

STATE OF CITY ADDRESS 2010
MAYOR MIKE MONCRIEF
11:30 a.m. Thursday, February 24, 2010
Fort Worth Convention Center Ballroom

Thank you for that kind introduction, Wes; and good afternoon friends! It's always an honor and privilege to join you each year to discuss the current state of affairs of our proud hometown.

Before I begin, I just have one question for you—HOW 'BOUT THEM FROGS! Let's hear it for Coach Patterson and the TCU Horned Frogs!!

If you thought dying the Trinity River purple was something, just wait to see what we do to Lake Worth and Eagle Mountain Lake! Well...maybe that's not my best idea...but we have started a new tradition of going purple on the Friday before each home TCU football game. Come next season, I hope all of you and your businesses get behind this tradition and support our home team.

You do know...the state of our city *is* purple!

Alright, now that I've got that out of my system, let me express my great appreciation to the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce for hosting us once again. Bill Thornton and his team are a big reason why Fort Worth is standing strong against the oncoming tides of this difficult national economy. Let's give them a hand!

And speaking of leaders, there are a few special guests I'd like to recognize...Our good friend Judge Glen Whitley, the Commissioner's Court, and Tarrant County Administrator G.K. Maenius are with us this afternoon. Y'all stand and let us recognize you!

We also have the pleasure of being joined today by Fort Worth ISD Superintendent Dr. Melody Johnson and my fellow mayor Tom Leppert of Dallas. Thank you both for being here. Y'all give them a hand!

Citizens and friends: We come together today in the throes of a global recession that has begun, as we expected, to affect North Texas. Nevertheless, those of us who live and work in this heralded city are resilient. Many businesses are holding strong. As always, Fort Worth finds a way to advance and persevere. In every challenge, we find opportunity; and that's what I want to discuss today—opportunity.

Who here remembers the year 1987? What do you remember? You may recall Ronald Reagan making his historic plea to the Soviets to, "...*tear down this wall.*" But what you probably remember most, however, was the dire state of our economy.

In the fall of '87, the U.S. Stock Market took a 23 percent nose dive in one day—October 19th. This was quickly followed with significant market declines around the globe.

Sound a bit familiar? Sure it does. Although the circumstances are somewhat different, the present situation shares many similarities to the events of the late 1980s.

Back then, on the heels of a housing market crisis, Fort Worth was hit hard by the '87 tail spin. Hardship was evident in every corner of our city. So, what was Fort Worth's response? What did our leaders at the time do? They certainly didn't grab their knees and curl up in the fetal position. No; instead, they rolled up their sleeves and forged a path out of the rut. In fact, they blazed a trail *before* the crash hit.

Several months prior to October of '87, Mayor Bob Bolen and the city council made a strategic move to annex a record 5,000 acres of ranch land to the north. Their plan? To better position Fort Worth to weather an oncoming recession through new public/private partnerships that would spawn new business investment and create jobs.

Not only did the strategy work, the result would ultimately become a saving grace for us today.

I'm talking about Alliance Airport and the surrounding AllianceTexas developments. At the time, some said it was a waste of city resources. Some said it was crazy. Many believed building a major industrial airport—the first of its kind—in the middle of a tired cow pasture during one of the nation's most difficult economies was far too risky.

But if there's anything Fort Worth has—its guts!

We find opportunities where others fail to see them. Consider the results today of that gutsy decision in 1987—\$36 billion in economic impact to North Texas, more than 200 companies and 28,000 jobs—28,000! And, if that weren't enough, for the third straight year, Alliance is the top foreign trade zone in the U.S. in terms of foreign products admitted.

The growth has been so significant that I-35 now has six more exits between downtown and Alliance than it did in 1987. We also have the Texas Motor Speedway, which has also greatly contributed to our success. If you think about it, the development to the north is just one of many examples of how Fort Worth has, in the past, outmaneuvered seemingly impossible odds.

We see past the challenge and embrace opportunity!

Recall how Fort Worth transformed a dark, crime-ridden, boarded up central business district into a beautiful, safe, and exciting downtown...Sundance Square is the envy of other cities...And don't forget the city's response to the closing of Carswell Air Force Base. Fort Worth didn't just survive. It thrived!

Mayor Bolen, Mayor Granger, Mayor Barr, and others before me all faced major obstacles, but they never failed to see the opportunity...the potential...the light at the end of a dark tunnel.

So now, we face yet another economic challenge. The national recession hit home in 2009. And no one is certain whether it will get worse before it gets better.

But, just because someone puts Tabasco in our oatmeal doesn't mean we have to eat it!

