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State of the City of North Little Rock

Joe A. Smith, Mayor

March 31, 2020

Distinguished members of the North Little Rock City Council, City Attorney, City Clerk, and my fellow residents of North Little Rock, thank you for the honor of serving these past seven years as your Mayor. Though you will continue to receive regular updates from me as usual, I present to you the final comprehensive 2020 State of the City report of my administration.

2,646 days ago, I first took the oath of office to serve as your Mayor. The first pledge I gave as your Mayor was to build and use partnerships to solve problems and move our city forward. I cannot do it alone – city government cannot do it alone. Those relationships, those allies, those partnerships – make our community stronger.

As we confront our part in a global health pandemic and unprecedented economic uncertainty, the strength of those partnerships is critical. We will get through this – but we will only get through this *together*.

Public safety, always considered the first priority of municipal government, continues to influence every decision we make. Closing all restaurants, parks, playgrounds, and community centers is but one of many difficult, but necessary, sacrifices we will make. We are in constant contact with our local health partners and are prepared to assist them with whatever their needs. We rely on our governor and state agencies to keep us informed of the ever-changing COVID-19 situation and are confident they are prepared to assist us if necessary.

Our public safety employees, firefighters, police, and emergency dispatchers are the best-trained professionals in the state and have our full support as they encounter difficult and dangerous responsibilities to protect us. I assure you that though COVID-19 presents new, specific challenges to them, the daily training and professionalism of our first responders to deal with the unexpected is second to none and they are prepared and committed to meet these novel challenges with success.

"An Equal Opportunity Employer"

My philosophy has always been that we will and should be judged as a city by how well we respond and meet the unexpected crisis. For years we have prepared our entire staff in emergency response. Be assured that every employee of our city is prepared and committed to guiding, assisting, and protecting our residents through this pandemic and laying the groundwork for a robust and quick recovery.

In addition to our immediate health crisis, it is incumbent on my administration to consider and plan for the recovery aspect of this crisis. Preparing for the financial repercussions that will follow is just as important if we want to win the war and not just the battle.

We must ensure that we have the future financial ability to continue our mission of support and providing basic services for our residents and businesses. Implementing a current hiring freeze and strict spending restrictions are immediate and necessary steps that we have already taken. As for our ability to draw on reserves to meet expected declines in revenue, the long-term planning of our City Council places us in a position that is the envy of almost every other city in Arkansas and the nation. Though future budget reductions will be a possibility, they will not be nearly as dire as many other communities across the state and nation will face.

Our city faced an uncertain and precarious long-term financial situation a couple of years ago that was addressed by the foresight and partnerships of a City Council engaged in our budget process and residents willing to invest in our future. Thanks to smart investment in economic development, critical attention to infrastructure, and conservative budgeting practices, we now have financial reserves available to meet the challenges of the future.

Partnerships with state and federal government agencies undoubtedly serve us during this pandemic but will be just as crucial for the coming recovery. Financial assistance provided by these partners for our businesses and residents is welcome and we look forward to assisting our community with these resources. Our years of fostering good working relationships with our government partners will undoubtedly serve us well.

The most critical partnership we have is with our residents. I have been filled with pride watching our community respond to the needs of those less fortunate and less prepared to deal with immediate interruptions to our daily lives. Our churches have been quick and generous - helping provide some of our elderly with shopping needs and offering compassion to those hurt by the pressure of social isolation. I have witnessed our citizens offer support and encouragement to our health professionals who are putting their lives on the line for our community during this crisis.

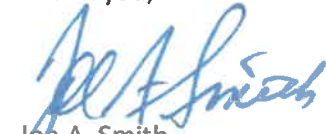
Our neighborhood groups have stepped up their commitment of looking out for their friends and families next door, and we stand ready as always to support them however we are able. We are North Little Rock Proud.

Emergency responders will continue to keep us safe. Sanitation and other necessary city services will maintain their high level of service. Your city government is responding to the

current challenge and preparing our future recovery. Our partnerships, formed and strengthened over years of considered cooperation, are comforting resources.

The state of our city, just like the people of our community, is strong.

Thank you,


Joe A. Smith
Mayor
City of North Little Rock

FILED 9 A.M. _____ P.M.
BY email
DATE 3/31/20
Diane Whitbey, City Clerk and Collector
North Little Rock, Arkansas
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