

CITY OF MODESTO

MAYOR GARRAD MARSH

2013 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Good afternoon and thank you for joining me at the Two Thousand and Thirteen State of the City address.

In the past, the State of the City has been a recital of the last year's events and achievements along with a list of future plans and objectives.

This year, I will be departing from that to some degree to focus on our economic future and making Modesto better. So often we all just continue doing what has been the norm. I AM willing to do things differently. I AM willing to take on projects that are not always easy or guaranteed to be successful. What I am NOT willing to do is just accept the status quo, especially when we could do so much better.

Therefore, this afternoon, I will focus on our economy and our economic future. To continue as we have, Modesto won't be really successful at expanding our fortune. We have just been getting along.

To excel requires strategic advantages. Where do we find strategic advantages and what are our disadvantages or shortcomings? First, we are superbly located to be a major agricultural processing center. And because of this, Modesto has been working to secure our infrastructure and expanding our ability to attract new processors.

Also, Modesto has a superior sense of community, our citizens, non-profits, religious organizations, and neighborhoods make this city so much better than Forbes or others can ever measure. Finally, we are a relatively affordable place to live and do business.

But we also have distinct disadvantages to other locales, especially in regards to our crime rates, our educational achievement, and the lack of business ready land. We must do better on all three of these fronts for our area to thrive. I think it is important here to address these problems.

Before I speak on the issue of crime, I would like to recognize our former Chief Mike Harden who was unable to join us today, and Captain Gene Ballantine, who has been our interim chief. I thank you both for your work, and for making due with too few resources.

Now, I would like to recognize our new Chief - Galen Carroll, Chief, please stand. We have hired

him to lead our police force. I have confidence he is the right person for us. But I must tell you it is time to give him enough tools to make our city safer. Thank you Chief.

For improving public safety, I have been fixated on just needing more cops and firefighters, but I also realized there may be more, and better, ideas on improving our public safety and reducing crime. Toward that end, in December I convened a citizen's forum on public safety. A group of nearly 100 business and community leaders, citizens, and neighborhood organizers gathered and generated over 200 ideas. 15 of the attendees agreed to analyze the different concepts and develop a report. Then last Friday, over 60 of the original group plus some new faces evaluated the different proposals. We will be posting the ideas and results on our website if you are interested.

This exercise has caused me to expand my scope. To realize that community involvement through non-profits, religious organizations, neighborhood watches and neighborhood organizations must be included as a cost effective way to improve our city. Hiring of private security and investment in technology must also be part of the solution. But all of the ideas take more dollars than we have.

During our most recent reductions in force, we eliminated 14 Community Service Officers. These positions, which provided support in crime prevention, investigation, response to citizens, and development of neighborhood groups, are desperately needed again.

Folks, last night I did something I hope I never have to do again.

I attended a candlelight vigil for an innocent young man who was senselessly murdered last week in a park. Two years ago this week, I attended the candlelight vigil for a mom, dad, and their mentally disabled child who were murdered in their business. And two years before that, we had a two year old shot in his front yard while playing. What do all of these have in common? They were all committed by gang members. We can no longer do business as usual. We can no longer move cops from the one hot topic crime of the month to the next. From gangs to drugs to graffiti to auto theft and back to gangs. Our police officers have done so well with so little.

I also desire to have every area of Modesto organized with an active neighborhood group, to watch out for ourselves. They are the eyes to aid our safety officers. Such associations will improve our quality of life.

There is more, we also have issues to address in our fire service. Over the last 5 years, with the cuts made to balance our budget, our response times have deteriorated from over 90% down to the 60 percentile range of being on time.

This has not resulted in a lost building or a death, YET. But I think it is only because of the grace of God that is true. We are truly on the edge. No longer having the equipment and staff to

handle two simultaneous working fires. The odds are not with us.

WE MUST HAVE MORE RESPONDERS. We must! And to do that we must have more revenues.

I challenge anyone to find a solution otherwise. We can continue to do the same, just making mi-nute incremental improvements, OR you can join me in shaping and passing a public safety tax proposal to make Modesto better, to make Modesto safer, to make Modesto attractive to businesses.

It is your choice. Keep doing what we have been doing, or work with me to make our city better and safer.

