



MAYOR JONATHAN WEINZAPFEL

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
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PRESENTED TO:
THE ROTARY CLUB OF EVANSVILLE

Thank you, Marge.

The Mayor of Evansville receives many introductions, and you're never quite sure what will be said. I can say that it's always nice to hear such kind words said about you. So, Marge, thank you for giving that introduction exactly as I wrote it.

I am grateful to the Rotary Club for this opportunity to deliver the annual State of the City address. And I appreciate the many dedicated leaders in government, business and education here today who give so much to this community. Finally, I thank Rotary, not only for this platform, but for the important work the Rotary Club does in our community and throughout the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, fellow residents, friends and neighbors, today I hope to talk with you about what we have accomplished during our short tenure in the Mayor's office and, more importantly, the vision, plans and projects that will inspire us make a good city great.

My co-workers tell me we have been in office for one hundred forty-six days and I can honestly tell you I feel blessed to have one of the best jobs anywhere. I wake up each morning with a few simple goals – how can we daily improve this community and better serve the citizens of this great city.

It is in that spirit that we began our focus on six critical areas – six civic needs which will stabilize and secure our City's foundation and provide the solid base from which we will grow, dream, and prosper. A year from now, I hope you will allow me to report on continued progress in the areas of:

1. Financial Accountability,
2. Operational efficiency,
3. Downtown development,
4. Neighborhood revitalization,
5. Job creation, and
6. Education.

When we took office, we were fortunate to take over some good initiatives and on-going projects. However, we also inherited some startling and surprising revelations regarding the

financial situation of the City. This, coupled with a state legislative change that reduced the City's maximum levy by more than \$1.6 million dollars, riveted our focus keenly upon the City's budget and financial health.

Rather than finger pointing, retreat or despair, we viewed the City's financial condition as an opportunity to make institutional changes. We chose action, thought creatively, and utilized all resources at our disposal to deal with the financial shortfall.

I am proud to report that the City Finance Department saved the citizens of Evansville nearly three million dollars by refinancing, at a lesser interest, city bonds on the Victory Theatre and Parking Garage. We also identified almost three quarters of a million dollars in savings from the 2004 city budget. And, we didn't stop there.

In February, we launched a long overdue efficiency study. With assistance from skilled and experienced community leaders, we're conducting a thorough review of all City operations. This comprehensive study will identify organizational strengths and weaknesses and will include specific recommendations for cost effectiveness measures and for improving customer service. For example, we have already discovered that we have too many city departments mowing grass and too many city departments operating their own vehicle maintenance programs. There is much more to come. I will report these findings within a few weeks and implement the recommendations as soon as possible.

We also have found that city government has been slow to embrace the 21st century or has done so very inefficiently. For example, the city is currently using three different computer systems for its departments. In fact, some city departments can't even talk to each other internally through e-mail.

In order to break down these barriers and knowing that efficiencies are gained through the creative use of information technology, we appointed a chief information officer to coordinate technological improvements throughout city departments. Our community can only benefit from better access to important government services. Thus, we're working to make the city's website interactive and one which offers useful services to our citizens: Services such as online payment of parking tickets, online payment of water and sewer bills, and online requests for city services. Hopefully, this improved access to city information will soon be available from your home computers.

The City of Evansville must ramp-on to the information superhighway. Electronic Government will make us more efficient and responsive to public needs; we will continue making progress in this essential area.

Equally as important as our focus on the future, we must never forget to preserve, protect and re-invigorate our past. History and geography teach that there is no great city in the world which does not have at its core a viable city-center.

Downtown revitalization stirs the imagination of area residents and entrepreneurs. Ideas span the gamut from loft apartments to a technology park. The possibilities and the progress are exciting, and I will lead the fight to make downtown Evansville vital, vibrant and a living reminder of both our history and our future promise.

Earlier this month, we issued a request for proposals for downtown housing development in the three-block area encompassing the former Kenny Kent block and two blocks west. The proposals are due June 14th and I am thrilled about the response we have received thus far. We will select a housing project for this area by mid-summer.

We have also had an announcement that new loft apartments will be constructed in the building that many of us know as the former Farmer's Daughter Restaurant. The new owner, Matt Johnson, said that he wanted the old landmark building "because downtown Evansville seems to be a good place to be now." It is this kind of can-do attitude and adaptive reuse of downtown buildings that will complement our efforts to revitalize the heart of our city.

My administration has launched a plan to encourage more of this type of development. We will offer individuals who build loft residences within the downtown area a subsidy of up to \$20,000 from the Capital Development Fund. Every year the loft is maintained as a residence, the city will write off 20 percent of the principle for up to five years. The Redevelopment Commission will hopefully adopt this loft program on June 2.

Last month we traveled to Washington to lobby our congressional delegation for federal funding to support initiatives in downtown Evansville. We requested funds to address concerns about our one-way street system to make the downtown more navigable and hospitable. Everyone here understands the problem. Just look at the Memorial Coliseum. In front of us is a two way street and one way streets surround us on either side. It is no wonder that driving in downtown Evansville is confusing for visitors.

We also asked for money to speed up the construction of a new interchange at Fulton Avenue and the Lloyd Expressway. This new interchange will serve as a gateway enticing people to the downtown area by making access more convenient.

Finally, we have proposed a certified technology park for the downtown. We hope to create a high-tech business incubator to help start up businesses succeed and create jobs. We also hope to invest in the fiber optic cables and other services to support such businesses. We have applied for state certification for the technology park and are awaiting approval. We expect to capture almost \$9 million in state funds and additional federal monies to invest in this effort.

