



Mayor James B. Gibson
State of the City 2009
February 5, 2009
Green Valley Ranch Resort

Thank you for being here with us today.

It's always a special occasion to be here at Green Valley Ranch to talk about the great things going on in Henderson. As I stand here I'm reminded of my first state of the city speech. That was 12 years ago at the Railroad Pass Casino in a room that probably held 60 or 70 people. We've certainly come a long way.

I want to thank Cindy Herman and her staff for the great work they've done with the logistics in preparation for today. I also want to thank our staff in the red coats throughout the room. This day really wouldn't be a success without them and we appreciate their hard work.

I had an experience a few weeks ago that I'd like to share with you. I was on a conference call in a hotel room back in Washington D.C., and the game show Jeopardy came on in the background. My ears perked up as I heard the host ask something to the effect of "this town is Nevada's second largest city." Unfortunately no one got the question right but me. The only person who even guessed answered "Reno." The correct question is "What is Henderson? ... of course."

When you've become a question on Jeopardy, I figure that says that you've gotten someone's attention.

Funny thing about that experience was that the next day our staff got a phone call from a lady in Mobile, Alabama, wanting to know more about our city because she'd seen that clue on Jeopardy. She was excited to know more about us because she'd never heard of a city in Nevada called Hendersonville.

Forbes Magazine at least got our name right when they called us one of America's most boring cities. One of the reasons we earned that distinction, according to them, was that nothing really happens here that is bad enough to get the attention of the media. The irony in that story was that once that article

came out, we got half-a-dozen calls from people wanting to do stories on the fact that no one does stories on us.

As it turns out, boring isn't half bad.

You know, several months ago I agreed to do an interview with an Irish journalist who visited Henderson as part of a story he was doing. We did a video interview at the Pavilion across the street and discussed everything from how our city was formed, to economic development, to our future plans.

A few months later I received a request from this same journalist for a sit-down interview for another piece he was doing on a similar topic. We did the interview at the Mayor's office and it went well enough.

Afterwards, I didn't give it much thought until an article appeared in the Las Vegas Sun. There was a picture of the Pavilion where we did the original interview and an excerpt from the print article that appeared in the Sunday Business Post of Ireland. The article started off describing things like the vastness of the Las Vegas Valley, McCarran Airport and pollution problems.

But then it changed direction, and I quote: "...but here on the hill, there is another city, where the air is clean and the sun shines bright. This is sin city's wholesome half-brother, Henderson. You have a one-night stand with Las Vegas. You marry Henderson."

If you give that some thought, you understand what he was trying to say. That journalist was trying to capture with words what it is that has made Henderson so attractive to so many people through the years: that we are, after all, a community. And that, especially in these economic times, is attractive on a variety of levels.

External influences that exert themselves on cities have become increasingly intense. Yet, our city has remained committed to our core principles. That commitment... that stability... is proving to be invaluable in these uncertain times.

Certainly we've seen our share of difficulties, just as all of you have probably seen in your own lives and businesses. We've encountered circumstances that will require that we change in order to seize the opportunities that lie ahead. But the foundation on which our city is established is stable, it's sound and our future is bright.

You know, as we look back on the past year, I don't think any of us could really have predicted with any degree of accuracy the extent to which conditions would change. Although we'd been watching the housing market and consolidated tax revenues decline for some time, a variety of factors combined last year that

triggered an urgent need for every entity to respond to indicators of a serious recession.

What we saw first was an immediate need to bridge a gap in our 2009 budget. We identified a budget shortfall of \$53-million dollars, and took actions to close that gap, and we know that it's not over.

What we saw next was a need to look at this as a long term situation. We acted. We prepared a five-year budget plan to see us through a long-term downturn and subsequent recovery.

As difficult as economic times are today, what will eventually emerge will be an unprecedented level of renewal and recommitment and revitalization which will allow our community to move forward.

To me it is similar to what happened to Yellowstone National Park. We all remember the terrible fire in the late 1980s that burned nearly a third of the park. If you were to travel there today, you would find the beauty returning, the natural identity intact, and a newfound hope for long-term stability – that the park will be more beautiful and sustainable than it was in the past.

We can't see anything good in the fire itself. But as nature takes its course there is hope for a recovery, and that what will emerge will be even better than before.

We're in the heat of the fire right now, in the economic sense. Our recovery will require both a national economic recovery and skillful leadership at the local level. We will have to be at our collective best!