As we consider the state of our city, Fort Worth's future is extremely bright. But to reach that shining point—to emerge from this dark tunnel with a robust post-recession economy—we must maintain our current course and commit ourselves to what I call an *Agenda of Opportunity*. Our priorities are simple:

- One: Job growth.
- Two: Mobility.
- Three: Better neighborhoods.
- And Four: Growth in the tourism sector while stabilizing our city budget.

Friends, our *challenges* are great. But the *opportunities* are just as profound.

Before I go any further, let me quickly recognize my fellow council members. We've fought some tough battles together over the past twelve months—the budget, gas drilling, mobility...Despite the adversity, this City Council continues to move your city forward, not backward. Mayor Pro Tem Danny Scarth, council members Sal Espino, Zim Zimmerman, Frank Moss, Jungus Jordan, Carter Burdette, Kathleen Hicks, and Joel Burns: Please stand or raise your hand and be recognized if you are here!

Weathering 2009 is also a great credit to City Manager Dale Fisseler, his leadership team, and each and every city employee. They work extremely hard for you. And, just like many of you, they have been asked to do more with less. The hard working employees of this city deserve our appreciation. Those city employees in the room; please stand and be recognized. Let's hear it for them!

Someone who also deserves our appreciation is my wife, Rosie. She is not only a true blessing to me and our family; she is also a blessing to this city. Rosie is a solid rock in the toughest of times. She is my anchor to reality. And she is a compassionate champion for all things good in our city. Thank you, precious, for all you do for me, for our family, and the people of Fort Worth.

Some of our family is also here, including our son Troy. Thank you for being here.

Now, let's talk more about our *Agenda of Opportunity*. More specifically, let's talk about creating jobs. As the old saying goes, "*It's not what you know, it's who you know.*" When it comes to earning new business investment, this is fundamental. It's all about relationships. It's about reputations.

Ladies and gentlemen, there's no better opportunity to build strong, new relationships than the North Texas Super Bowl. In less than a year, we will showcase our city to the world.

Playing host to the AFC champs is extraordinary, but just as exciting is the NFL's decision to bring the Taste of the NFL right here to our Fort Worth Convention Center.

Not only does the Taste benefit food banks in North Texas and across the country, it also means big names, big business, and big money, all converging here in the heart of our city. What an opportunity! And it just so happens that our world famous Fort Worth Stock Show will be in full swing as the NFL teams and fans arrive. Where do you think those visitors will go looking for that true Texas experience?

Folks, this may be our first Super Bowl, but it ain't our first rodeo!

Just like Dallas, Arlington and so many other neighboring cities, Fort Worth has a great deal to offer. Thousands of influential business leaders and corporate sponsors from around the globe will get their first peek at our marvelous city next year. When these guests arrive, we not only want to entertain them... We want them to entertain the idea of moving businesses and jobs to Fort Worth! That's our goal.

We will not miss this opportunity. I guarantee you that!

Our Fort Worth team is working overtime to not only put our best foot forward, but to build a strategy to follow up on business leads. The game itself will be spectacular. But, Fort Worth is focused on the prize—corporate growth, tourism and convention business, and jobs. And as we welcome these visitors from around the world next February, we will do so with an already remarkable reputation as a business savvy city.

The proof is in the pudding. Warren Buffet isn't known for making bad bets. His move to purchase freight rail powerhouse BNSF is not just a vote of confidence in this company—it's a vote of confidence in Fort Worth! These alliances and others—like the recent agreement between Exxon Mobil and XTO—mean stability and growth. And, I would expect to see more of the same as Fort Worth becomes home to new innovative and prosperous small business and industry leaders.

So, as we continue to aggressively fight for more business investment...as we build new relationships during the months and weeks leading up to the Super Bowl...what's the first thing a potential CEO is going to ask about? Location. Location. Location, of course.

He or she will want to know where in Fort Worth we have room for major business investments. Is it safe? Is it clean? Is it centrally located? Is it green? Is it easily accessible to workers? It's all about location. And, we have all of that and more throughout downtown, Sundance Square, 7th Street, and elsewhere.

Schools are also an important selling point, and under the leadership of Superintendent Melody Johnson and the school board, student test scores—especially in math and science—are higher than they have ever been.

But to the point of location... We must not overlook the historic opportunity in our Trinity River Vision. Protecting our central city from natural disasters is the primary purpose of the plan. But there's another opportunity that comes with removing the levees that stand between us and this natural asset... It's an opportunity so big, that it can only be compared to those decisions made back in 1987.

The Trinity River Vision is our modern day Alliance!

