

## **State of the City Address**

Mayor Ken Miyagishima

February 13, 2013

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 here today or watching at home. Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your mayor, and to come before you once again to discuss the state of our great city.

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

The state of our city is strong in spite of an uncertain economy and one of the worst recessions our country has experienced in over eighty years. Though there are signs of improvement, this uncertainty, and our ability as a city to negotiate it, has been a major challenge in recent years. I am happy to report that the fiscal condition of the city continues to be good, and that the adjustments we have made have brought real and tangible benefit to the people of our city.

Again this year I point to the fiscal discipline of this city council and to the strong and positive leadership of City Manager Robert Garza and Assistant City Managers Brian Denmark and Mark Winson, as well as city staff. Based on a commitment to manage our current budget within parameters from the 2008 city budget, the city ended fiscal year 2010-2011 with 3.6 million dollars in overall savings. In fiscal year 2011-2012 these savings were almost doubled to 7.1 million dollars. As a result, the City of Las Cruces continues to maintain its reserve account at twice the level required by New Mexico state law.

These are remarkable achievements, especially since the demand for city services continues to grow. They also underscore the importance of our city's ability to plan for and adapt to a wide range of

eventualities, from changing weather patterns to a fragile world economy, from drought in our desert community to the demands of a global economy on business and an evolving workforce. We, like successful communities throughout the world, need to develop and maintain the resources necessary to respond effectively to the many challenges of a rapidly changing world.

Policies we have initiated in the city are important contributors to this resilience as we move into the future. One is our commitment to maintain the reserve funds I have already mentioned. Another is our implementation of efficient practices at all levels of city activity, practices that were initially required by economic challenge, but have become standard as their value is understood. Yet another lies in our doing the things now that will most effectively support our health and economic wellbeing in years to come.

One thing we have learned, along with communities throughout the country, is the importance of planning thoughtfully for future growth. This is especially important for a city like our own, where people will continue to come to live, attracted by our landscape and climate, our educational and medical resources, and the kindness and vitality of our people.

Thoughtful planning is one of the most important and least expensive of all efficiencies. That's why we remain fully committed to the Vision 2040 regional planning process and to collaboration with Doña Ana County and area municipalities under the HUD Sustainable Communities grant. Whatever our personal views on growth, there's a shared consensus that successful communities can no longer afford to expand mindlessly across the landscape; economic realities demand thoughtful prioritization of our roads, utilities and other infrastructure. We need to implement fair and efficient means to pay for this infrastructure, as well as ways to ensure that growth patterns strengthen our community rather than harm it.

Another important efficiency is made possible when we collaborate with other regional entities to provide needed services. We support the County's efforts to build a 911 Center, and will continue to be

involved in that project at whatever level is most beneficial. Joint use of facilities is one important way we can provide more for less to the people we serve. Consultation and collaboration in the siting of public buildings -- especially schools -- would save millions of dollars in infrastructure costs in coming years -- resources that would then be available for further reinvestment in our community.

Recent years have been instructive about the importance of efficiency and living within our means. The greatest benefits of fiscal responsibility, are the resources that it frees up for other commitments and priorities, and for steady re-investment in the people who live here and our quality of life.

High among these commitments and priorities is public safety. I'm pleased to report that we have completed the police and fire training facility at the Las Cruces Airport and are moving along well on the new West Mesa fire station. We continue to plan for the East Mesa Public Safety Complex, to be located near the corner of Lohman and Sonoma Ranch Boulevard. We are working to obtain from the Bureau of Land Management, at a nominal fee, up to 350 acres of land for the police and fire stations that will anchor that campus, surrounded by new ball fields and recreational facilities for public use.

Another important priority has been the revitalization of downtown Las Cruces. Main Street is now fully open to traffic, a central tree-lined corridor where cars pass a steadily growing array of quality restaurants, galleries and businesses. Downtown is the site of our Intermodal Transit Center, currently under construction, and the new offices of the Las Cruces Sun News. I hope you've had a chance to visit the Las Cruces Art Museum and new adjoining Museum of Nature and Science, beautiful facilities that join our new City Hall, our Convention Center, our Aquatic Center and the Las Cruces Farmers Market as real and visible investments in our community life.

