

State of the City 2013

I love this city. I still love going to work every day and I love the future we are creating for Houston. In our 3.5 years together we have gone from fighting a severe recession---with necessary cut backs and layoffs ---to having the hottest economy in the nation. Today we're the job producing capital of America--- the place to which more people are moving than anywhere else in the nation.

Just this year we have hosted an NBA All Star Weekend that was second to none, we have started major programs to improve our parks, streets, and libraries, and announced two new international flights to Houston. We will have two international airports, so you can fly directly from Houston to your international business meeting in Turkey, China or Mexico.

Our current list of "Top Ten" rankings could fill all the time available for my speech today so I've only selected a few as a reminder of what we've done together:

We're the best place in the country to start a new career.

Your paycheck will stretch further here than anywhere.

We are one of the best cities in which to own a home

We are in the top ten cities for college graduates.

The New York Times suggests we are the seventh best city to visit in the world.

Forbes Magazine named us "America's Coolest City."---which I don't think is a reference to our climate.

And, best of all, Travel and Leisure says we are the best burger city in the country.

There are more, but I will stop there. Do an Internet search. Look it up for yourself. It's a proud list of achievements. **These are the facts that allow me to proudly say the state of our city is strong-- and getting stronger.**

Personally, though, I think that list isn't enough. We have a lot more to do. I love having others recognize how great our city is. But it's not going to be enough until every Houston family's life is better---from the roads on which we drive, to the jobs we work, to the neighborhoods in which we live in, to the schools we attend and the parks where our children play. The best city can and will get better.

That's been my goal as Mayor: to improve our role as a global city of business...while also focusing on making Houston a great place to raise a family and a great place to live.

No one person can do this. We are two million people working together to do it. Everyday we are building our tomorrow. Call us a City of Change. Call us the City of the Future. Call us the best city in America - a city that is still working to get better. We have the plans, the vision, the imagination, the ability...and the will to go there, and we're on our way.

A City of Opportunity---Jobs and Our Economy

A great city is many things. And it starts with opportunity. My economic philosophy is simple. I don't believe in trickle down. I believe in building up.

The best way to grow our economy is also the best way to lay the foundation for a strong future: executing on the fundamentals, with sound city finances and good public services. We've done that together.

We've laid that foundation. We've cut waste in the vast city bureaucracy. Put our finances in order. Made city departments more efficient. Balanced the budget without raising taxes. Begun pension reform.

All that work is not the goal. They are the tools to make our city even better. When we recruit new business to come to Houston, we have something to sell.

Houston is the biggest economic success story in America. In the last three years, the Houston region has created more than 250,000 jobs, exported approximately \$300 billion in locally produced goods and services and issued permits for the construction of nearly 74,000 single-family homes. Houston was the first major metro area to fully recover from the recession. We lead the nation.

A year ago I stood before you and announced that incentives and other measures offered by the City of Houston had resulted in more than \$1 billion in new economic development since 2010. Today, I am proud to say that we have more than doubled that number. With limited incentives and aggressive pro-growth policies our city government has helped attract more than \$2.2 billion of economic development.

Growth begins at home, so we started the Hire Houston First program, giving priority to local firms to keep our tax dollars here and build our local economy. In the first year, more than \$139 million of city business was awarded to certified firms, sustaining more than 6,000 jobs.

Many of these firms had never done work for the city prior to their Hire Houston First designation. One of those first timers is Generators of Houston, owned by Lewis Giddings. Mr. Giddings please stand. He and his team won a \$144,399 contract with the Houston Airport System. His company has 22 employees and has been in business for nine years, selling, installing and servicing virtually all makes and models of Power Generation Equipment. Generators of Houston got involved in the city's contracting process due to the Hire Houston First initiative. Join me in celebrating Houston business owner Lewis Giddings and the Generators of Houston team.

Since last year at this time, the number of designated firms has risen from 250 to more than 600, and growing monthly. The local preference offered by the program only kicks in for registered companies, so get registered!

We've also taken an existing program and made it better.

The city awarded a total of \$340 million in contracts to small, minority, women and disadvantaged business enterprises during fiscal year 2012. This is the highest percentage of work awarded to certified vendors in Houston history. It reflects our commitment to creating a competitive and diverse business environment.

And there's more to come.

