

State of the City
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A State of the City speech is a task undertaken with reservation. The nature of the times we live in makes speeches of this sort a challenge. I must complete in a world of social media for your attention; yet I bring with me no drama, no gossip, no conspiracy.

In place of flash, I rely on my belief that nearly all of you are good people. We all have flaws and all of us have and will make mistakes. Nevertheless, despite the impression we may get from hearsay and occasionally the news; an overwhelming majority of us lead familiar lives.

We care for our families. We remember those loved ones we have lost. We find joy in watching kids experience childhood. We work. We contribute to society. We make our peace with God. Those experiences are common to all.

This speech is me talking with you about those experiences. I will not be able to address everything that is worthy of speaking about. My voice and your ears have limits. Therefore, the subjects are broad in nature and seek to capture our noblest aspirations.

In keeping with the interests of our community, we again strengthen safety services. We build within police and fire increased resiliency, and capabilities. No desire exists to boast. Fire and Police are and should remain above political expediency. The task of strengthening safety services requires dollars, dedication and patience.

To that end in the past several years, we have increased staffing in the Police Department. Currently, police strength stands at twenty-two officers all ranks and five dispatchers. Retirements from the Police Department and their replacement with new police officers means that the police force of Washington Court House is increasingly composed of younger police officers.

Long service police officers provide wonderful experience. Officers young in their law enforcement career bring renewed vigor. While many examples of excellence exist in our Police Department; when I think about police officers young in their career, I desire to note the work of Alex Rosado.

Alex professionally and without fanfare consistently does the job of law enforcement well. In life, some folks seek the limelight and other folks get on with the task. Alex Rosado is the type of person that gets on with the task. I could have selected any number of other police officers young in their career. Alex is thankfully representative of young police officers working to make our community better.

In the past several years, in the Fire Department we have purchased firefighting equipment, fire trucks and hired firefighters and will hire an additional firefighter this year.

A young firefighter that has contributed more than expected is Scott Monroe. Scott's attitude is excellent. Also, Scott Monroe's prior mechanical work experience at All American, a fire truck vendor has proved an asset of value. Again, Scott is representative of employees young in their career making a difference for all of us.

For many years, the City of Washington Court House has maintained a cooperative relationship with the various volunteer fire department of our county. Together, full-time firefighters, volunteer departments, paid call and part-time firefighters form an exceptional response capability. All of the people of the Washington Fire Department, Wayne Township Fire, Concord-Green Township Fire, BPM Joint Fire, Jefferson Township Fire, Pic-A-Fay Joint Fire, Tri County Fire and Paint Township Fire deserve recognition of their contributions to our community.

Finally, the historic commitment of Union Township and the City of Washington Court House toward maintaining a cooperative firefighting agreement should be remembered. The agreement serves to provide fire service to residents of Union Township and in turn strengthens the Washington Fire Department. The continued support of Union Township Trustees, Wes Wilson, Clyde Fyffe, Butch Malloy and Fiscal Officer Tom Rambo is appreciated.

Police and Fire are important services, but not the entirety of our City. The City also operates a Street Department, the Washington Cemetery, the Water and Wastewater systems of our community and via an independently elected judge the Municipal Court.

It is not possible to speak in a single speech to all of the services of the City of Washington Court House. However, I would like to note the exceptional commitments of all the Departments of the City of Washington Court House and in particular several individuals.

This year will see the retirement of Rankin Kirkpatrick of the Washington Cemetery. The Washington Cemetery serves as a place of remembrance, green space and a source of community pride. For many years, Rankin Kirkpatrick has been an important part of the cemetery. While retirement is not quarantine; retirement is for the individual and the City an evolution of the relationship with bittersweet tones. I thank Rankin and express confidence in the transition to Rankin's successor Chad Elliott.

Two employees will be hired this year in the Street Department. This year also marks the promotion of Pete Harparee to Street Superintendent. Pete is a fellow who cares about our community. Increased resources will provide the Street Department with more hands and equipment and dollars to invest in paving.

