

State of the City Address

Mayor Ken Miyagishima

February 28, 2019

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

First of all, welcome. Bienvenidos todos. As always, I want to express deep appreciation to my colleagues on the city council, to members of our city staff, and to our fellow citizens in attendance or watching at home. I especially want to welcome and thank my wife and first lady, Rosie Miyagishima, for your love and support.

Thank you too to Sara Burkhalter and the Lynn Middle School choir, for helping us launch this address. Lynn is our first Community School in Las Cruces, and we are grateful to have them with us today. Also, with us are our friends from Central Elementary School.

I want to take a moment to remember former police chief Jaime Montoya who passed away a few months ago. Jaime was an excellent police chief, an inspiring leader for his officers, and a truly decent and admirable human being. We miss him deeply but will always benefit from the example he set.

I'm pleased to announce today that the *State of our City is Strong.*

This strength rests on a base of careful financial management by our city councilors and Office of Management and Budget, and by solid, forward-looking administration by City Manager Stuart C. Ed and our entire City of Las Cruces staff.

We continue to maintain twice the financial reserve required by the state of New Mexico, we plan and budget carefully, and we work hard to be responsible stewards of public resources.

Our mission has been invigorated by a number of measures initiated by City Manager Ed and his administrative team.

One important initiative has been the adoption of a PEAK Performance model for city staff, which uses a performance-based model to assess each department's progress toward accomplishing city goals. A key aspect of the initiative is that residents will be able to monitor city progress online and provide ongoing input to the process.

Another important initiative has been the creation of Policy Review Committees, covering 10 areas of key concern to the city, ranging from Health to Economic Development, Public Safety and Quality of Life. Each committee is chaired by a city councilor and consists of other interested councilors, city staff and members of the community. By opening up this process, we have strong councilor and resident involvement in creating policy across the whole broad range of city activities. This, in turn, energizes us all.

A list of these Review Committees is available on the City website or through your councilor. If you would like to join one, please contact that committee's chair to find out when they meet.

The results of these efforts are all around us.

Nowhere is change more visible than in our downtown area, where new restaurants and shops are coming in along Main Street; the Farmer's Market draws hundreds of weekly visitors; the Plaza hosts symphonies and rallies; and where, in warm months, the

sound of children playing in the Plaza splash pad spills out through surrounding streets.

This resurgence of the downtown area reflects our confidence in ourselves as a city, and the tireless efforts of so many over the years.

At the same time, downtown is only a part of widespread dynamic change in the city.

We will spend 17 million dollars upgrading our baseball and soccer fields, and our parks in general. We are building a new state of the art animal shelter near its old site on the East Mesa. We break ground next year on a new community swimming pool off Hadley Avenue – a recreational pool for our residents that will also bring in competitive swim events from around the region.

We are expanding the Las Cruces Convention Center in cooperation with New Mexico State University, which is developing the new Marriott Hotel next door. We will spend several million dollars building new walking and biking trails, including completing a 16-mile loop that circles the city, from Triviz down the Outfall Channel to La Llorona Park, along the Rio Grande, and back through the University to Triviz.

These are great achievements for our entire community. What has made them possible is a willingness to invest in ourselves as a city.

One of the greatest tests of a democracy is whether people will agree to tax themselves, and last August our residents did, passing four General Obligation bonds by substantial margins.

I would like to recognize Marci Dickerson, who led the public effort to pass the GO Bonds. Thank you, Marci, for your hard work on behalf of this effort.

I would also like to express our appreciation to Debbi Moore, President and CEO, and Rick Jackson, Chair of the Board, of the Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce for their endorsement of the GO Bond effort.

I'm grateful to the entire business community, and to the youth sports, progressive, and bicycle communities – among many others – and to all the voters who supported this investment in ourselves and the future of this city.

When we think of investment in infrastructure, we inevitably think of physical infrastructure: capital improvements like streets and fire stations and ballfields. We all know what these facilities mean for the people of our city.

Also, important, even if not as immediately visible, are our investments in social infrastructure, the physical and conceptual elements that bring us into closer interaction as a people.

