

STATE OF THE CITY

Mayor David A. Bowers

August 13, 2009

NOTE: THE MAYOR MAY ABBREVIATE OR ADD TO THESE REMARKS.

What a year we've had in Roanoke! What a year the American economy has had! The nation has been in a recession, people have lost their jobs, businesses have slumped or gone out of business, and no one seems to have enough cash. God willing, we will come out of this economic slump and once again, I'm sure God will bless America. I believe it!

It is with thanks that I once again appear before you as Mayor of this great All America city. Thank you for being here today, thank you to the Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce for sponsoring this opportunity for me to present to you the State of the City for 2009.

This year I thought I would take time to recognize 7 individuals. I thought this was the best way to tell the story of Roanoke over the last year. You may have heard me say often that "things just don't happen, people make it happen." That certainly has been true again this year as we look back on the last year.

The first individual I want to recognize is my colleague on Roanoke City Council, former Vice-Mayor and now fellow Councilman, David Trinkle. You may recall that last year in my State of the City speech I recognized Gwen Mason as a

leader in the environmental "clean and green" movement of our city. This year I'm pleased to recognize Dave Trinkle. He has been the driver, in my opinion, behind the scenes, and has taken public leadership positions on matters of interest to our city. He was instrumental in the City Council/School Board multimillion-dollar deficit negotiations for this fiscal year, and helped to engineer a balanced budget without a tax increase. His calm demeanor and business savvy he must have inherited from his dear father, well known long time realtor Jimmy Trinkle, and his leadership qualities he must have learned inherently from his grandfather, the late Governor Trinkle of Virginia. With his leadership during the budget process, we've done our job and we've maintained the financial integrity of our city for yet another year. On another note, I'm convinced that our 2 major capital improvement programs are renovation of the City Market Building and the Elmwood Park Amphitheatre. Dave Trinkle has been a driving force in moving these two projects along for the benefit of our city, also. Roanoke City Council is now poised to move forward immediately with the architectural and engineering plans for both projects, with a start for construction and renovation of the City Market Building within the next 2 years and the start of construction of the downtown amphitheatre in Elmwood Park shortly thereafter. These two

projects will enhance our downtown area and assure for many years to come that the center city is the entertainment mecca of Western Virginia. With our Civic Center, Jefferson Center and now Elmwood Park and the City Market, we have put together a "tourism magnet" that should have regional appeal throughout the Mid-Atlantic states. These two economic development initiatives should yield economic development benefits with the expansion of restaurants and stores, new offices and new downtown residences. Our goal is not just to have Roanoke simply "survive", but to "thrive" in the future. This year, Dave Trinkle is owed a lot of credit for what has been accomplished for the City of Roanoke and I would ask that you now join me in recognizing him.

The second person I want to ask you to recognize is City Manager Darlene Burcham. Shortly after we begin a new calendar year 2010 just 6 months from now, the era of her administration in our city will come to a conclusion with her retirement. While cities across this great land are struggling, Roanoke over the last 10 years has moved forward. Sometimes it seems like 2 steps forward and 1 step back, but nonetheless our city has made progress under the administration of Ms. Burcham. She has helped to get the Riverside Medical Center Complex underway, perhaps her greatest achievement, improved our library system and our neighborhood services; she has built a LEED

certified, environmentally sustainable firehouse, plus new fire department and police department headquarters; she's helped to preserve, protect and enhance our parks; the greenway system has been extended under her administration; she's worked with three mayor's and 15 council members, in good times and bad, to make sure that our annual budgets are balanced and that our capital improvement program moves forward. She's worked hard for the people of Roanoke and she has served honorably, and I ask that you join me now in recognizing the service of Darlene Burcham as City Manager of Roanoke.

The third and fourth persons I'd like to recognize are Dr. Ed Murphy and Dr. Cynda Johnson, both connected with the Virginia Tech Medical School at Carilion Clinic. I was at the meeting 10 years ago when we discussed the redevelopment of the Reserve Avenue site, turning it from a dusty and deserted industrial neighborhood to a gleaming new medical center with hospitals and restaurants and residences. I was at the meeting when someone said 10 years ago that Roanoke may even have a medical school someday, and we all laughed! That now is a reality! Last Fall, Governor Kaine joined Dr. Steger, from Virginia Tech, Dr. Murphy, Dr. Johnson, and others in the ground-breaking ceremonies of the new Virginia Tech Carilion Medical School on Jefferson Street. Since then, you and I have