Wastewater is not the most common subject of conversation, but a needed and basic service. Within our Wastewater Plant, is a lab in which we perform a number of tests to ensure the public's health. In that lab you will find Karl Kellenberger. Karl is an

excellent example of a person who consistently delivers on responsibilities and daily brings with him a positive attitude.

We have employees that have served the community for many years like Karl. However, like Rankin, from time to time those people retire. Thankfully, in the past couple of years we have been able to hire a number of good people. Two employees young in their careers with the City that have shown an exceptional commitment to their work are Daniel Kasberg of Water and Spencer Bryan of Street.

Daniel and Spencer every day have a positive attitude. Both are examples of a willingness to learn. Both care about our community and the people they work with.

Daniel Kasberg and Spencer Bryan deserve recognition. I could recognize the contributions of many more people, but to paraphrase Robert Frost, we have more miles to go before we sleep. The people I have elected to note are happily representative of many others making a difference for us.

I love Water Departments, Police Department, Street Departments, Fire Departments, Cemeteries and Wastewater Departments, but a city is more than its services. Private employers are of considerable importance to the life of our community.

In roughly the past year and half, the Chamber of Commerce has gained thirty-five new members. Any number of means exist to measure the strength of a local economy. While perhaps not scientific, Chamber membership is nonetheless a powerful way to access economic strength and civic capacity.

Thirty-five new members of the Chamber speaks well to the commitment of local businesses to improve not only trade, but community life. While many are responsible for the increased activism of the Chamber, I would like to thank Chamber President, Julie Bolender for her work. With each passing month the Chamber grows in strength and commitment to our community. Julie's contribution to that growth has been exceptional.

We are blessed to have numerous quality employers in our community and I can't recognize all of them, but I will talk about a few that represent excellence. I will start with Lowe's Distribution. Recently, with Julie of the Chamber, Chelsie Baker of the City, Dan Dean of the County Commissioners, Mike Cooper of OhioMeansJobs, Godwin Apaliyah of OSU Extension and several other people of note, I visited Lowe's Distribution.

Lowe's Distribution of Washington Court House supports a number of retail stores in Ohio and neighboring states ensuring that the stores are stocked with building supplies. The logistics operation is interesting, but the story of Lowe's Distribution in Washington Court House is about people.

It is people that make our Lowe's Distribution center a model operation for Lowe's and exemplify the story of Lowe's Corporation caring for their employees. Wages have been

increased, family friendly working arrangements are maintained, health insurance and other valuable benefits offered.

What are the most important traits Lowe's Distribution looks for in an employee? A good attitude and a willingness to learn. We must share some values with Lowe's; Adam Phillips of our Police Department worked for Lowe's Distribution before becoming a police officer.

Adam is also notable in another way that Adam may not be aware of. Adam's mother was one of my high school classmates. The day I signed Adam's appointment papers as a Police Officer, I remember going home and looking in the mirror and noting on what remains of my hair the advance of grey.

Another employer that deserves recognition is YUSA. The scale of the financial commitments that YUSA has made to the betterment of Washington Court House are enormous. The community and particularly the YMCA owe much to the generosity of YUSA. YUSA's attitude of investing in not only the future of YUSA, but the future of our community is appreciated.

YUSA needs employees. YUSA offers many benefits that include medical, dental, vision, short term disability, long term disability, 401K, an on-site health clinic, attendance bonuses, educational reimbursement, shift premium, a fully equipped exercise facility and an on-site subsidized cafeteria. You can make a career at YUSA, from jobs on the floor to all of the associated work inherent with an industrial enterprise comprised of hundreds of employees and more than three-hundred thousand square feet of manufacturing plant.

There is opportunity not for just a job, but a career with YUSA. If you doubt the value of the YUSA opportunity, apply and look at the wage scale and benefits yourself. If you are skeptical that an opportunity for a career with YUSA exists; go talk to some of the first people hired when YUSA came to Washington Court House that still work at YUSA.

If you think that this YUSA talk is my imagination, I will give you an example; Moe Bagheri of Washington Court House. Moe was one of the first employees hired by YUSA in 1987. Moe made and continues to make a career with YUSA. Like Moe, you can make a career with YUSA. Perhaps more importantly, Moe made a life in Washington Court House because of the YUSA opportunity.

