

Art is already contemplating an expansion – a nice patio for patrons to sit outside now that the weather has finally improved.

Art's Skillet – a great place, a great meal, and a great man. Thank you, Art.

By the way, we hope to help Art with a façade grant made available from a program sponsored by our Redevelopment Commission and the Lawrence Community Development Corporation.

If any of you know of a company along the Pike or Franklin Road that needs a facelift, tell the owner to check into a façade grant.

I mentioned the weather a moment ago, and that brings to mind another great Lawrence example of cooperation and commitment. Enormous commitment.

Crews from our Public Works, Utilities and Parks departments did yeoman's work this past winter.

Our folks worked 12-hour shifts in terrible conditions, guaranteeing that the snow-plowing operation never stopped over the course of five days in early January. That dedication continued throughout the very long winter.

We had Utilities workers standing knee deep in frigid water when mains broke because of the extreme cold.

Police officers and fire fighters braved the cold and snow to rescue people who had no heat and take them to a shelter.

And now we've got crews methodically moving through our streets, repairing an unusual number of potholes that have erupted. Many times, our crew is on the scene the very day that they're reported.

Cooperation and commitment.

Let me say, as an aside, that you don't get much more real than when you're collecting trash or treating sewage or plowing snow.

Maybe that's why city government gets more things done than Washington. I'm sure that's why we're accomplishing so much in Lawrence. We're willing to get our hands dirty.

Let me just mention a few other things we have accomplished.

We began work on a new water plant on Richardt Street. Already, the first building is completed and the dangerous and obsolete water tower on the property has been dismantled.

This work ultimately will ensure that our city can weather unusual events and will have a reliable supply of clean drinking water for years to come.

We remediated the wetlands next to Monarch Beverage Company and soon will have a new park there. We'll be announcing its name in the next two weeks.

We attracted Blue Ribbon Transport to locate here in Lawrence at a perfect location for a company that provides transportation and logistics for other firms.

Blue Ribbon started with 21 employees, but has now doubled their workforce to 45!

Just think: two years ago, the buildings occupied by Blue Ribbon, Little Raymond's and Art's Skillet stood empty.

Now they're housing vibrant, growing businesses. That's what comes of cooperation and commitment.

We also have made sure that our citizens know what we're doing by publishing the monthly Lawrence Lift newsletter and regularly posting information online and in social media, such as Facebook.

Meanwhile, I've been visiting businesses, learning about our community's creativity . . . and ingenuity . . . and determination.

So far, I've visited 70 companies and schools on what we call WEAL visits. That stands for Work . . . Educate . . . and Advance Lawrence.

Seeing the diversity of fabulous companies here in Lawrence has been a highlight of my time in office.

For example, Harris and Ford distributes chemicals and ingredients to food, personal care, cosmetic, pharmaceutical and industrial customers.

Can you imagine? Every ingredient, except sugar and water, that you find in that can of Coke or Pepsi you'll enjoy this afternoon comes from Harris and Ford right here in Lawrence.

During these WEAL visits, I've been asking questions and I've been listening to their ideas and concerns. My hosts have been gracious and generous with their time, and I think we've opened a lasting dialogue that will facilitate our cooperation as we all work to advance Lawrence.

I also have had the opportunity to visit some of our local schools. My sons attended Lawrence Township schools, so I'm well aware of their excellence.

But more important is that the world is aware of their excellence.

Companies considering expanding or locating here know that their current workers can send their children to fine schools and that these same schools will be turning out excellent workers for the future.

I'm pleased to have Dr. Shawn Smith, the new superintendent of Lawrence Township Schools, here with us today.

Dr. Smith, thank you for your leadership, and welcome to Lawrence.

The exciting work continues in 2014.

Developers expect to break ground next month on an incubator-type office building at 56th Street and Lawrence Village Parkway, across from Panera Bread.

The 5-and-a-half-million-dollar, 36-thousand-square-foot building will bring in fledgling businesses, which of course have the potential to grow and create even more jobs in Lawrence.

Jockamo's Pizza, an Irvington success story, has agreed to locate in the building and bring its delicious gourmet pizza to Lawrence.

We're hoping to attract another restaurant that will offer nighttime entertainment, making the village an evening destination.