Another evolving project, just west of downtown, underscores our theme of efficient city government and investment in the future. The Council was able to move \$200,000 from the reserve fund surplus to our Affordable Housing Trust Fund, for use on a new housing project

at the site of the old cotton gin. This small investment by the city will be leveraged by some 7 to 8 million dollars in private investment, resulting in 5 acres of attractive mixed income housing, including both market-priced units and specially financed units for veterans and middle income families. All over the country cities are partnering with private developers to revitalize core urban areas where infrastructure and amenities are already in place or can be more easily developed and shared. Las Cruces is no exception, and we will continue to look for similar opportunities in the future.

The Las Cruces of the future will have a solid downtown, an active corridor running from the university along El Paseo to the city's center, and vibrant neighborhoods interconnected by key arterial corridors and public transportation. Continuing to define our community will be our beautiful landscape, and these different areas of our city will increasingly be connected as well by a system of bicycle paths, trails and walkways. In this past year we completed a new multi-use trail connecting Triviz with La Llorona Park, the northern side of a bicycle and walking path that will provide a loop around the city, stretching from the East Mesa to the banks of the Rio Grande.

Another new addition to Las Cruces is the area being developed behind the Las Cruces Dam, in cooperation with the Army Corps of Engineers, an area that will feature trails through restored wetlands and remnant cottonwoods, and serve as a major refuge for migratory birds. This park, when fully developed, will be larger than New York's Central Park, and a key recreational resource for Las Cruces and our visitors in coming years.

Clearly this has been, despite the challenges of the national economy, a period of tremendous progress in the City of Las Cruces. I would also like to point to a few special opportunities we have as a city and region.

Las Cruces lies at the crossroads of an area with enormous economic potential. New rail facilities are being developed in the southern part of the county, facilities which will provide a major point

of connection between Mexican seaports and United States markets, as shippers seek alternatives to congested West Coast ports. To the east, White Sands will continue to employ thousands of local residents. To the north, Albuquerque and Santa Fe are awakening to the political and economic power of our region, and our city remains an important urban center for communities throughout the southern part of our state. The Mesilla Valley itself is a key corridor in the region, offering the still-available opportunity for economic development that benefits all of our residents, while preserving the cultural and community ties that make this such an attractive place to live.

One key to our community's success is the development of a regional transportation system. It's time to link our valley from Truth or Consequences to Sunland Park, and from Alamogordo to Silver City, through a well-coordinated transport system with Las Cruces and our Intermodal Transit Center as its hub -- a system that will bring people to our hospital, educational and business centers, and return them to satellite communities with their own distinct identities and community ties. Plans are underway for a regional transit district for Southern New Mexico, a district which would provide a reliable web of transport of all kinds -- buses, vans, even an eventual rail connection with El Paso and Spaceport America -- for use by our area's workers and extended families, and by visitors eager to engage more fully the variety of southern New Mexico life. I hope we will participate enthusiastically in this regional effort, and that we will develop a plan that merits our residents' active support.

A second area of opportunity lies in overall regional planning. Our neighbors in El Paso, Ciudad Juarez and northern Chihuahua share a growing awareness of our interconnectedness and economic potential, and understand the value of planning for the region as a whole. We should actively cooperate on shared infrastructure and economic growth, planning that will allow Las Cruces to continue to develop its own character and opportunities within a larger supportive regional context. I applaud the formation of the new Borderplex Bi-National Economic Alliance, with business leadership from all three

major cities in the region. We will look forward to working with the Alliance and other related efforts in coming years.