Many of the efficiencies and cost saving ideas that we're examining have come directly from our employees. We appreciate the way they've responded and realize that through the years it's been our people who have made us great.

With us today we have our City Manager, Mary-Kay Peck; City Clerk Monica Simmons; and Assistant City Managers Mark Calhoun and Bristol Ellington. I know we have department heads and other city employees at lunch with us today as well as others who will view this speech. Would all of you please stand so we can recognize you?

I want to personally thank each and every person who works for the City of Henderson for the job they do. It's been my pleasure to work with all of you over the past 12 years, and I'm proud of the work you've done.

You're the ones who will continue to carry out proven fiscal policy and maintain the stability that will serve as the foundation for people to depend on through the difficult times ahead.

That fiscal policy has driven us to be conservative in the way we have administered the taxpayers' money, and for the past decade we've been diligent in planning and preparing for this eventuality. That preparation has made it possible to continue to function and provide critical services to our residents, even in times of economic uncertainty.

However, we know that the current legislative session may have great impact on the way we're funded and we're anxiously watching to see what comes of the next four months in Carson City. We've pledged our support to work with legislators, and many of them have visited City Hall over the past weeks to gain a better understanding of municipal government.

Following one of those meetings the Las Vegas Sun quoted Assemblywoman Ellen Spiegel as saying, "One of the things I feel pretty strongly about is that Henderson has a long track record of being efficient with its money...one of the things I would hate to see would be for the City of Henderson to be penalized for being efficient with its money and having an excellent staff."

I couldn't have said it any better. We appreciate that expression of confidence, and our legislators' willingness to work with us.

Municipal government is the government closest to the people. We provide the daily services that impact our residents the most, and we're the closest resource to them when needs arise.

We might not be, as Forbes pointed out, one of the most exciting cities in America, but in these difficult economic times, we are one of the most solid. And this was accomplished while our population was growing from 144,000 to nearly 280,000 residents. That means that excluding the counties of Clark, Washoe and Carson, more people live in Henderson today than live in every other county in Nevada, combined.

In the past 12 years we've nearly doubled in population. All of this is especially significant when you consider that our property tax rates are the lowest in the entire valley and have remained at the same level for the past 19 years.

In the good times it's often difficult to focus on preparing for life's inevitable downturns. The urge is to run at break-neck speed and take as much advantage of the prosperity as possible. We've enjoyed many years of prosperity and growth, but we've been wise in how we've managed our city in those good times.

We've been recognized for our foresight and vision time and again. On your tables we've provided you a sampling of the national, state and local awards our city has received over the past 12 years. Each recognition was earned! They represent the commitment and hard work of our City Council, management and

staff. They reflect our commitment to Henderson families and businesses to sustain our vision to remain one of the best cities in America.

In order to maintain that vision, we must continue to meet our public safety responsibilities and otherwise sustain and enhance our residents' quality of life. So while we have reevaluated our capital improvement program and other areas of our budget, we must continue to provide projects that will sustain our infrastructure, ensure public safety and provide economic stimulus in the form of job creation.

This past year we've completed major projects on Eastern Avenue as well as Gibson and Sunset Roads. We've undertaken a pilot program with the RTC (Regional Transportation Commission) on Pecos Road to link our traffic signals via wireless transmitter. If our tests prove successful we'll save millions of dollars in the future by avoiding the need to bury our communications lines.

In coming weeks we will celebrate the opening of our new LEED-Certified North Police Station as well as the completion of our Justice Facility Expansion and Parking Garage Project. We currently have nearly \$55-million dollars of SNPLMA¹-funded parks and trails projects under way, in addition to several other turnkey projects. We expect to open our LEED-certified Heritage Park Aquatics Center and Senior Facility later this year, with the entire 160-acre park site open by 2010.

We've established events in our city that last year brought in over \$30-million in economic impact, and in 2008 we generated an additional \$220-million in tourism.

We're underway with our Galleria Interchange Project and are managing 74 capital improvement and other development-related projects in various stages of planning, design and construction. Many are shovel-ready and will become an important part of our efforts to stimulate the local economy. Those include the expansion of our Water Reclamation Facility and construction of the Southwest Water Reclamation Facility.

As part of our sustainability efforts throughout the city we recently approved funding for important energy improvements and upgrades to lighting, heating, cooling and other modernizations at city facilities. Those upgrades will be paid for out of the energy savings we realize as a result of this program, with an energy savings in excess of \$1.6-million dollars annually.