Last year I talked with you about Blue Zones, areas in the world where residents live longer and report living happier lives. We talked about these Blue Zones as places where people have a chance to be physically active, have a sense of purpose and more importantly, have environments in which they can readily interact with other people in their community.

We recognize that loneliness and a sense of separation can be unfortunate consequences of modern society, and that we need

opportunities to come into regular contact with one another and experience the human ties that bind us with others in the city.

Councilor (Kasandra) Gandara has been insistent on exploring, in the Policy Review Committee that she chairs, the city's important role in promoting good mental and physical health for our residents.

We are also – and always – indebted to former councilor and Mayor Pro-Tem Sharon Thomas, who has helped us understand how thoughtful design of streets, sidewalks and transit can expand mobility and access for individual residents, unifying the city into a more cohesive whole.

I would like to thank Mayor Pro-Tem Dolores Archuleta for being my “Unofficial” mayor’s liaison for Veterans affairs, you always do a fantastic job!

I would like to highlight today one of those investments in social infrastructure, the development of our Community Schools. The young people here today from Lynn Middle School represent the first Community School in Las Cruces, which provides a glimpse of what these centers will provide for us when expanded throughout the city.

As a Community School, Lynn serves not just as a school for area children, but as a center for interaction, opportunity and activity for the entire neighborhood. From an educational standpoint, it brings parents and neighbors into closer partnership with teachers and school children, making each child’s educational success an integral part of the neighborhood’s life.

Community schools aim to be hubs for the entire neighborhood, open at night and on weekends throughout the year, serving not just students but the entire community.

Since its designation in 2017, Lynn Community School has developed a program that includes pairing students with high school and community mentors, Boys and Girls Club activities, STEM-based learning, and after-school tutoring.

“First Teacher” classes are hosted for parents with young children, and family members can use school computers to access job training, tuition assistance and employment services. In cooperation with local agencies, Lynn offers school-based mental health and dental services, a food and clothing pantry for both adults and children, and a wide variety of after-school activities, including a super-computing club, a gardening and cooking club, and weekly field trips during the summer to local parks and monuments. There is an onsite Juvenile Assessment and Reporting Center, a diversion program for at risk youth.

The list goes on and on.

I would like to recognize David Greenberg, the Community School Coordinator for the Las Cruces Public Schools; Mary Parr Sanchez, Community Schools Liaison for the school district; and Sylvia Chavez, Lynn Community School Administrator. And, of course, I would like to recognize Superintendent Greg Ewing, School Board President Ed Frank, and the rest of the board. Thank you for being here.

We are, as a City, grateful for the opportunity to partner with you on this exciting initiative. We intend to continue that partnership as we create fully functioning Community Schools in every area of the

city. I understand that plans for expansion are well underway, and we are eager to participate in that process.

I would like to also recognize Mr. Tommy Esparza and the many children from Central elementary who are here with us today.

Another initiative I would like to highlight today also involves planning for the future, in this case for the long-range sustainability of our entire community.

While the effects may seem to be occurring slowly, relative to our busy, event-filled lives, and while we may not yet, in Las Cruces have experienced the severe storms and wildfires that have devastated so many other states, we will not, in this desert region, escape being deeply impacted by the many wide-ranging effects of a warming climate.

This is not my “belief” so much as a willingness to accept evidence at hand. The same science that allows us to travel to the moon and the bottom of the ocean, to have access to heart transplants and design cellular phones, has sketched out a trajectory of rising temperatures that threaten the very future of human life on this planet.

The only variation in that predicted trajectory is that it may be happening much faster than originally predicted.

This is a worldwide phenomenon that we will not be able to escape – scarcity of water and extreme summer heat will be especially challenging for us here in the Mesilla Valley. And these are just two of a seemingly endless list of worrisome effects of this accelerating cycle.

The transition to an economy based on non-carbon fuel sources will be one of the greatest challenges our species has ever faced.

And, as the recent United Nations report and numerous other studies have made clear, the time period in which we can still avoid the worst of the pending consequences is short.

In the absence of leadership from the federal government on this enormous task, states and cities have come forward to take the lead. It is a responsibility that we accept, both to protect our own community and the planet as a whole.