witnessed the building of that new edifice next to the new Carilion Clinic facilities. That laughable dream 10 years ago of Roanoke having a medical school has now come true, and this year it was announced that the medical school has been fully accredited by the American Medical Association. Our thanks to the vision and hard work of Dr. Ed Murphy of Carilion Clinic and Dr. Cynda Johnson, the Dean of the Virginia Tech Carilion Medical School. This project alone is our greatest economic development project since the railroad came to Roanoke and these two individuals have helped our city secure a positive and stable place in the future of the region, competitive with UVA at Charlottesville, Duke Medical School in Durham and Wake Forest Medical School at Winston-Salem. In the future, someone will not be able to ask the question as to why Roanoke didn't take a step to compete with those cities in this regard, because in the 1990's we did take that step. You, Dr. Murphy and Dr. Johnson, took that leadership role in helping us make that step and we recognize you and thank you today.

The fifth person I want to recognize today is not with us. Former Vice-Mayor Dave Lisk died recently. His memory should be for all of us a reason to be very proud of Roanoke and how our city inspires us to do great and noble things. Many of you may have heard the story which I've told over the last

several months that is important enough to bear repeating today. When former Mayor Roy Webber died unexpectedly back in the 1970's, it was anticipated that David Lisk, the second most popular public official here in the city, would assume the role of Mayor. But those were turbulent times in America and in Roanoke. We had just witnessed the integration of our schools and our public facilities. For a southern city like Roanoke, it was important for us to figure out whether we were going to continue to be a part of the past or a part of the future. There was this young dynamic other council member at the time named Dr. Noel C. Taylor, a black Baptist minister, who had been elected to Roanoke City Council as a Republican; can you believe it? In the ensuing days of political debate following the death of Mayor Webber, it became quite evident to Dave Lisk that, for the good of our city, it was important to place Noel Taylor in the Mayor's Office as a sign of progress and for racial harmony. Dave Lisk, who always, I'm sure, wanted to be the Mayor, nonetheless stepped back and did the noble and right thing in throwing his political support behind Noel Taylor. And now you know the rest of the story, because Dr. Noel C. Taylor, my immediate predecessor when I took office in 1992 for my first term, then went on to serve for 17 years, being the 1st African-American Mayor in the history of Roanoke and serving longer than

any other Mayor in the history of our City. There were many reasons why Noel Taylor became Mayor and became a successful Mayor over his tenure, but one of the reasons is because David Lisk was noble in his withdrawal from the contest and in his support of Dr. Taylor to serve as Mayor. Another thing that Dave Lisk did over the years is help to extend the friendship of Roanokers around the world, under his leadership with the Sister City organization. He has helped to expand our Sister Cities from 1 connection with Wonju, Korea, to 7 connections with cities on every continent including, Kisumu, Kenya in Africa, Pskov, Russia, Opole, Poland and St. Lo, France in Europe, Florianopolis, Brazil in South America and Lijiang, China on the Asian continent. Through this remarkable organization, which each of you should belong to and participate in, we have an opportunity to welcome people from around the world to see the beauty and progress of Roanoke. It also provides Roanoke's people an opportunity to visit other lands, to gain an understanding of the cultures, governments and people that may be strange to us here, and to commit ourselves to the ideals of world peace and human understanding. Dave Lisk was a noble leader in that regard as well, and that's why I ask you to join me in a round of applause, as he looks down upon us, for the

service that the late Dave Lisk provided to the people of Roanoke.

The sixth person I want to recognize is very much with us: Estelle McCadden, this year's Citizen of the Year in Roanoke! You know she's here, because she doesn't just light up a room...she fires up a room! Her joy and enthusiasm and civic commitment to Roanoke are contagious. And if you don't agree, she'll let you know otherwise! Estelle is to be recognized for being the mother and grandmother of a wonderful family, including former Councilman Mac McCadden. She's been active in our schools and neighborhood activities for dozens of years. She has served as president of her Melrose neighborhood civic association, as well as service on the citywide neighborhood council and the National USA Neighborhoods Board of Directors. She's a real honest-to-goodness spitfire! She just won't stop doing good for people. And we Roanokers, along with her family, are the grateful beneficiaries of her love and attention. The good Lord only made one Estelle McCadden, but how much better we would be if there were a few more around like her. She's here today. Please now join me in recognizing the deserving Citizen of the Year, Estelle McCadden.

