

State of the City Address

Mayor Ken Miyagishima

February 16, 2011

Good afternoon. Thank you for being here. It's an honor to speak to you today.

First of all, welcome. Bienvenidos and a heart-felt thanks to my colleagues on the city council, to members of our city staff, and to all our fellow citizens who are in attendance today or watching at home. I especially want to welcome and thank my wife and first lady, Susana Chaparro, for your love, support and inspiration, as well as for being such a strong ally and partner in all that I do. Although our children are not here with us today, I want to wish my daughter, Danielle, a Happy Birthday!

I would also like to thank former city manager Terrence Moore, and to wish him well in his new position at Morgantown, West Virginia. We are very pleased to have, as our new city manager, Mr. Robert Garza, whose experience, creativity, and leadership make him an excellent choice as city manager. Robert, we look forward to working with you in the months and years to come.

I am pleased to report today that the state of our city is strong.

By necessity, I paid special attention to economic concerns in each of my last two State of the City addresses. Two years ago we were just beginning to understand the seriousness of the nationwide financial crisis and its impact on local communities. A year ago, during some of the worst months of the recession, we were able to report that the city's financial condition was stable, with our reserves at over twice the level required by law. Over the past year we have continued, with staff's guidance, to be proactive in protecting the city's finances, developing contingencies for whatever the economy may bring. I am happy to report that our reserves continue at their same strong financial level, and that we have been able to continue all essential city services, including our police, fire, and public safety protection, without interruption.

One of the hidden advantages of a financial crisis like we have experienced is that it gives us an opportunity to look closely at our expenditures, and to become ever more effective in delivering the services our residents expect. For example, when we moved away from conventional phone service to VOIP, or Voice Over Internet Protocol, this saved the taxpayers an estimated \$ 100,000. When we changed the manner in which cell phones were being utilized, we were able to reduce the number of city-issued cell phones by 200 with a savings of over \$200,000 a year.

Our new Sustainability Officer, Tom Schuster, has been charged with evaluating opportunities for cost savings throughout city government, from lighting upgrades through money-saving renewable energy projects. The way we go about our daily business can also be made more productive, and I fully support City Manager Garza's plans to re-organize the city's administrative structure for greater cost efficiency and effectiveness. This will be the first major administrative re-organization in several years, during which time our population and the demands on city government have grown enormously. This has been a good opportunity to take stock and plan wisely for the future.

At the same time we have – despite the financial environment – made remarkable progress over the past three years. We are a city on the move, and the envy of other cities across the state and region. I'd like to take a few minutes today to consider that progress and the many exciting initiatives currently underway.

Most immediately noticeable, as we look around, are the new contours and landmarks of our city. We gather today in our new award-winning City Hall, a building that is not only beautiful and efficient – it uses 30% less energy per square foot than the buildings replaced – it provides a consolidation of functions within our government to allow our residents an opportunity to complete most of their business under one roof. In addition to the energy savings, having a single administrative facility reduced the number of vehicles in our city fleet by over 20, saving thousands of dollars in maintenance and repair. Not to mention this project was completed on time and within budget – a building that will serve us well for decades to come.

From City Hall we look across to the hustle and bustle of construction underway downtown, with crews hard at work on the long-awaited re-opening of Main Street. Thanks to re-structuring of city bonds and careful investment of stimulus funding, Main Street will emerge complete and ready for use, with benches, landscaping, and other key features in place. By late fall of this year, we will be driving past the many new restaurants that have already moved into the downtown area. We will continue to visit our Farmer's Market, which was recently rated number one in the state of New Mexico and number nine in the entire nation. We'll pass the site of the new Nature and Science Museum in the old Rio Grande Bank Building, and the new multi-modal Transportation Center at the corner of Alameda and Lohman. Downtown Las Cruces, too, is very much on the move.

To the east and west of downtown are the Mesquite Historic District, with its vibrant neighborhood organization, Las Esperanzas, and the Alameda Depot Historic District, with its shaded streets and sidewalks and new overlay plan. We are fortunate to have a strong residential community in the downtown area, and look forward to a new mixed-income housing project at the site of the old City Center building on Alameda. More and more our downtown will join downtowns across the country that are rapidly becoming great places for residents to live, work, and enjoy life together.

Just as the new City Hall anchors the north end of our downtown area, the new Las Cruces Convention Center, at the edge of the New Mexico State campus, anchors the south. This state-of-art building – built on time and within budget -- is not only LEED certified; it has solar collectors that will save the city almost a half a million dollars in energy costs over the next 20 years. We're grateful to City Councilor Small and local architect Steve Newby for their leadership in securing the federal funding that made this solar installation possible.

Connecting these two ends of downtown is the El Paseo Corridor, which, thanks to Mayor Pro-tem Thomas and city staff, was selected as one of only four communities in the entire country for special planning assistance by the federal government. Three separate federal agencies have been working with neighborhoods along that corridor as they envision a vibrant commercial and residential district

for our city. Many older residents can remember when El Paseo was a tree-lined "paseo" that linked campus and city. In the near future that reality may be ours again.

When you add in the new Regional Aquatic Center, the opening of Sonoma Ranch Boulevard, the new flood control reservoir on the East Mesa, completion of an Army Corps of Engineers plan for a recreational area behind the retention dam between Lohman and Highway 70, our overlay project on University Avenue, citywide recommitment to neighborhood infrastructure, citywide curbside recycling, and our new water reclamation plant on the city's east side -- which saves over 1 million gallons of fresh drinking water per day -- there's little doubt that good things are happening in the City of Las Cruces!