And there are changes coming to Franklin Road. In short order, three burned-out houses on Franklin Road – real eyesores – will be torn down.

Then we'll start preliminary engineering work that will lead to the repaving of Franklin Road from Pendleton Pike all the way to 56th Street.

The area will look better and be a more attractive place for job growth and economic opportunity. Even more important, it will be safer for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians.

We'll break ground in August on the first leg of the Oaklandon Trail, which eventually will complete a north-south route that traverses the entire city, providing exercise opportunities for our residents and a safer route for school children.

There's more!

- Thanks to an initiative of the Redevelopment Commission, we will be reconstructing the intersection at 59th Street and Sunnyside Road to improve traffic and stop the dangerous U-turns that are happening there.

- We expect that the old Village Pantry will be torn down so that the corner can be developed in a way that benefits the community. We'll have more good news on this in the coming weeks.
- We are aggressively pursuing federal money to reconstruct 56th Street from Interstate 465 to the bridge at Lee Road. Call it the Fort Benjamin Harrison Boulevard bridge-to-bridge project.
- Lawrence has been chosen as the site for the Hoosier Veterans' Hall of Fame, and we're in talks with its advocates about how to best honor these real Hoosier heroes.
- Our city has been named in the Marion County Public Library's master plan as a logical location for a new library branch. We're doing all we can to bring that fabulous asset to our city.
- We're relentlessly seeking a sponsor that can help us bring an LPGA tournament to the beautiful Fort Harrison golf course and expose our fine city to the world.
- We've filed all the paperwork to create the Community Foundation of Lawrence, Indiana. Now it's just a matter of time until we get the go-ahead from the federal government.
- And we're working fast and furiously to schedule what we are calling "Fridays at the Fort" – a summer concert series – that could start in just a few weeks.

We have other ideas – and a few dreams – and we're hopeful that, at this time next year, we'll be telling you about even more fantastic developments in our city.

Earlier I mentioned some extraordinary leaders who set great examples for us. Examples that we here in Lawrence are taking to heart.

I want to tell you about someone who has done just that . . . who has followed their examples . . . and, by doing so, has established himself as an extraordinary leader.

Matt Lohsl is all about service. Matt, please stand.

For 10 years, he was a math and computer science teacher in a public high school.

That would probably be enough hazardous duty for most people!

But not for Matt. He has served his country in three wars, first as a Marine in Beirut in 1983, then – as a member of the Indiana Army National Guard – in Iraq in 2006 and Afghanistan more recently.

Matt is an avid sportsman. He was an All-America swimmer for Wabash College and has run the Mini-Marathon 11 times.

He even organized a Mini in Afghanistan that drew 170 participants, including some Afghan soldiers!

But most importantly, Matt is a father to his children, and a husband to his wonderful wife Colleen who also joins us today.

What an example of cooperation and commitment! Matt, we are honored to know you. Thank you for your service. And for your overwhelming love for our country.

During his service, Matt was recognized by a Blue Star Banner that hung over a street here in Lawrence. The Blue Star Banner program recognizes all Lawrence men and women during their active military duty.

This stellar program – a real hallmark of Lawrence and something that sets us apart from average communities – was the brainchild of Candy Davis, who has served Lawrence for more than 10 years.

Candy, please stand.

Candy is unflappable and patient. Not too long ago, she said that 90 percent of her job was herding cats! And she can do it!

That's because she is a doer. If I ask Candy to do something, she'll get it done, no matter the obstacles. I don't have to give the request another thought.

She does the same thing every single day for the people of Lawrence.

Candy, thank you for the Blue Star Banner program. Thank you for your service to Lawrence. Thank you for your cooperation and commitment. Our city and country are better because of you.

Let me leave you this morning with a thought from the president I most admire – Harry S Truman.

President Truman said, and I quote:

A pessimist is one who makes difficulties of his opportunities and . . . an optimist is one who makes opportunities of his difficulties.

I'm here to tell you: I am an optimist!

Like Art Ugalde, I want to make lemonade from lemons.

Like Matt Lohsl, I want to demonstrate my commitment to this country and our city.

Like Candy Davis, I want to get things done.

And like President Truman, I want to make opportunities from difficulties.

I hope you'll join me.

Thank you for your cooperation. Thank you for your commitment to Lawrence. God bless you, God bless Lawrence and God bless America.