

**THOMAS C. LEPPERT
MAYOR**



**MAYOR'S ADDRESS
2009 State of the City Address
September, 15, 2009
Dallas Regional Chamber Luncheon**

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**Contact: Chris Heinbaugh
214.670-0773**

Mayor Tom Leppert:

Thank you and it is a pleasure to be with you.

I can remember back only six years ago, when I addressed you as the Chairman of the Dallas Regional Chamber.

That was a great opportunity and it was an honor and a privilege to serve in that capacity.

Since then, there have been a few changes.

My hair color, schedule and pay have changed ... in some cases a lot.

And back then, I measured my success by my ability to stay out of the newspaper and off the airwaves ... if the last two years are any measure, I have failed miserably on both counts.

But what is interesting is what has not changed.

I spoke to you about the importance of being competitive, pushing economic development, building our downtown, protecting the environment and improving education ... back then or in this current role, they are all still critical to our community's success.

And two years ago, I spoke to you as the Mayor of this great City.

We laid out an aggressive agenda.

To some it was too aggressive ... saying such an agenda did not reflect the realities of working in the public sector.

To me, though, it was an agenda that reflected the possibilities, the potential of this City.

Unless we had the belief, the optimism that we could move forward, we were falling short ... both to those that had given so much to build this city but also to the people that would follow.

And, to be clear, we have succeeded.

In each of the key areas and the objectives we set, we have been successful. While never easy, this community has pulled together to move forward.

Today, I am enthusiastic not only by what we have achieved but by the prospects ahead.

I hope you share this view.

I believe people in our City have more confidence, are more convinced, that we can move forward ... address the major issues and get real results.

The pride in the city and the optimism is strong.

And this comes at a time when we, in Dallas, this region and Texas, feel, economically like an island.

While many regions across this country are concerned that the best is behind them, here in Dallas, the best is ahead.

Six years ago or two years ago, no one would have imagined the economic upheaval of the last year.

While it has made achieving our goals even more difficult, it has not deterred us or prevented us from getting to the goal line.

Today, I would like to evaluate our progress, appraise our position and share with you some of the "lessons learned" during these past two years.

When I first addressed you as Mayor, we laid out several goals.

1. Reduce crime ... make Dallas a safer City ... both perceived and in actuality.
2. Help improve our educational system
3. Position Dallas as a leader in addressing environmental issues
4. Create economic opportunities, especially in the southern part of our city and downtown.

Today, Dallas is a much safer City.

We aligned our police, staff, Council and citizenry on reducing crime.

We increased our police force and we have made great strides in cleaning up our neighborhoods.

We have enacted new ordinances that provide additional tools for our police and attorneys.

Crime was down double digits last year and we are on track for it to be down double digits again this year.

Some major violent crimes are back to the level of forty years ago ... in absolute terms.

These are results that any large city in America would love to have.

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On the education front, we need to significantly improve public schools.

The Dallas ISD has made strides, increasing the number of recognized and exemplary schools.

But we need to do much better.

While we at the City do not have a structural role in the public schools, we have focused more attention and resources than ever before.

Early reading programs to give young, disadvantaged children the chance to walk in to public school on the first day with a real chance to succeed.

Scholarship programs to encourage students to stay in high school.

Internships to expose students to the importance of an education.

Enlisted businesses to improve the appeal of our campuses and create a better learning environment.

And each of these efforts have been at almost no cost to the taxpayers.

We recognize that our programs will not turn around education in Dallas, but they provide support and help our students succeed.

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Ten years ago you would never have thought of Dallas as being at the forefront of addressing environmental issues.

But today we are.

It was back in 2003 that we added this as a major component of the Chamber's agenda, reflecting that it is not only a health issue but also a vital business issue.

More and more the way we are positioned on environmental issues will contribute to our ability to attract new investment.

A year ago, we took the step to become the first large city to adopt comprehensive green building standards for all buildings ... public, private ... commercial, residential ... large, small.

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And in a difficult environment, we have made significant strides in building a strong economic base.

Downtown has been a focus.

In the last two years, over 50 companies, large and small, have relocated downtown.

I had hoped to have one new major company locate downtown during my term.

AT&T a little over a year ago moved to our city ... an event that gained national and international media attention.

And in two weeks, Tenet Healthcare will also call downtown Dallas their new home.

We have thousands of new residents, new local retail, hotel and entertainment venues, making our downtown more vibrant and energetic.

We have also expanded the green space in our downtown, with over 20 parks and plazas Downtown.

We also placed a priority on the southern part of our city, knowing that future economic development there was critical to building a tax base to ease the burden on our residential taxpayers throughout the city.

And while there is a long ways to go, we have seen real progress that will make a difference long into the future.

Sixteen projects have been supported by the City in the last two years that will produce nearly a half billion dollars in investment and creatively using TIF districts will produce another 100 million dollars in investment in the Lancaster corridor.

And maybe most important to the residents of the southern part of the city, we are seeing jobs being created, three new bottling plants, and new basic service development.

We recently opened one new grocery store and we anticipate four more in the near future.

Shortly, we will announce the approval of our EB 5 program.

This program will encourage high net worth foreigners to invest in Dallas.

It is the culmination of two years of hard work and it will a great new tool to aid development in the southern part of our city.

In each of these identified priority areas ... public safety, education, the environment and economic development ... we have seen demonstrative achievements and progress.

At a time when there is still significant economic uncertainty, I am more optimistic than ever.

We have an attractive cost of living and doing business, a strong transportation infrastructure, regularly rated as one of the best places to do business and, most importantly, have people with the optimism to invest in their community and the future.