Nationally our city has not gone unnoticed – in 2010, for the second straight year Las Cruces appeared in the top ten of the Milken Institute's list of best performing cities, as well as in Relocate America's list of Top 10 Recovery Cities. We were also listed last year as "One of the Best Places to Thrive" for baby boomers – which include a lot of us in this room -- and in the top twenty of Sunset Magazine's "Best Towns of the Future."

Ultimately, though, the new facilities and contributions to quality of life, the accolades and recommendations, are rooted in something more basic, a growing, shared excitement about what Las Cruces is and can become. I grew up in Las Cruces, and raised my family and built my business here, so I know and appreciate our flavor and uniqueness, the special something that makes this a great place to live. As you know, I've been committed to making sure Las Cruces continues to be a great place to live, even as we enjoy the growth that is certain to occur.

Fortunately there has emerged a broad consensus on the part of our council and the people who elected us, on the part of the business community and the people they serve, that we want our growth to be well-planned and thoughtful. We want to safeguard our mountains and fertile valley. We want healthy neighborhoods and a vibrant public life. We want life to be good for all Las Cruceans and not just a

few of us, a good home for those who live here and for those still to come.

When I first was elected, these propositions were still in doubt. Over the past three years, though, we've seen the effects of a new commitment on the part of all of us – city staff, city council, contractors and developers, residents and homebuyers – to our quality of life. A commitment to neighborhoods that have nearby parks and schools, with connected walkways and bike paths that stretch from mountain to river, joined by a network of well-planned transit and roads. These are all part of a shared vision for our city's future, embraced by resident and homebuilder alike.

An important part of this livability involves public safety, and making sure that we have first class emergency services for all parts of town. We will be announcing in the next few months the site for a joint police / fire / emergency response facility on the East Mesa. Among our top priorities for the city before the legislature this year is a consolidated 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Point to respond to calls and dispatch services throughout the county. Another priority is the construction of a Crisis Triage Center to serve, on an emergency basis, individuals with serious mental health issues, an important issue for a growing city to address.

Finally, in discussing public safety, I want to congratulate our new Police Chief, Mr. Richard Williams. All of us have been greatly impressed by his professionalism and commitment to community engagement, which will help us make sure that our officers are known and trusted by those that they serve. We've also been pleased to have Travis Brown as our new fire chief. He was already well acquainted with the department before becoming chief, which has made for a smooth transition. Both our chiefs are already planning to collaborate on future public safety facilities, to improve teamwork and eliminate the costs associated with separate sites.

We have learned that a good quality of life is important to businesses wishing to locate here. We've been pleased by the arrival and rapid growth of companies like Sapphire Energy, and in the past year the West Mesa Industrial Park has welcomed Alaska Structures -- which has consolidated operations in Las Cruces -- as well as Samson

Equipment as they continue to expand. Recently, AmeriCom, a national telecommunications company has decided to locate their national headquarters in Las Cruces. We appreciate efforts by our economic development partners to attract industries to our city, even as we urge them to develop resources that will support our local businesses as well – businesses whose owners have already committed their lives and futures to our city. At a recent council work session, Abby Train, a researcher at NMSU, suggested that we include Economic Gardening in our development strategy – a principle that involves growing our economy through investment in our local businesses and home-grown entrepreneurs. I urge both MVEDA and our city economic development department to explore and develop this option for council in coming months.

Clearly, the success of these economic development efforts will depend on our ability to educate our children and to prepare a well-trained workforce for both today's and tomorrow's jobs. I want to congratulate Kari Mitchell and other community leaders who helped bring into being The Bridge, an early college career program that will link our local students to well-paying jobs. I'm also excited by the newly formed Children's Reading Foundation, which will be mobilizing our entire community behind making sure that every child reads at grade level by the end of the third grade. I've been gratified by the response to my own Mayor's Stay in School initiative, in which I have visited personally with nearly six thousand third graders over the past three years, with each signing a pledge with superintendent Stan Rounds and myself to graduate from high school.

These few examples serve to remind us of the literally hundreds of groups, organizations and individuals that contribute daily to the success of our city. These dedicated community members join our local newspapers, our service clubs, our Chambers of Commerce, and all of the other groups that make this a better place to live.

Earlier I mentioned a shared consensus about quality of life in the city of Las Cruces. It's important to remember the foundation on which that consensus is based, and that's a commitment that decisions affecting our future will be made openly, with full public and stakeholder participation. We have tried to be a mayor and council that listen, whether to our residents individually or in the dozens of

district meetings we have held since being in office. This reflects not only a commitment to openness, embraced by all of our councilors, but our belief that better decisions are made when everyone is involved.

Clearly, as we move through the year, we will continue to carefully monitor our city's financial situation and the national economy. Our own local economy continues to show strength compared to other areas of the state and country – a recent U.S. Conference of Mayors report put Las Cruces near the very top in terms of projected economic growth in the next five years, and indicates that we will be among the first metropolitan areas in the country to return to peak employment. This is good news, and reflects favorably on the economy we are working together to grow.

There will always be opportunities for improvement, but when I look at our city's progress over the past three years, and the hard work of our citizens, council and staff, I'm proud of what we've accomplished. It's been a remarkable period for us all. The state of the city is strong, Las Cruces is on the move, and together we're building a city to be proud of. Thank you for being a part of this great endeavor. These are exciting times for the City of Las Cruces, and a great time to be your mayor. Thank you for that honor and privilege.