Like Alliance, Trinity Uptown will create jobs in an otherwise underutilized portion of our city... It will further expand the city's tax base and tourism market... And, no different than Alliance, the Trinity River Vision will be the key to Fort Worth weathering future bear markets. Does this Vision require a commitment from the city, from taxpayers? Sure it does. Is this commitment appropriate in tough times like this? Absolutely! And, let's not forget that this extraordinary vision would not be possible were it not for the significant commitments on the part of Congresswoman Kay Granger.

Friends, we've been aggressive in attracting business growth. We've been burning the midnight oil, and I think you will agree that the strategy has worked in our favor. Take Q-Edge, for example. This major electronics company recently selected Alliance for its newest distribution center. The deal adds another 750 good-paying jobs to the Fort Worth economy. Likewise, 250 new jobs were created when Phoenix-based DT Credit Corp. announced that it would land in CentrePort Business Park for its newest call center.

These are but a few recent examples of the real impact of seizing those unique opportunities to bring good-paying jobs ready to be filled by our diverse and skilled workforce. But, we must not rest on our laurels.

Thanks to this point-and-click world, businesses have more options than ever before when considering where to invest human and capital resources. We're not only competing with Austin, Houston, and San Antonio. We're up against, Beijing, Taiwan, New Delhi, and others.

Fort Worth is in the middle of a fierce global battle for jobs.

It would be irresponsible—especially in the shadow of this recession—to slow down or relent on major initiatives like the Trinity River Vision and others that hold such great opportunity for jobs. The public/private partnerships we've built over the last 20 years have diversified and strengthened our economy. They are the reason why Fort Worth remains in such an enviable position despite the economic downturn.

When it comes to creating jobs, our bustling city remains on the right track. Despite the national declines, our city maintains a distinctive edge. *Forbes* magazine named the Fort Worth/Arlington area as the most cost-effective region in which to live. *Newgeography* named Fort Worth/Arlington area as the fourth best place for job growth. And, *Builder Magazine* ranked our city as the third healthiest metropolitan area for housing.

Health care is another driving force in our economy. Fortunately, Fort Worth is home to innovative public health care leaders like JPS Hospital with its Level 1 trauma center and the University of North Texas Health Science Center, which has been churning out top-notch physicians for 40 years now.

There's no questioning Fort Worth's competitiveness. And our success has nothing to do with luck. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "*Shallow men believe in luck. Strong men believe in cause and effect.*" Our success is the product of hard work, determination, and the cunning ability to realize the opportunities before us. Remaining competitive will require no less.

If I had to name one thing...one top issue that poses the greatest threat to Fort Worth's ability to compete, I wouldn't have to think twice about it—It's mobility, or the lack there of. This is an extraordinarily complicated and expensive problem; and finding solutions is the second objective in our *Agenda of Opportunity*.

The mobility crisis of North Texas is no midnight hallucination after a bad burrito, it's not a naysayer's notion, it's real and it's costing us dearly. To meet growth expectations over the next two decades, North Texas needs to invest \$130 billion in regional transportation system improvements.

That number should be no surprise to anyone who frequents our congested highways. I've sat in that traffic more than I'd like to admit. I know how frustrating it is. Some days you can change a tire without losing your place in traffic.

We, and many of you in this room, have been working hard to find answers that offer real relief for commuters. Southwest Parkway continues to move forward steadily. This major artery will greatly improve mobility in southwest Fort Worth and relieve the pressure on I-35, Hulen, Bryant Irvin, and others by the year 2013.

Just yesterday, the Texas Transportation Commission approved the finance agreement for Southwest Parkway and Chisholm Trail. The NTTA Board will consider this agreement tomorrow, and we look for their approval. This agreement, if approved, will accelerate construction on this important road.

Widening I-35 between downtown and far north Fort Worth also continues to be a priority. In March, we expect the Texas Transportation Commission to consider including the I-35 improvements as part of the larger North Tarrant Express plan. This would be a significant win.

Although all battles are not yet won, we are advancing the front lines.

Commuter Rail, street cars, and other alternative modes of transportation also remain a priority for me and this City Council. Unfortunately, Fort Worth and other major metropolitan areas are finding out the hard way what a mistake it was to design and build cities around automobiles

years ago. Friends, we cannot continue to focus solely on building more roads for more vehicles. That's counter productive at best.

Business as usual is dead!

North Texas requires a transportation overhaul. No more band-aides, no more patches—a complete overhaul!

Regrettably, it's becoming more and more obvious that we cannot depend on the state or federal government to help us in the near term. In fact, there is no guarantee of any new money to build any new roads in Texas after 2012.