But the best example is what is happening all around us ... literally right now.

Yesterday, we opened the Green Line, the latest in the largest light rail construction project anywhere in the nation.

We also broke ground on the Woodall Rogers Deck Park ... a park built over a highway.

This will provide spectacular green space and venues for outdoor entertainment.

It will also, strategically bring together uptown with the arts district and downtown and it will spur new investment and development.

Later today, we will break ground on the Convention Center Hotel.

For twenty five years, we knew its importance ... we saw the negative impact of failing to move.

But people said we could never get it done.

We did.

It will secure Dallas' spot among the top ten convention cities in America and it will be the genesis of new downtown development.

It was never about a hotel, it was about our future ... it was about choosing hope over fear ... it was about believing in the great potential of our city instead of conceding to mediocrity.

And then, on Thursday, we will unveil the schematic designs and building model for the new Perot Museum of Nature & Science at Victory Park.

It will be a major new attraction ... world-class and bringing millions in the coming decade ... and encourage students to pursue science, math, technology ... critical to North Texas and our country's competitive edge.

Next week, we initiate the latest component of the Trinity River Corridor Project.

The Margaret Hunt Hill bridge will tower 40 stories above the Trinity, changing the horizon of our city.

I am happy to say the Trinity Project is moving forward ... we have overcome challenge after challenge ... there will be more ... *and we will overcome those.*

People understand the critical nature of flood control, they see the potential for recreation and economic development and they realize the major role this project plays in our transportation future.

From the foresight to see this project become the face of our City in the next century, comes the fortitude to persevere ... to seek solutions rather than surrender... and to work in partnership rather than quit.

And then, next month, we open the AT&T Performing Arts Center ... the Wyle, Winspear and Strauss performance venues and the Sammons Park.

Together with the DMA, Nasher, Myerson and others, we have the largest and finest arts complex anywhere in this nation.

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Now, let's put the pieces together ... real progress on addressing today's needs, strong economic fundamentals and major investments that look to the future.

And then, look across the nation ... Rising taxes, increasing regulatory constraints and economic instability in California and the east coast.

Today, we have a unique opportunity ... to build an even stronger economy, deepening our tax base and providing jobs for our people.

I am speaking to a Fortune 500 company on the east coast ... they are looking hard at Dallas because they feel they can no longer operate effectively in the regulatory environment in their home state.

A large financial company in California is looking at us because they see costs that are strangling the business and the prospect of increasing costs from the financial problems of the state and cities there.

But we cannot take this advantage for granted. We have to remain competitive and provide a stable economic environment.

That's why I am so opposed to raising taxes. We have invested in public safety and economic development without raising taxes.

That would be a clear path to turning our back on today's opportunity and communicating to businesses and individuals that we can't manage our fiscal position or provide the stability that draws new businesses and the taxes they pay.

So how do we communicate these advantages to our benefit?

Today, businesses are thinking different. Any issue outside of expense control or the need to restructure operations is off the board. We need to position a relocation to Dallas as an integral part of that restructuring and reducing costs.

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To accomplish this, I'd like to introduce our newest marketing effort ... Bold Move.

Bold Move consists of many elements.

But most of all there's a personal contact with the decision maker, the CEO.

To identified companies, we are sending a fully functional iPhone ... one that has been customized to provide data specific to the company.

You are seeing clips from the phone and web site.

On the website and phone there are videos by major Dallas CEOs offering their perspectives.

You might be interested to know that we have even included the personal cell numbers of many major CEOs here in Dallas.

We are selecting companies built on a detailed filter encompassing industry stress levels, current location and recent structural and leadership changes.

This will be a journey.

It took over a year for AT&T to make the move and 10 years for American Airlines.

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After decades on the private side, I am often asked, "What's the difference between leading on the private side versus the public side?"

While there are clearly differences, I have learned that there are far more similarities.

First, teamwork is everything.

The accomplishments we have seen are a function of a community working together ... understanding we are all in this together and need each other.

Your City Council is a great example of this.

Known for too long for a lack of teamwork, this Council has been focused on the key priorities that make a difference for this City.

They set a tone for a city moving forward.

While there are disagreements on various issues, the major moves have all had the strong support of the vast majority of the members.

Those members have put aside politics and individual agendas when the big priorities, the defining issues have come before them.

This concept of team work is also alive throughout the community.

The Trinity, the Deck Park, even the homeless center, the Bridge, are a function of the private and public sectors teaming together to push our City forward.

We got green building done by working with and for the private sector not against it.

Public or private ... teamwork is the key to success.

Second, successful cities or companies look to the future ... they understand the importance of investing for the future ... building strength.

That means responsibly moving forward and you can't move forward by saying "No".

Delaying or avoiding investments that impact our competitiveness or improve our infrastructure, such as our bond programs, are a sure way to send us back to the 80's and 90's when we fell behind and suffer to this day.

It's easy to say "No" ... it is the risk-averse route ... but it is not the route to building for the future.

It doesn't get things done, it doesn't make lives better, it doesn't attract people and businesses that build a company or city.

In today's environment, we have to be willing to capitalize on opportunities, to see our tremendous diversity as the asset it is, and be willing to take on the tough issues ... the ones people say can't be done.

We need to be willing to move forward and willing to invest in our future.

Unless we do, we can not and should not expect to create a great City.

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The state of this City is strong, even in this tumultuous economic environment.

As we work together and build on the foresight of those who were willing to take risks to build this City, we will exploit the opportunities ahead.

In doing so we will set the stage for a future that is stronger, more productive and more promising than ever.

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