While downtown should serve as our City's heart, our many unique neighborhoods must surely be its eyes, ears, arms and legs. Believing that our citizens should neither have to FIGHT nor FIND City Hall, we are taking City Hall to the streets.

Through our traveling City Hall initiative, we have gone back to the basics. We have hosted four meetings thus far and have received a wonderful response. For the first time, city residents have the opportunity to sit down, face to face, with the mayor and department heads to talk about their problems and concerns on a regular basis. In fact, just last week at our recent traveling city hall, one gentleman told me that he had lived in Evansville for 54 years and had never met a Mayor before. I just hope he didn't leave the meeting disappointed.

More importantly, however, the city is following up on the feedback we received to resolve residents' concerns about the status of their streets, sidewalks, or the lack of city water. At our second meeting, I was surprised to learn from Ms. Leanne Beswick that her entire city block on Culverson Avenue was not served by city water. I believe such a situation is intolerable and as a result we have begun to provide such service not only to Ms. Beswick and her neighbors, but to other areas of the city without water.

Recently, we held a special Saturday meeting to discuss property maintenance and 150 people showed up. We are now addressing code enforcement concerns with the help of about 70 people participating in five resident working groups. One of the groups is charged with code review. Another is involved with neighborhood support programs and services. We're listening to property owners' concerns; we're making sure the codes are understandable, simple and enforceable; and we're involving neighborhood groups and residents like never before.

Surely housing and attractive neighborhoods are of vital importance, but to be great, a city must also be about opportunity. Martin Luther King, Jr., once said that "Our lives begin to

end the day we become silent about things that matter.” That is why I said throughout the campaign and have continued to say in office, I believe the Mayor has a critical role and responsibility in supporting education and our local schools. Yesterday, I announced the creation of the Evansville Education Roundtable that is charged with providing a public forum for educators, administrators and community residents to begin a conversation about education. By sharing, they will learn from each other and work on solutions to the variety of issues that we face in all of our schools.

The Roundtable includes educators, labor representatives, business leaders, community volunteers and parents to insure a healthy and constructive mix of experience, ideas and solutions.

Financial accountability, operational efficiency, downtown development, neighborhood revitalization, job creation, and education present us with ambitious challenges and unlimited opportunity. In order to move forward, we must all be willing to work hard and sacrifice toward common goals. But, as President John F. Kennedy said, “effort and courage are not enough without purpose and direction.”

At our Traveling City Hall forums, we’ve learned that Evansville residents’ hopes and concerns have reoccurring themes which provide us that purpose and direction:

Our neighbors believe it is important that government be efficient and financially sound, and that downtown Evansville reflect not only yesterday’s “The Way We Were”, but today’s “Who We Are”.

Our citizens believe it is imperative that we retain our best and brightest. They want efforts that strengthen K through 12 and the other educational institutions that respond directly to the needs of new economy employers.

Evansville residents want crime and blight controlled. They want neighborhoods that are safe and attractive. They want to be proud of where they live.

The people we’ve talked to also want to see our economic development groups work together on a regional basis to help create good paying jobs.

Our neighbors also want to see the city excel at delivering basic city services such as streets, sidewalks, sewers, water, trash pickup and snow removal.

I’d like to close by offering some insight into additional challenges we face over the next several months on top of the many challenges we are already undertaking.

We recently started contract negotiations with city employees and their bargaining units. We have difficult decisions to make with revenue limitations imposed by the state and health care costs soaring out of control. We estimate that between 2004 and 2007, city health care expenses will increase from \$13.3 million to \$18.9 million. That is a 42 percent increase if nothing changes. On the revenue side, recent legislative changes limit the growth in revenue from property taxes to approximately 4.6 percent per year. Something has to give. However, we intend to make this a team effort in working with city employees to find the solutions.

In the area of economic development, we must increase cooperation and decrease duplicative effort among the many worthwhile organizations involved. With greater regional collaboration, I believe we can do a better job of planning strategically for future economic development.

We need to prepare today for the future of I-69 in our area. Our entire region could reap tremendous benefits if we act now. Otherwise, we will miss a golden opportunity.

We need to look at new opportunities to build on the many business and educational assets existing in our community. A good example is the establishment of a Commission on Life Sciences and Biotechnology. By bringing together local manufacturers like Bristol Myers, research companies like GFI, a high tech plastics industry, dynamic regional hospitals and prominent institutions of higher learning in USI, UE, Ivy Tech, and the IU School of Medicine, we can carve out a niche for our region to excel in this rapidly growing field.

We also must look to further the presence of the arts and other cultural and entertainment attractions to enhance the quality of life in our region. The establishment of an arts and entertainment district and efforts to create new attractions in the area require true public/private partnerships. We have resources available but we must build the mission and partnerships.

And, we must begin to address an antiquated combined stormwater and sewer system that has endangered people's homes and health.

These examples should demonstrate a central theme of the Weinzapfel administration: We have high hopes and goals for this city. I stand here with an incredible sense of optimism for our future. As I've said before, I sensed for some time that this community was ready for some new ideas and fresh leadership. And, most importantly, I truly believe that our citizens want to take an active role in making Evansville the best city it can be. I am honored to lead these

efforts, and I know that together, there is nothing we can't accomplish. As Walt Disney was fond of saying, "If you can dream it, you can do it." I am convinced that together, we can do it.

Thank you.

And now, I'd like to open the floor to your questions.

FOLLOWING THE QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD --

All of our city department heads are here, and just as we do in the traveling city hall meetings, they are available to answer your questions.