

**Mayor's State of the City Address**  
**7:30 a.m. • June 3, 2021**  
**Robert H. Spence Chapel Auditorium**  
**Evangel University**

Good morning! It is hard to believe that approximately one year ago today, we live streamed the 2020 State-of-the-City address from this very campus of Evangel University. It was during a thunderstorm that knocked power out for a while... and in a mostly empty room that we were able to broadcast the 2020 State-of-the-City. Thank you, Dr. George Wood, interim president, for hosting us once again.

We missed seeing your faces and hearing the whir of your voices. In some ways, the quiet and mostly empty room was symbolic of how we were all feeling at the time: isolated, a bit lonely and mostly uncertain about the days ahead.

While we are not back up to full capacity today, it is very nice to be joined, in part, by an in-person audience. That is something that would have been impossible only a few months ago. And as always, it is nice to be joined by those of you who are viewing on television and online.

We would not be here in person today, had it not been for a couple of things: the creation of vaccines, and our community's dedication and willingness to get those

vaccines into the arms of our people. I want to thank our excellent health care providers – our hospital staff, public health workers and emergency medical responders. You continue to serve the needs of our people in the most trying of circumstances, with the most dedication and at the highest level of service. Thank you.

It is not lost on me the importance of today's State-Of-the-City address. What we lived through – and continue to live through – the COVID-19 crisis – is the most significant global public health emergency to affect human society in the last 100 years. Perhaps it will be the biggest test of resiliency we will see in our lifetimes. We are forever changed.

Back in March of 2020, in the face of the rapidly expanding new virus about which little was known, swift and decisive action was needed. On March 4, 2020, Clay Goddard, then the director of the Springfield-Greene County Health Department, launched a local COVID-19 task force. Just eight days later, on March 12, we were notified of our first positive case in Greene County. Four days after that, on March 16, I had to declare the first of 10 emergency declarations for Springfield. And just one week later, March 23, we made the grim announcement of the first, in what

would become 433 COVID-related deaths in Greene County. We have experienced a long and complicated journey ever since. We have taken actions I never dreamed necessary. And made decisions that only weeks earlier would have been unfathomable.

But, I am proud of my colleagues, City and Health Department staff, and the City's many partners, for having the courage to make those difficult decisions and for taking necessary action. In spite of the contentious nature of some of the actions we had to take, we really have seen Springfield at its best. It is a very special place, Springfield. It is a very special place we call home.

When we asked you to stay at home, and for businesses to shut down, you listened. Research published in the Journal of the American Medical Association on the impact of COVID-19 now suggests that, in the complete absence of stay-at-home orders, the United States could have seen 220 percent higher rates of infection and a 22 percent higher fatality rate. It is simple: those of you who stayed home, saved lives.

When we asked businesses, churches, not-for-profits, the arts community, and educators to close or reduce capacity, employ public health safety measures, and assist with mitigation strategies such as testing, quarantining and isolating, you listened.

You promoted behaviors that prevent spread, such as maintaining healthy environments and operations, and you prepared for when people got sick. Those actions resulted in reduced exposure of the virus among individuals, reduced transmission and reduced burden on our health care systems. Those successful mitigation strategies helped Springfield fare better than most cities across the country and positioned us to rebound from this crisis with a higher likelihood of not only stability, but growth. For example, Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau chief Tracy Kimberlin happily reported just last week that the city's lodging industry is not only recovering nicely after being devastated by the pandemic in 2020, but hotels are breaking records this year.

When we learned, along with the entire nation because of an exposure at a local hair salon, that the simple act of wearing a mask helps prevent us from spreading the disease to one another, we asked you to wear a mask in public and once

again...you listened. Collectively, we achieved a long-term goal of minimizing the severity of COVID-19 in those who contracted the illness, and our actions also prevented countless transmissions and additional deaths.

Today, I commemorate our community's brave, innovative and critical work in the battle against COVID-19. My first statement of gratitude is for the community – our citizens. It is you, who largely determined our fate. Your sacrifice, resilience, patience, selflessness, and love for one another is what continues to see us through. It has not been easy. Thank you.

There were, and are, so many battles in this fight. As Winston Churchill once said, "If you're going through hell, keep going." And that's what we did.

Businesses learned to adapt their operations: such as Dynamic DNA, which, quickly reengineered to offer COVID-19 testing. Our safety net nonprofits refocused their efforts, such as Community Foundation of the Ozarks announcing an initial \$1 million commitment to a COVID-19 fund. Community Partnership of the Ozarks found long-term shelter for nearly 300 homeless individuals at high risk for COVID-19. Our percentage of homeless individuals testing positive

subsequently remained among the lowest in the nation. And United Way of the Ozarks shored up its 22 nonprofit agencies with supplies and support. Meanwhile, educators created virtual classrooms and reimagined distance learning, coming up with creative ways to engage and connect with their students, despite being apart from them. The Discovery Center, for example, reopened as a no-cost childcare and learning facility for the children of healthcare workers. And the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce and local financial institutions worked through the night to help businesses apply for loans through the Paycheck Protection Plan, established under the CARES Act.

Mercy, CoxHealth, Jordan Valley Community Health Center and the Springfield-Greene County Health Department scaled operations to unprecedented levels, both in volume and collaboration and worked with other medical providers in the region to share information and resources, as the pandemic continued to grip the Ozarks for 14 months. We are grateful to our hospital and health care workers who sacrificed immensely, working in environments that were similar to war zones – seeing and experiencing deaths at a rate no human beings should ever have to witness. Words of gratitude seem insufficient. We are grateful, nonetheless.