That's why I joined the Climate Mayors initiative a few years ago, and a key reason we created the position of Sustainability Officer during my first term in office, a position that has only grown more important as the years have gone by.

This is why, the City of Las Cruces has joined the City of Albuquerque and the City of Santa Fe as founding members of the Coalition of Sustainable Communities. Representing nearly 40 percent of the state's population, we are working actively in Santa Fe for legislation that will help set a new and sustainable course in energy policy.

Last June, the City Council passed a resolution committing the city to generate 25 percent of its own electricity from renewable energy by 2022, 50 percent by 2030 and 100 percent by 2050.

These are steps we are duty-bound to take for the future of our community. As it turns out, this worldwide energy transformation will provide great opportunity for us locally as well. New Mexico has enormous wind and solar resources, with our immediate area being one of most advantageous in the country for solar energy.

Bills that we are supporting before the Legislature would open up the playing field on renewable energy production to local firms and local workers, with wages and profits staying here in Doña Ana County.

Schools, hospitals and city buildings would be immediate targets for solarization, with apartment buildings, residential neighborhoods and industrial sites close behind. Due to technological advances and rapidly expanding markets, solar and wind energy, including storage, are already cost-competitive with carbon-based sources, and in most cases less expensive. These are local, paradigm-changing opportunities for us both as a city and state.

I would like to thank Mayor Pro-Tem Gill Sorg and Sustainability Officer Lisa LaRocque for their leadership in this area. Rest assured that we will continue to move forward as a city to address this important challenge, while benefitting from the economic opportunities its solutions provide.

Building on our strengths as a community relates directly to another area, I would like to discuss with you today: economic development.

Many of you may have read the Sun-News profile earlier this year of Tony Dohrmann, CEO of Electronic Caregiver, who has made Las Cruces the headquarters for his innovative health technology company. He already has 70 employees at work in three floors of the downtown tower, with expansion underway, and the goal of being the first Fortune 500 company based in New Mexico.

What brought Mr. Dohrmann here? He says it came down to our quality of life: our beautiful landscape and open skies, reasonably priced homes for his employees, a steady flow of skilled engineers from our local university, and room to enjoy the activities he loves. All of that plus an excitement about our city's future, a future he is eager to share.

It was also announced recently that Ganymede Games will locate its new headquarters on the third floor of the Bank of the West building downtown, bringing 50 new high wage jobs. One of Ganymede's founders, Jerry Prochazka, likewise cited our quality of life as a key reason for coming to Las Cruces. He said he had "zero hesitation bringing talented people here," with his only surprise that "there are so many talented people here already."

Mr. Dohrmann, of Electronic Caregiver is with us today, as is Mr. Prochazka, along with Ganymede co-founder Lynn Stetson. I know you'll want to join me in welcoming them to our city.

These are great additions to the City of Las Cruces. It would have been hard even to imagine, a few years ago, the products these companies create, let alone that they would be bringing their workers into our downtown area to join us at local restaurants and brewpubs and on our Plaza, welcome participants in our shared public life.

These positive developments lead to questions important for our future. How do we make sure companies continue to want to come here? How can we help them thrive? How can we ensure that our current residents benefit from an expanding economy? How can we prepare ourselves to be full participants in opportunities that emerge?

One of the most important steps we've taken in this area has been our decision, as a community, to take responsibility for the education of our children.

Through the countywide Success Partnership, a powerful coalition of parents, teachers, the public schools, New Mexico State University, area nonprofits and our local business community, we are dedicated to making sure every child grows up healthy and ready to learn; that they are able to take full advantage of their educational opportunities; and that they complete high school and continue onto college; or for advanced training in a needed skill.

We are fortunate to have an inspiring leader in that effort with us today: Tracey Bryan, whose coordination of workforce development through the Bridge of Southern New Mexico and the Workforce Talent Collaborative is making a big difference throughout the county. Tracey, thank you for your leadership in this important area.

We've also worked hard to help existing companies prosper, those who have already decided to live among us and build their businesses here. They will benefit too, of course, from a better-skilled workforce, but we have also mounted an all-out effort to eliminate barriers to their growth and expansion. We have implemented the new Business Concierge Program to guide businesses through their interactions with city departments.