I know it was a while ago, but remember the beginning of this speech. We care for our families. We remember those love ones we have lost. We find joy in watching kids experience childhood. We work. We contribute to society. We make our peace with God.

Most of us lead that familiar life. Some of us make a life with a few scars and a few bumps, but we progress. Some of us have challenges, be it from drug abuse, domestic

violence, mental illness or any of the other wrongs of the world that regrettably remain un-conquered in the Twenty-First Century.

If your life is troubled, I won't offer any snake oil solution. However, I remind you that together we cherish a community where however hard the path may be; the opportunity for betterment exists. A community that cares about you.

I have confidence that people with a challenge or two with help can grow and hold a job and make a life. If you are a young person and simply don't know what you want to do in life, take a look at our local employers. I know this takes courage, but I know like you want to make a life, those employers want to make that opportunity available to you.

This year also marks an effort chaired by Leigh Cannon to build a new jail. Jail building is not popular. Nevertheless, issues exist in public life where folks like Commissioners Dan Dean, Tony Anderson, Jim Garland and Sheriff Stanforth have to address problems and explain to us proposed solutions for our vote.

The jail is one of those issues. The majority of the current jail was built in the Nineteenth Century and altered on numerous occasions to meet the demands of the day. Our forefathers built a building anticipating future needs that has served us for much longer than any reasonable expectation could demand.

Many a Nineteenth Century home in Washington Court House is still providing sterling residential service, but a jail is not a home. While a jail houses people like a home; a jail is more akin to an industrial building than a house. Few examples of Nineteenth Century industrial architecture exist that are still used for industrial purposes.

The Commissioners plan is to build a one-hundred twenty bed jail near the Fayette County Solid Waste Facility that should serve our needs well into the future. Currently, the Fayette County jail runs the risk of being closed due to the inability to meet minimum standards set for jails by the Ohio Rehabilitation and Correction Bureau.

Should the current jail close, the taxpayers of Fayette County will still have to pay the bill for the detention of prisoners. Local dollars would be set out of Fayette County to pay to house prisoners in jails in neighboring counties. The cost to house and transport prisoners to other jails outside of Fayette County would exceed the cost of building a new jail.

The Commissioners estimate the total cost to house and transport prisoners to be at least \$150,000 per month. In contrast, the payment for a new jail is \$83,000 per month. Certain operational costs with a new larger jail will increase, but those cost increases would be comparable to any jail meeting minimum standards operated in a manner consistent with the protection of public safety.

The levy that the Commissioners propose is 1.9 mills designed to both build and operate the new jail. In practical terms, this means for every \$100,000 of appraised property

value a homeowner can estimate that taxes will increase by \$66.50. Again, building a jail is not popular in that the majority of taxpayers abide by the law.

Nevertheless, the justice system needs the creditable ability to enforce consequences for violation of the law. If a person steals from me, I want the criminal to go to jail. I don't want the criminal released due to overcrowding or assigned other corrective measures when jail time is appropriate.

I also want a jail that can accommodate mental health and drug treatment of people that want to start making positive choices. The nature of the construction and small size of the current jail simply does not physically accommodate meaningful treatment. While people are incarcerated, we need to make all reasonable attempts to encourage a change in behavior.

In our community, we have in the past several years built a number of facilities designed to serve our needs and our children's needs. I hope on the jail question that you will again vote to relieve the next generation of a future burden. This May please vote yes.

Usually, I devote words to future projects and the small businesses that I love. In the future, you will hear those talks, but my voice is beginning to give way and you have listened for longer than I may reasonably impose upon you.

Unlike most people, I live a public life. In a contradiction, I usually hold my emotions well within. I like to think that reserve is dignity. I suspect that I am wrong, but the convention is convenient. I have always been fascinated by people that make small talk with ease. People that hug acquaintances. I am not one of those people. Nevertheless, tonight I hope I have communicated the depth of my compassion for you.

Simply, I love our quiet corner of the world. God bless our community and all who live within it.