Another exciting part of our sustainability efforts is our Henderson Renewable Resources Campus, where we plan to install solar panels providing up to six megawatts of power. In addition, we're exploring the feasibility of producing

¹ Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act

hydroelectric power using the downhill flows within pipes at key locations within our water reclamation system.

You'll notice at your tables some bookmarks and information on our new "My Henderson" program. "My Henderson" is the face of our city-wide effort to incorporate all of our green, sustainable strategies into a comprehensive way of thinking both on a city government level and in the community.

The theme "My Henderson" is intended to convey the message that each one of us has a responsibility in this city, while recognizing the fact that no one of us can do it alone.

The input we have received from our residents has guided us in establishing this city's priorities. We communicate on a regular basis with our residents to learn how they feel and what they expect of us. Our city departments regularly solicit feedback on their services and have made it a priority to be responsive to the needs of their customers. We're even developing a new Henderson Kids Web site to interact with our younger residents.

We recently rolled out our new Contact Henderson program. Contact Henderson is an innovative way for us to communicate even more directly with our residents.

Just two weeks ago we received the preliminary results from our latest communication with our residents, our community assessment survey. That survey allows our people to grade us on the job we are doing, and helps focus our efforts as a city on areas that are important to them.

I'm pleased to announce that, as of two weeks ago 90% of them told us they were satisfied or extremely satisfied with our efforts to provide them with essential services. In addition, 95% of our residents told us they are satisfied or very satisfied with their quality of life in Henderson.

Together we've created a community, a real place that people can call home.

There's been a simple formula that has helped us create that community; and it's a formula we must continue to employ if we're to find future success. You've heard it said that necessity is the mother of invention. I subscribe to that notion.

But success requires that we take it further. We must combine an understanding of what the necessity really is with the political courage to do what it takes.

And we must have a vision of what is possible. When we combine those elements, we begin to accomplish something truly significant. And that is the challenge for the future: to see what is necessary and exercise political courage along with the vision to accomplish something beyond what may have been done in the past. Anything short of that and we fail to serve our people as we ought.

We've done that by focusing on what is right for the future rather than what is convenient in the moment. We've done it through innovation, employing public-private partnerships in areas that are crucial to our future, such as education.

I'm convinced that our success, or failure, in educating our children will ultimately define us more than any other accomplishment. We've always looked for ways to support education in Henderson and we are proud of the foundation we've established in that regard. We were the first to require land from developers for public schools. It wasn't easy and it wasn't the common thing to do, but it was the right thing.

We help with landscaping at local schools. We allow school district programming for sports and other activities at our sports and recreation centers, in exchange for allowing us to program theirs. We contributed money to keep Junior High School sports programs alive. We worked with UNLV to establish a therapeutic recreation program for our special needs children. We created public-private partnerships like the APPLE Partnership, which continues to grow and yield great benefit by bringing our community together to help our children learn to read.

The establishment of the Nevada State College is another of our proudest accomplishments. The NSC provides new generations of teachers and nurses to our community and to our state. We took the idea of the state college to the board of regents and to the legislature. We were instrumental in evaluating the need for a state college, which persuaded the board and legislature to fund it. With the aid of our Congressional delegation we secured from the federal government the 500 acre site that comprises its campus. We provided temporary facilities to house the college and brought infrastructure to the campus site.

Working together we built a great example of what can be accomplished through public-public partnerships.

Quite honestly, we haven't achieved much without resistance, but that resistance has made the end product far better. It is a good example of how resources of government agencies and institutions can achieve far more when leveraged together than if they'd pursued separate initiatives.

As we consider these and myriad other projects we've championed through the years, it's obvious that we've been motivated by an overwhelming interest in providing to our young people the ability to recognize opportunity. Some of that opportunity comes because we've built institutions and programs, and some of it will come in the future, as we nurture their interest in pursuing careers that will require a great deal of sacrifice on their part.

Over the past several months, we have been doing preliminary planning for the establishment of a science, space and children's museum and we believe that such a museum is exactly what this city and region needs.

When all is said and done, I would not want to be in a position where the children in this community could claim later on that they never understood what their possibilities were. I believe one of our fundamental commitments must be to keep opportunities alive in the minds of our children. In so doing there is a greater likelihood that they'll realize their dreams. And so our challenge is to make our contribution to an ever-expanding legacy of good works and achievement in this city – and when the children of this community stand in our place, they'll have been lifted, they'll be better than we were and their sights will be set on achieving goals higher than we ever imagined.