Frankly, I'm tired of talking about this. This afternoon, workers at BNSF...employees at Lockheed Martin or Bell Textron...even many of you in this room will leave work and then sit...and sit...and sit in traffic. It's a frustrating daily routine that carries a great cost once you consider the impacts to our quality of life, our environment, our air, and our ability to attract and keep new business investment.

If this is a mobility crisis—and I believe it is—then it must be treated like one!

In the spirit of the early Fort Worth pioneers who took it upon themselves to pick up shovels and extend the first rail line to our city, it's time that we took matters in our own hands. It is clear to me that we are not going to get where we need to be by relying only on help from the feds or the state.

We are going to have to pull ourselves out of the ditch!

In the coming weeks, I will appoint an 11-member Blue Ribbon Task Force. I will charge this body with returning specific recommendations to the full City Council on how we fix or relieve pressure on Fort Worth's aging transportation infrastructure. Former city manager and business leader Bob Herchert has agreed to serve as the chair of this task force.

Because of the urgency of this matter, I will ask this task force to present recommendations within 90-days of the first meeting. This will allow any proposals to be thoughtfully considered during the next budget cycle.

We must take responsible action, and we must do it swiftly!

I submit that further delays are as dangerous as licking a steak knife! Got that visual?

And, let me be absolutely clear: Finding solutions to this mobility crisis ourselves *does not* relieve the state of its responsibility to deliver our region and our city its fair share of transportation dollars.

Our third objective has everything to do with building better neighborhoods, and doing so starts with building *safe* neighborhoods. This is at the very heart of Fort Worth's continued success.

Safe streets along with clean and attractive neighborhoods result in award-winning communities like Fairmount, which was recently recognized as one of the "South's Best Comeback Neighborhoods" by *Southern Living* magazine.

We've done extremely well on the public safety front. Violent crime in Fort Worth was down 7 percent in 2009! And, our Police Department now has a strategic plan to guide operations and growth well into the future.

And, let me just stop for a moment to say just how much I appreciate the hard work by your Police Chief Jeff Halstead. He's got a year under his belt here in Fort Worth. Despite some challenges he has proven why he was the right pick for this very important post. Chief, thank you; and keep up the good work!

Safe communities are also defined by the quality of fire services. Two additional fire stations are now in service and will improve response in the northern reaches of Fort Worth. We thank Chief Rudy Jackson and his troops for their brave service to our communities.

Maintaining our rightful place in the history books as one of the nation's safest major cities will be no easy task as revenue streams remain dry. Our success will be measured by our ability to take advantage of the opportunities before us.

Local voters recently seized a significant opportunity when they renewed the Fort Worth Crime Control and Prevention District. The overwhelming victory was a resounding statement that the people of our city still believe, as I do, that public safety is a top priority.

The CCPD helps ensure that we have the best trained and best equipped police force protecting our neighborhoods and businesses. In fact, gang crime in Fort Worth is down more than 5 percent thanks to the Gang Unit, which is completely funded by the CCPD.

The district also funds community policing programs like Citizens on Patrol. This program has more than 1,200 volunteers who keep a watchful eye on our neighborhoods. Community policing will only become more important in the coming months. I challenge all able citizens to get involved. You can get started by logging on to the city's Web site or reading the brochures at your tables.

Building better communities also has a lot to do with extending a helping hand to those less fortunate. Even in this down economy, we've made great strides in implementing our *Directions Home* plan to end chronic homelessness. In just nine short months, more than 270 people who were previously living in emergency shelters or on the streets have ended their homelessness.

Thanks to you, our 10-year plan to end chronic homelessness is working. And our success flies in the face of the myth that progress cannot be made in midst of such heavy economic storms. It can, and we have!

I hope to keep you abreast of our progress on homelessness and other important city initiatives with a new “Mayor’s Message” that I will begin posting regularly on the city’s Web site. Yes, even I will soon have a blog...

Whether you’re talking about Police, Fire, Code Compliance, or even Animal Care and Control; the amount of resources dedicated to better communities reflects the priorities of our citizens. And, those citizens understand that sometimes their safety comes with great personal sacrifice.

Last year—in honor of our fallen heroes who died so that we may live in peaceful and safe neighborhoods—we dedicated our magnificent Police and Fire Fighter’s Memorial. The monument in Trinity Park is an absolute masterpiece! Thanks to the selfless generosity of countless individuals—many of whom are in this room today—Fort Worth went from the largest city in the nation without a memorial, to a city with one of the most spectacular memorials in America.

It’s an extraordinary accomplishment that pays tribute to extraordinary sacrifice.

Our fourth and final objective in our *Agenda of Opportunity* must be to remain focused on attracting more business and leisure travelers as we continue to stabilize the city budget.