Thanks to the financial backing of Capital One, we are launching Lift Off Houston, a business plan competition to engage individuals seeking to start a new business--- utilizing resources available at the Houston Public Library and the city's Office of Business Opportunity. Participants will be provided with the resources and mentoring to research, develop and present their business plans. They will receive more than a \$1,000 in in-kind services. At the end, there will be three cash prizes ranging from \$5,000 to \$15,000 to jump start those business plans. Join me in acknowledging Directors Carlecia Wright and Rhea Lawson for their innovative collaboration, work and commitment to the citizens of Houston.

Bringing in major investment is important. Growing opportunities for small businesses of all kinds is important. But it isn't enough. What if you don't have a job or you are looking for a better job?

Help is on the way. Today, I am launching a revolutionary new recruitment tool called TweetMyJob Houston! This hyper-local website and app matches current job postings with qualified job seekers- at the click of a button. Right now you can download the TweetMyJobs Houston app on any Apple or Droid platform and find more than 150,000 available jobs in the greater Houston area. Today, small and mid-size businesses with limited recruitment budgets now have the same opportunities as many of the Fortune 500 companies to recruit the best talent that Houston has to offer. TweetMyJobs Houston combines social networking with job searching and matching- where and when you want them. This service is easy to use and free to join by both business and job seeker. Tweet your jobs today.

A City That Works: Modernizing Our Infrastructure

A city is only as strong as its physical structure---utilities, streets, and drainage. It must work well so the community can function. Houston is now pioneering new ways to accomplish this. Good management and fiscal responsibility go together. You can't have one without the other.

Good management means making it easier for your customers to talk to you and let you know what's going wrong. We have restored our 311 helpline to a 24/7 schedule and launched a new smart phone app that makes for easy reporting of potholes and other issues. Just click a photo, tag it and send it in.

With voter approval we're in the second year of our comprehensive infrastructure modernization program that this year will provide more than 100 miles of road improvements and good paying jobs. Our transformative, bold, pay-as-you-go approach to addressing drainage issues and improving overall infrastructure will provide benefits for decades to come.

We have already invested approximately \$180 million in improvements to our infrastructure since the program began and we are just getting started. In the first year-we completed, continued or started a total of 46 street and drainage improvement projects. We resurfaced 136 lane miles of asphalt streets, cleaned 75 miles of storm sewers and re-graded 277 miles of road ditches. In 2013, we will complete or start another 38 improvement projects.

Voters stepped up again last fall by approving \$410 million in public improvement bonds for city building projects and park improvements. In my first state of the city I talked about my concern about debt, and I'm proud that this is the smallest borrowing request in 30 years. The bond proceeds will fund five years of city public improvements ranging from roof and foundation repairs to new police and fire stations. Together, we're rebuilding our city and I thank you for your commitment to making the best city, even better.

A Safer City

Over the past three years one of our top priorities has been to make Houston a safer city. We've made real progress. Since 2010, the crime rate is down eight percent. Despite budget problems during the recession, we did not layoff a single police officer or fire fighter and protected our investment in public safety. Join me in recognizing the first responders who work tirelessly to keep us safe. Please stand and be acknowledged.

We've tackled long-neglected problems.

We've modernized our public safety radio and technology systems.

In the last three years through Demolition Days we have demolished more than two thousand blighted or abandoned homes and some of the worst apartments in Houston. We have removed crack houses, cutting away a cancer that eats away at neighborhood vitality.

Just last month we launched Make Safe Saturday, a new neighborhood cleanup initiative that secures blighted properties that are in violation of City codes but do not meet the criteria for demolition.

We are eliminating the city's backlog of untested sexual assault kits that date back decades. They are in testing today. Within 12 months the backlog will be gone. I know how important this is to rape survivors. It's a problem that was years in the making and we began working to solve it as soon as I took office, with no resources to accomplish it). Frankly, I wish we could have solved the problem sooner, but we've done it now.

To improve law enforcement in the future, we are transitioning to an independent city crime lab to catch criminals, and to protect the innocent.

Last month we opened the doors at the Houston Center for Sobriety, an innovative facility that is an alternative to jail for people detained for public intoxication, allowing them the opportunity to regain sobriety in a safe, medically monitored environment.

The best can get better.