The last person I want to recognize could not be here last year but I've asked that he attend this year. He is

Officer Brian Lawrence of the Roanoke Police Department. As you all know, Officer Lawrence went to the aid of a citizen in a fight on Williamson Road more than a year ago. He was injured and suffers disability and great physical pain. His family has suffered and he has been confined to a motorized wheelchair for much of the last year. I call upon Brian because he is an example of the service which our police officers, our fire personnel and every employee of every Roanoke city department, thousands of people who give their all to do their job for our great All America City everyday. There are thousands of other employees whom I am not recognizing today, but I do want to recognize Officer Lawrence as an example of their dedicated service. I also want to recognize him because he has, if you'll have an opportunity to talk to him, reached a zenith in his life. His spirit is so strong and cheerful. I'm sure that it probably masks difficult days in his life and times when he's almost ready to give up. But I say to Brian Lawrence: "Don't give up!" The people of Roanoke love you and want you to be back with us and we want you to walk again. Please join me as we thank Officer Brian Lawrence for his service to the people of Roanoke, and may God Bless him and his family.

There are many other people and accomplishments that I could call upon and recognize that have made a contribution to

Roanoke over the last year. I've chosen to make this presentation in the way that I've done, but there are available, over here on the table, lists from the School Board and from the City Manager as to the many accomplishments of Roanoke this past year.

As I close, I have just two other things to say. I mentioned earlier that I was at a meeting 10 years ago when someone laughingly suggested that Roanoke might someday be the site of a medical school. It was hilarious, but it came true. I now want to tell you that I'm working very hard with others behind the scenes for another laughable possibility, and that is the creation of a law school in our city over the next 10 years. Lynchburg has a law school, Greensboro has a law school, Grundy has a law school, and Roanoke should have a law school, too. Just a few years ago, Mayor Jim Melvin of Greensboro came up with a crazy idea that there should be a law school in downtown Greensboro near the Guilford County Courthouse and the United States District Court in his city. He was able to meet with representatives of local colleges, and there are many in that area. He met in particular with representatives of Elon University and over the last several years an arrangement has been made, and now the former main library in downtown Greensboro has become the site of the Elon University School of

Law. Elon is in Burlington, but through the vision of Mayor Melvin of Greensboro, the Elon Law School is 25 miles west in Greensboro, North Carolina. We can do this in Roanoke! We can and should have a law school here. I think it's important for us to stimulate the thought that a law school should be here in Roanoke near our City Courthouse and the United States Federal Courthouse.

Roanoke has made tremendous strides in higher education over the last 10 years. Not only do we have many fine area colleges and, now, an accredited medical school, but the Roanoke Higher Education Center with more than 15 universities participating has lent itself to be a truly important and vital part of our downtown, providing needed graduate and post-graduate education for thousands of people from across Roanoke and the region. I know because I'm teaching at the Higher Education Center this year!

We all know how important education is for our young people. It's also important for us adults as well, and it's vitally important for our community. So when we talk about education in Roanoke, we should be talking about education "from the cradle to the grave", and when we do that, we should be thinking about expanding our Higher Education Center, expanding adult educational opportunities for our region. One of the ways

we can do that is to begin discussion among community leaders in the region about the placement of a law school in our city.

That I intend to do. It's a laughable idea, but 10 years from now, I hope we can look back and say a law school in Roanoke, like the medical school, became a reality.

Let me just conclude by saying that over the last several weeks I've been thinking about how Roanoke used to be known as "The Magic City." That's right, after we were known as "Big Lick" and before the Star was placed on Mill Mountain in 1949 and we were given the nickname "The Star City" for the 50 years, in between from the turn of the last century up until WWII, Roanoke was known as "The Magic City." That's why we have Magic City Ford and Magic City Sprinkler, companies that existed before the placement of the Star on the mountain. That's why the athletic teams at old Jefferson High School were known as "The Magicians," because they represented the premier scholastic institution of this city.

The thought of a "magic city" has been on my mind recently because, as we struggle with this economy, as we go forward on the City Market Building and Elmwood Park Amphitheater, as we take steps in finishing the missing link of the greenway system along the river, as we open new environmentally sustainable public buildings, as we struggle to

bring our graduation rate up in our public schools and as we open a new high school at William Fleming... as we do all the great things that are being done here in Roanoke, we should sit back for just a moment with a sigh of relief and wonder, look around and remember and realize how very thankful we should be to live in this blessed place. This is a magical city! It is lush and beautiful, it is a great place to live, raise a family, and to work and visit.

As the Mayor of Roanoke, I've got to tell you, Roanoke is still "The Magic City."