In order to do that in times like these we must be focused on leveraging every dollar, working together as public institutions. We've found great success in public-private partnerships and must continue to explore the opportunities that exist for creativity and innovation not only in public-private partnerships but in public-public partnerships as well.

One of our most recent public-public endeavors will soon pay dividends for the future of our city. Through a spirit of cooperation with our Congressional delegation, the Limited Transition Area bill, or LTA bill, recently passed out of the United States Senate. We're expecting the House vote any day now. With its passage will come the conveyance of more than 500 acres from the Bureau of Land Management near the Henderson Executive Airport.

Federal and local governments have worked together to preserve land for important industrial development and the jobs this development will bring to our community near the airport. The Henderson Executive Airport is extremely important for business travelers and the time will come when important transactions will be conducted in this city because of the establishment of business and industry in proximity to that airport. Those 500 acres will create an industrial and commercial buffer for our residents and bring additional business to that area, further diversifying our economy, providing jobs and building infrastructure.

There is even more business potential in West Henderson. In a few weeks we will see the grand opening of the new LEED-Certified Cashman Equipment headquarters. We're excited about the economic diversity that adds to our economy and the great jobs and community support they bring to Henderson.

We'll soon see another exciting project in that area with the opening of the M Resort, which is scheduled to open in March. It's a great addition to our growing cultural arts and tourism offerings within the city, and heck, we're just excited to add it to the tax rolls.

Those projects are examples of what can be accomplished as we work in partnership with people, with governments, with other entities to build our city in ways that may not traditionally have been employed in the past. And as we go forward serving and working and contributing, keep in mind that change for change's sake may be misguided and very often can respond to our individual interests while failing altogether to hit the community mark that ought to be our target.

I have the highest regard and deepest respect for the people I've served with on this council. They have understood how important it is to set aside individual political aspirations and instead pursue policy that strengthens the foundation of our success as a community. It has been a remarkable experience to serve with them.

Of this group, Jack Clark will also be leaving the council after our spring municipal elections. I ask you to join me in recognizing Jack for wisdom, tenacity and for commitment to all of us. Thank you.

I'm proud of what we've accomplished. It's not always been easy, but in difficult times we are more likely to find our real capacities and define our real limits. Great good can be done as we work ourselves through the challenges this council will face over the next months.

It's difficult to name all of the great accomplishments we've achieved together over the past 12 years, but one thing's for sure; our city is dramatically different from what it once was.

When you think about it, Henderson is still in its infancy. In 12 years we've changed dramatically, and in another 12 years given our past record of success and the stable foundation we've worked to establish, I can only imagine the incredible community we'll see for our children and our grandchildren.

People have asked me how I would define my legacy as I look back over the past 12 years. My response to them is that I don't claim right to any legacy. Rather, I've been a contributor, I've played a part. We have all – electeds, staff, business people, children, families – all of us together have created a legacy that is a measure of a living effort, not a static remembrance.

Remember at the beginning of my remarks I mentioned the interview I'd done with the Irish journalist, Mark Little? Well, his article wasn't just a commentary on Henderson, or even the Las Vegas Valley. It was a commentary on America and the American Dream, and I think it fitting to share the last paragraph.

It said, "The Mayor is a genuine visionary..." I really liked that part. It continued with the next sentence, "But he makes one mistake. He talks of the American Dream as if it had a single destination. It doesn't."

"It's an everlasting journey with countless different stops. At least, though, his city offers hope that it is going in the right direction."

And so I say, we all claim the right to declare as our own, the legacy of a remarkable community...a community committed to educating its people, dedicated to respecting its seniors, to responding to the needs of families and businesses. It is a legacy that is the envy of countless communities throughout this country. And a legacy that, by itself, is in its infancy and that will mature as good people, leaders in and out of government, continue to give priority to community achievement rather than to personal ambition.

And so, each one of us can leave here today standing just a little taller with the knowledge that no one owns the legacy to this community. Rather, it belongs to all of us.

As we work together in the coming months and years, always focusing on the right direction, this community will continue to overcome challenges, and this community will continue to be an influence for good in this state and a nurturing environment for the creativity and risk taking that have made us the most amazing place I know!

It has been my privilege and high honor to serve as Mayor of this city these past twelve years. Thank you for allowing me to work with you in that capacity.

May God bless each of you. May God bless our country, and may God continue to bless this city and all who work to make it such a great place to call home.

Thank you.

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