We've increased our One Stop Shop for permitting and construction needs to 52 hours a week. We are committed to helping all local entrepreneurs, large and small, succeed in any way that we can.

Overall, we have been blessed with many natural advantages for a strong economy. We have a good climate and beautiful landscape.

We are located at the crossroads of two major interstate highways and less than an hour from a large international airport. We are home to an excellent university and important research facilities for aerospace and national defense. We have a large bilingual workforce and are near a rapidly expanding transportation and industrial center along our county's southern border.

We understand that conditions change slowly, but residents in our region have often struggled economically. Why does the situation in Las Cruces seem to be improving? Why might we be achieving a kind of critical mass in the progress of our city? What will continue to be important as we strive to improve?

I have been informed on these questions by respected NMSU economist Jim Peach, through the distinction he draws between economic growth and economic development.

Economic growth, he points out, is reflected by increases in specific statistical indicators, like employment rate, median income or GDP. Economic development, on the other hand, is a much broader effort, one that's been characterized as "the movement upward of an entire social system." Economic development, then, is part of a larger conscious effort to make all things better, which is exactly what we have been engaged in the last dozen years.

This means that when Tracey Bryan and her colleagues take on workforce development, they aren't just attracting new business, they are creating real choice and better lives for our residents. When our business community supports the GO Bonds, they are increasing property value and making the city more attractive for business, but they are also expressing their deep commitment to our community as a whole.

When we build a network of Community Schools that enliven and reinvigorate whole neighborhoods, or we seize the opportunity to create real solutions for long-term sustainability, we are at one and the same time engaged in economic development, creating structures for the long-term betterment of us all.

We know through long experience that economic indicators will rise and fall, often for reasons beyond our local control. Fortunately, we have also learned that we are best-served economically and in every other way – through good times and bad – when we work to steadily improve the lives and opportunities for all Las Cruces, those already here and those still to come.

It's important to note that both Mr. Dohrmann and Mr. Prochazka cited our city's quality of life as key to their decisions to come here. They like the same things about Las Cruces that we do. That's why they're here. They know who we are and the values we share.

A few months ago, Councilor Vasquez wrote a column in the Sun-News that I hope everyone has had an opportunity to see. His first line was: "Las Cruces is an exceptional city."

He went on to talk about the Las Cruces "brand" as one of resilience and perseverance, of diverse cultures and out-sized generosity. As a people ever ready to welcome the stranger among us, and an unwavering commitment to the most vulnerable in our lives. He talked about not abandoning these core qualities that define us, even as they stand in sharp contrast to the divisive rhetoric of the day.

I'm deeply appreciative of Councilor Vasquez's insights. Las Cruces is exceptional city. We're lucky to live here. I'm grateful to all the members of the city council, to our excellent city staff and all

our residents; to all who have created the brand that the Councilor identifies, and in each of their daily actions bring it more fully to life.

You know, some like to talk about vision. My own vision has its roots back when I was first elected to public office. I knew then that I would do everything I possibly could for the people we serve.

Over time, of course, that vision has evolved, and the details filled in. I want all of us to live in health and safety. I want us to have the tools we need to support ourselves and enjoy our lives. I want us to bring everyone along. I want us to share all the joys and sorrows of being part of a community; and I want our city to be a platform of opportunity for all who live here, providing a solid place to stand as we engage with the world.

If this vision seems familiar, it's because it's a vision we've shared. It's not my vision, but our vision, one we've developed together and enact every day.

This isn't my city or your city but our city, held in trust together, from Telshor to Main Street to Valley Drive, from the Bellamah District to Sonoma Ranch, from University Hills to our vibrant downtown.

That unity, shared vision and mutual respect, and all the countless things we each do to improve our community, are what continue to define us as a people, and why the state of our city is strong.

These are great days for the City of Las Cruces, with so much achieved and so much still to do.

Thanks for your commitment, your creativity, and your support through the years we've worked together. Thanks to our own Community School Choir for your inspiration. Thank you all for your

friendship and for being here today, and for the opportunity to serve as your mayor.