At a recent conference LA Mayor Villaraigosa said, "When streets are safe, neighborhoods blossom; when streets are safe, companies and businesses thrive and invest in our city; when streets are safe, jobs come to our City."

As a community, wouldn't you like our neighborhoods to blossom? Or our local companies and business to thrive and further invest in our town? Wouldn't you like more jobs and safer streets in Modesto? Well - I.... do....too! I want neighborhoods to blossom, I want business to thrive, I want safer streets, I want more jobs.

Washington, and especially Sacramento are not going to rescue us. They can't even take care of themselves. We must take it upon ourselves to help ourselves. I will be actively seeking input, commitment, and help to make this happen. I think it is of the utmost importance to our community. It will not be easy, but I AM willing to try.

The second structural disadvantage is our education attainment level.

Addressing education is an interesting topic for a mayor. But without an educated workforce, we will have difficulty attracting the businesses we need to diversify our economy.

First, I have chosen to continue Former Mayor Ridenour's Top Teens program. To that end, we have named 27 to this year's list. These are youth that have overcome hardships or been outstanding examples of community servants. They are special, and I am so pleased to have written letters of recommendation and acknowledgement for them to file with their college applications. I have invited them to join us today and would like to ask those who were able to attend to please stand.

We need to bring good jobs to Modesto for these young people. They should have a secure future here, in Modesto, not being forced out of our area to find quality employment. These and many more children are why economic expansion is so important.

While our system essentially excludes city government from being a part of the educating our youth, I think all of us must be willing to help our schools to succeed.

It cannot be just the teachers and the school system's job to help our youth be successful students. Mentoring, tutoring, after-school activities, literacy, and summer learning programs are just some of the areas where we each can help. Citywide grade level reading initiatives are springing up around the country. Children who are not at grade level by third grade usually fall further and further behind. Truancy and behavioral problems become greater. We must join in a partnership with our schools to help them be successful.

The truant, the failing student, the neglected, the dropouts are also sweet targets for gangs. It's not just policing, but also preventing that we should be addressing.

Our Council and the School District have had a contentious issue on the table for a while now, but we must set it aside to work together for the good of our youth and our community. All of us, together, can do more. This is a challenge that we as a community will need to undertake.

Modesto has not been especially successful at diversifying its economic base. Not just because of the topics I have already covered, but also because we have, too often, just been reactive. We need to stop hoping that someone will knock on our door, that someone will decide to select Modesto to do business. Toward that end I plan on including a \$500,000 economic development commitment to our upcoming budget. Together with my Council, we will look toward marketing Modesto initiatives, incentive programs for vibrant and targeted firms, and other programs to bring new types of employers to our area. Much like I convened our citizen forum for public safety, I would like to propose a similar effort for expansion of our economic base. I have asked Dave Cogdill to join me in this effort.

We have to plan for the next thirty years, not just for tomorrow. Modesto does not have adequate business land. Toward that end, I looked towards addressing the problem. The Salida Now plan was approved by the Board of Supervisors over 5 years ago. Because of the economic changes we have endured, that plan cannot be built as sold. The Salida Now developers will never be able to provide the infrastructure for the business park areas. Modesto can.

I believe annexation of Salida is workable. I believe it is in the best interest of Stanislaus County and Modesto. But most of all, MOST of all, I believe it is in the best interest of the people of Salida.

Their future was sold to developers, and there is nothing Salidans, nor Modesto, nor Stanislaus County can do for 20 more years if things stay as they are. Only by entering Modesto can the people of Salida have a say in what their future will look like. If they choose not to join us I see triple the homes, triple the population, and triple the traffic with little chance of bringing the business parks to fruition. I know it will be difficult to convince the people of Salida, but it is another challenge I AM willing to undertake.

Now, let's quickly look at some recent accomplishments in Modesto. We have scored a few

wins on the transportation front, another important aspect of economic development.

Improvements to the Kiernan interchange, plus the expansion of Kiernan to four lanes all the way to McHenry are underway. I have advocated, and the North County Corridor committee has accepted, the “make Keirnan work” plan for the Corridor.

Councilwoman Burnside OR I have made ourselves regular attendees at the California Transportation Commission hearings. We have been fighting for funding of the Pelandale overpass project and if successful, the outreach work of Councilwoman Burnside will be a major factor. I thank her for her efforts.