Visitors are an economic force. They support local jobs and ease the tax burden on residents and businesses. The significance of this cannot be overstated!

Thanks to our efforts to lure business and leisure travelers, our hometown is now the number one tourist destination in Texas! We’re number four on *Hotwire.com*’s list of value-friendly destinations in America. And, you can’t ignore the fact that the Kimbell is the only place in the western hemisphere where you can feast your eyes on a true Michelangelo masterpiece!

And, talk about opportunity—as we expected, the Omni Hotel has indeed been a game changer—a remarkable public/private partnership. We opened the doors to the Omni just more than a year ago, and the results are clear: 150,000 guests and more than 400 new jobs! All in all, the downtown hotel market, which nearly doubled the number of rooms in late 2008, saw a 36 percent increase in the number of room nights sold last year.

And speaking of successful public/private partnerships, the Fort Worth Zoo—now among the top five zoos in the nation—will open the new Museum of Living Art in less than two weeks. This world class zoo only gets better!

Along with the zoo, we have a remarkable new Museum of Science and History...the renowned Modern Art Museum...the Amon Carter Museum...the Kimbell... The proposed Equestrian Center at Will Rogers will be another feather in our hat...

It’s clear that Fort Worth’s gravity and allure will continue to grow.

The more visitors we attract, the better our ability to stabilize the city budget in the face of declining revenues. Bridging the \$59 million gap for this fiscal year was a significant challenge. We dug every nickel out from under the sofa cushions! Nevertheless, in true Fort Worth fashion, we recognized the opportunities to get the most for your tax dollars and delivered a responsible, effective, and balanced budget.

We did this by prioritizing those “basic” city services.

Clean and safe water is still available at the twist of a knob...Our neighborhoods remain in the care of some of the best trained and best equipped police officers and fire fighters in the business...And the trash is still picked up every week on time (well...that is unless we get 12 inches of snow!)

Come this fall, however, sustaining these services will be just as difficult, if not more. Although there’s always room for further reductions, the Star-Telegram was accurate in saying we’re past the point of cutting the fat, “...*we are down to the muscle and bone.*” We are beyond the luxury of simple across-the-board cuts. This only serves to water down services, rendering them totally ineffective.

As we enter the next budget cycle, our priority will be to identify those things the city must do, and do those things well!

Our citizens expect and deserve no less.

Part of doing things well is to continue to look for opportunities to privatize and/or leverage city dollars with private investment. A perfect example is our partnership with PetSmart to help us get adoptable animals out the door with a new family, not by putting them down. That’s thinking outside the box, and we greatly appreciate Bill Boecker, who has been instrumental in this effort. And, I commend PetSmart for their willingness to partner with our community. I encourage other businesses to do the same.

Making better use of the latest technologies will also help stabilize our budget. Case in point: We recently invested in a state-of-the-art program management system for capital projects that will allow us to be more aggressive in completing roads, water, sewer, and drainage improvements. Citizens should see more durable projects built faster. That’s being more efficient. That’s a better use of your money.

Friends and partners: I’m honored to serve as your mayor. Mayor Bolen once described it as the “*The best job in the world.*” I’m humbled to work with such a dedicated group of City Council members, and a team of compassionate city staff. Most of all, I’m proud to work with all of you—the heart and soul of our celebrated city.

These are tough times, folks. But Fort Worth never has and never will shudder in the face of adversity. We turn challenges into opportunities!

We prosper! We thrive!

Will we have surprises along the way? Without question. An Army helicopter gunner once said, “*If everything is as clear as a bell, and everything is going exactly as planned, you’re about to be surprised.*” Nothing more succinctly describes the year 2009. I don’t expect any different in 2010.

But while this economy is tough—we are tougher!

I submit that Fort Worth will master the challenges ahead by following our *Agenda of Opportunity*. It’s about creating jobs...improving mobility...promoting better neighborhoods...and stabilizing our city budget. This is our charge.

A lot has changed since the 1980s; but here in Fort Worth, some things never change. All things are possible if we focus on those unique opportunities woven tightly into the fabric of our diverse and proud communities.

Fort Worth didn’t rise like magic from the dust of the western frontier. Nor was it spawned by complacency or happenstance. No, Fort Worth was borne through stout will, guts, and brawny determination.

Countless brave pioneers laid the bedrock of this fair city, and they would be the first to tell you that success is not found through a doorway; but rather at the end of a long, steep staircase.

These confident and optimistic leaders blazed trails for us to follow—and now it’s our turn to do the same. *We start TODAY!*

God bless you and God bless our city.