Yet a third area of opportunity lies in a rapidly changing energy economy. Any map of the United States that charts renewable energy resources shows that our own area is at the epicenter of solar potential. The development of the local solar industry has been a major bright spot in our economy, and its continued development is key to our economic future. We're accustomed to thinking of large solar arrays in the desert, but our greatest potential lies on the rooftops of our homes, businesses and public buildings, where enormous value can be realized by our residents, and where good jobs created locally won't go away.

Everyone can see the benefit of a generation system owned by individual residents and installed by local contractors, with a correspondingly lower need for expensive new power plants that rely on fluctuating supplies of fuel. The challenge lies in our local utility's ability to incorporate this locally generated power, spread over thousands of rooftops and parking lots throughout the city, into its distribution system and business model. I pledge myself personally to this process, and urge El Paso Electric to work closely with the city, with our engineers at New Mexico State University, and with the Public Regulation Commission and other utilities, to fully develop this system and model. It would be a major achievement and benefit for us all.

As we consider our city's firm commitment to fiscal responsibility and efficiency, the achievements that these practices have made possible, and our many opportunities for further success, I want to take a moment to thank the city council and staff for something less visible to the casual observer. And that is the process by which we govern ourselves and make decisions, and the commitment to transparency and collaboration that we share.

Central to this process is the Strategic Plan that we develop every two years in a public process -- a set of goals and objectives that reflect the deepest aspirations of our community, and provide the

basis for detailed work plans for our staff. This Strategic Plan is shared with city residents, along with results indicating how successful we have been in achieving its goals. In this way residents can judge whether we are trying to do the right things in the first place, and whether we have been effective in getting those right things done.

I again want to express my appreciation to City Manager Garza and his staff for making this process a reality. While the elected members of the City Council are responsible for the Plan's priorities, development of these priorities is dependent on the reliability and completeness of information from city staff. We have enjoyed this reliability and completeness from Mr. Garza and his departmental leaders.

After the Strategic Plan is developed, Mr. Garza's results-oriented management system is designed to create positive outcomes, outcomes that are in turn reported to the community at large. Increasingly important in coming years will be the recently instituted Citizen Satisfaction Survey, which is meant to be a real tool in charting future activities. It's important to know what's working in the city and what isn't, and which services our residents really need, want and use.

Another aspect of this feedback process involves the appointment of a Community Relations Coordinator charged with developing top-level customer relations at every level of public interaction, and proactive engagement with city neighborhoods on the issues that affect them most.

A final area of process that has been important to us involves eliminating barriers for businesses interacting with the city. One way of doing this has been through our Consolidated Review Center, where the process of construction approvals is meant to be straightforward, fair and efficient. Building codes exist to protect our community, but business people who invest in our city deserve to move forward on their projects without conflicting information, or waiting long periods for inspection and approval.

If this or any other city process isn't working for you or your neighbors, you need to let us know, and we will address it. I can't promise perfection, but I can give you my own commitment, and the commitment of our city councilors – Councilors Thomas, Silva, Smith, Pedroza, Small and Sorg -- and our city staff, that we will do our very best to serve the people of this city, every day and in every way that we can.

Related to this commitment, I would like to make one last observation about the state of our city that has to do with the general environment in which we live and do our work.

I have been honored to serve as your mayor, and I have done everything in my power to do a good job. We have an excellent city council, whose members are hard working, approachable, and involved. Staff morale and performance are high because our employees feel they are part of something important, and that their work makes a difference to the people they serve.

My observation is that people across the political spectrum have slowly begun to trust city government, and to value the important role that it plays in our lives. There will always be differences of opinion, but I sense a growing confidence that decisions – good or bad -- are being made openly and honestly, that our councilors and staff are trying to do their best, and that we share a very special city with a bright and inclusive future. My hope is that this trust and confidence will continue to deepen, and that we will be able to partner ever more effectively with our residents, with our citizen groups, with our chambers of commerce, and with everyone else who aspires to strengthen this great community.

Fellow Las Crucens, thanks to all of you, the state of our city is strong. Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your mayor.