By the way, the CTC is tentatively planning for their October meeting in Modesto. They have never met in the San Joaquin Valley before. Maybe we are finally regaining a voice we lost with Kirk Lindsey’s passing.

I formed a bicycle advisory group last year, and Modesto was awarded an Honorable Mention by the League of American Bicyclists. We are far from Davis’ platinum level, but we will keep moving forward. Our city’s work on bicycle infrastructure is just a small step in making our community more desirable.

Speaking of more desirable, have you seen our “parklets” at 10th and J. In thinking of these new parklets an old proverb comes to mind, “Those who say it cannot be done should not interrupt the person doing it.” When I think of that person, the person doing things right in our downtown, I think of Josh Bridegroom. Josh had a vision and took a proactive step in the beautification of downtown Modesto. Initially donating nearly \$1,000 of his own money, and with the help of fellow community members and businesses, Josh took the initiative to get the parklets project started.

Just that small change made those corners friendlier. I will push to continue with a redesign of all of J Street and more of 10th street. More steps toward improving the image of Modesto.

With our downtown partners, over the last few months, committees have been actively working to identify existing unfavorable conditions, from physical to regulatory and developing ideas for improvement. In order to involve the larger community in the process of developing the Downtown Hospitality Program, a summit meeting is being planned for February 28. We would welcome your input.

We’ve made some other advances locally. The Modesto arch was restored, my thanks to the Chamber and all of the volunteers and donors who made that happen. The long awaited Archway Commons, an affordable housing project at 9th and Carver, is nearing completion, as is Mary Grogan Park and its 7 soccer fields.

MJC’s new science building at the West Campus will also open soon. This is a state of the art building, and is LEED certified. A truly fine sustainable green facility.

While I am on the topic of green and sustainability, I want all of you to know that Modesto will be rolling out a Property Assessed Clean Energy program, commonly known as PACE, later this year. This will provide financing for energy efficiency improvements to your business properties and homes. Whether this is in the form of better insulation, dual pane windows, high efficiency air conditioning units, or solar, these are projects that will provide positive cash flow to the property owner while improving our environment. I expect 25 to 100 projects the first year with multiples of that in the following years. What ELSE does this do? It provides hundreds of jobs for our local contracting industry, one of the most devastated segments of our economy. Modesto is ready to be one of the leaders in this field.

I continue my commitment to building up, not out.

On the building up front, I view the court house renewal as vital. But it has been a roller-coaster year for this project: on and off three times. Today it is tenuously on. Construction of this project will be a major step not just toward a better Modesto, but to a better economy, and a more successful city center. I believe it will also generate infill and market rate housing projects in our downtown. Market rate housing is an essential component of a vibrant city core.

I mentioned the importance of having strategic advantages and our ability to be leaders in segments of the economy.

Toward that end and my “not out” commitment, I believe it is paramount to also protect and secure our largest strategic advantage, agriculture. Therefore, we will soon be considering farmland mitigation proposals similar to those already adopted by the County and LAFCO. Additionally, I plan to place Denny Jackman’s residential urban boundary proposal on our agenda for the Council to hopefully move it to a citizen’s vote this November. We need to be proactive in this area.

Over the past year, I have held Town Hall Meetings and Public Safety Forums which have been designed to blend the needs and desires of the community with the vision of the City. I will continue to hold Town Hall meetings this year with the next meeting scheduled for 1 pm May 4th at Gregori High School. Prior to that, there should be public forums on the Salida question taking place.

As I said in the beginning, it is easy to just take things day by day. But I AM willing to lead us into a better tomorrow.

It is time we as a community stopped being spectators and become active participants in making a better Modesto.

On the brink of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln had this to say about change: “The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate for the stormy present and future. As our

circumstances are new, we must think anew and act anew.” Modesto, so must we.

Join me in no longer sitting on the sidelines and doing what has always been the norm. Join me in no longer accepting the status quo. Join me in thinking and acting anew. Join me for the challenges we face.

For our boundaries, it's time to think up, not out. For our economy, think big, not small. For our streets and parks, think safe, not scared. It's time to think about the youth and their future here in Modesto. It's time to provide more responders. It's time to join me in focusing our goals on a stronger economic future and a better Modesto.

Thank you and God Bless.