A More Livable City---Our Quality of Life

Houston's a great place, but one of my top goals has always been to make it an even more livable city. Our history - making new Bayou Greenways Project, which voters approved in the recent bond election, does just that. This is the stringing of the beads along our bayous, linking existing trail segments into a seamless whole. Using a mix of public and private funding, it will eventually complete one of the largest continuous park/trailway systems in America, along every major bayou segment in the city. This year we have begun working with many communities and partners and are completing designs on the first \$20 million worth of projects.

Quality of life can mean many things. It can mean access to parks or the arts. To some it means finding a roof over their head and food on the table. Unfortunately, this includes many veterans. Now through an unprecedented community-wide effort we are finding homes, social services and jobs for homeless veterans. More than 1,000 homeless veterans now have a place to call home as a result of this initiative.

One of them is Paul Lewis, an army vet who was living on the streets. Mr. Lewis please stand. As he said, when you lose your livelihood, you risk losing your self-respect. But with the help of this new city supported program, he found a new home and updated his automotive repairs skills at Houston Community College. Today, he is back on his feet and has opened a car repair shop on Veterans Memorial and Antoine. Thank you Mr. Lewis for your service to your country and God bless you in your new life. Together we won't be satisfied until all our heroes have a safe place to stay at night.

In addition to our Veteran Affairs accomplishments, homelessness is down overall by 27%, and still the best can get better. I'd like to thank our many partners including Houston Housing Authority, Harris County Housing Authority, the Coalition for the Homeless and the many faith and community-based organizations that are working tirelessly to stamp out homelessness.

Houston is a City of Innovation

We're taking the lead in new technology to make us a modern, efficient, sustainable city. Houston has been the number one city government for using renewable energy for four years in a row; and this year we've expanded the city's use of renewable energy by 50%.

I am especially proud that Houston was selected as one of the winners of the Bloomberg Challenge, a national competition that judged innovative ideas from cities all over America. The city has received a one million dollar prize to use as seed funding for the development of a One Bin For All recycling system. The goal is an innovative system to allow residents to mix trash, recyclables and lawn waste in a single bin ready for automatic sorting. It is a transformative approach with the potential to improve the city's recycling recovery rate to 75%.

I love Houston. I was born here. I grew up here. This city is planted in my heart and soul. I know many of you in this audience personally. I have worked with most of you... and I even fought with some of you from time to time. We're all in this together. So many of the good things in our city actually start at the grassroots level, from people who care passionately and work tirelessly---without pay---to improve life in our community.

Six of Houston's community leaders are in the audience today.

- There's Steve DeGloria, a Kroger Store manager, who volunteers for the Children's Miracle Network, the United Way and the Houston Food Bank.
- Anna Gonzales - the current president of the Denver Harbor Civic Club where she organizes community clean-ups, maintains the neighborhood esplanade and fights the permitting of new cantinas.
- Margaret Jenkins is the current president of the Greater Sugar Valley Civic Club, and Sunnyside Super Neighborhood 71& Crestmont/SouthAcres Super Neighborhood 76 Councils.
- Ritika Kapoor is using her love of libraries and expertise as an IT professional to help at the Houston Public Library where she has personally set up more than 700 computers, installed wireless router systems and helped upgrade other library systems and equipment.
- Ruby Mosley is affectionately called the "Mayor of Acres Homes," and the Houston Chronicle named her Acres Homes' Grande Dame of Community Activism. Her community involvement includes serving as a member of the Acres Home Advisory Committee, Acres Home Super Neighborhood, Houston Police Department Advisory Committee and Gulf Coast Community Services Association.
- Finally, there's Gary Thomas, who was voted fan favorite in our Facebook contest honoring these volunteers. He's a retired Vietnam vet, who volunteers five days a week at BARC, working directly with the animals and serving as a counselor for new adoptive families.

These volunteers, and the countless others I do not have time to mention, are the true heroes of our city. Please join me in acknowledging their contributions and the contributions of all our volunteers across the city.

We all share the same goal. Making Houston better has been our great joint endeavor. I want to thank you for the privilege of working with you to achieve that. I want to thank you for your vision of a better city.

We're a city of change and innovation, a city of opportunity, a city that's growing better for all of us who live here. We still have much to do, but we're making terrific progress. The state of our city is strong. The state of our future is unlimited. And the best will continue to get better.