The list of impressive deeds goes on and on. But, COVID-19 is not the only thing from which we need to heal.

We have also faced a number of additional challenges over this past year – challenges that have confronted our community in numerous ways and left us grieving and relying on one another to cope: the killing of Springfield Police Officer Christopher Walsh, the community grief and discussion following the George Floyd tragedy in Minneapolis, the attack on Springfield Police Officer Mark Priebe, the very contentious and controversial national election in November, and the attack on the United States Capitol. These are indeed difficult times. And difficult times call for a patient healing process and inspirational positive action. We cannot expect that healing to take place overnight, but we can call on one another to keep moving in a positive direction.

These times have revealed what really matters: the health and well-being of our loved ones, the resilience of our communities, and the importance of the sacrifices made by our essential workers who give their whole selves to serving others.

I have been asked many times if I am excited for things to return to “normal” and I reject that phrase. The pandemic has illuminated the vast systemic inequities that have defined life for too many for too long. I am lifted up, however, with the knowledge that we can, and do, work together to find common ground, and to heal our afflictions. Collectively, we have the power to stand for, and fight for, healthier conditions that will create a healthier society. Let today be considered an invitation for each of us to use our knowledge, experience and passion to apply the best of what we have collectively learned we need to do. It is what Gandhi has taught us: Be the change we wish to see in the world.

Every one of us gets through the tough times because somebody is here, standing in the gap to close it for us. The faith community has so reliably played that role, specifically tending to the spiritual and emotional needs of the community, as they always do, despite their specific challenges related to being separated from their congregations.

While our healthcare heroes on the front lines were fighting a seemingly invisible enemy, the Have Faith Initiative, a group of more than 80 faith-based and

nonprofit organizations, encouraged the public to “stand in their gap” with support, with prayer and with love. Positive billboards, signs, cards and letters, video and audio messages flooded our community from this very important group. In addition to ungirding me in my responsibilities as Mayor, Have Faith Initiative members also launched food and supply drives, shared public displays of support and encouragement, and even now, continues to be an important voice in providing accurate and timely information through their vast networks. Thank you – co-chairs Pastor Jenn Simmons of National Avenue Christian Church and Pastor Bob Roberts of Second Baptist Church, for your strength and support. I hope to see this collaboration continue indefinitely as the work you are doing is superb and appreciated.

Former Springfield-Greene County Health Director Clay Goddard and Acting Director Katie Towns have also provided tireless support and incredible leadership. Again and again, they stepped up to the plate, assisting with decision making using a data-driven approach, based on sound medical science and in the best interest of the overall community.

My colleagues on City Council, City Manager Jason Gage and City staff have provided steadfast assistance and encouragement, supporting my role and actions as Mayor. I am thankful for the leadership and courage displayed by each City Council member, in spite of strong and often vitriolic criticism from some quarters. True humility is being able to hear and accept criticism as graciously as we accept compliments. I salute each member of City Council for taking the high road. Please join me in thanking the members of the Springfield City Council: (if you are here, please stand as I call your names) Mayor Pro Tem Matthew Simpson; General Seat A Councilwoman and our community's first woman of color on City Council - Heather Hardinger; General Seat B Councilman Craig Hosmer; General Seat C Councilman Andy Lear; General Seat D Councilman Richard Ollis; Zone 1 Councilwoman Angela Romine; Zone 2 Councilman Abe McGull and Zone 3 Councilman Mike Schilling. Thank you for your service.

To my colleagues at Greene County: thank you for your support, wisdom and collaborative spirit. Presiding Commissioner Bob Dixon and Associate Commissioners Rusty MacLachlan and John Russell – you are true statesmen.

Thank you.

We have endured an unprecedented health care crisis and have emerged strong. Springfield is resilient and, in my opinion, has been a model city for dealing with the pandemic. We collaborated, we trusted data and followed the science - our partnerships so tightly woven that we are able to do things quicker and more efficiently than most cities. Our communication among entities and with our citizens was strong, thanks to the communicators – the local news media and the City and Health Department public information specialists, who played the crucial role of keeping our citizens informed and educated – in a time that is not easy, and in an arena that is too often filled with misinformation. We are all blessed, thanks to your professionalism, ethics, conscientiousness, and dedication.

While there is much to grieve this past year, there is also much hope and promise for the future. That promise is evident not only in the current recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, but also in the strength, ingenuity and optimism of our community and the businesses that drive our economy. Springfield offers a vibrant community full of opportunity.

The state of the city is strong. And it is encouraging to see that despite what we have been through – Springfield still continues to grow and thrive.

## **ECONOMIC VITALITY**

Despite the challenges created by travel restrictions, social distancing and working from home, there have been significant economic development successes in 2020. Through persistence and diligence – and the collaborative work of the City of Springfield, Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce, Greene County, City Utilities and additional partners throughout the region – nine economic development projects were completed in 2020. These projects are expected to create more than 1,000 new jobs in our area and will result in nearly \$290 million in capital investment.

These announced projects include: significant reinvestments by Kraft Heinz, Convoy of Hope's new headquarters and Northstar Battery's new investment, as well as a new Springfield location for Veterans United, a new American Airlines maintenance base at the Springfield-Branson National Airport, expansion of Ozarks Coca-Cola / Dr Pepper Bottling Company and new Amazon facilities in Republic and Springfield.

In addition, the construction of Springfield's new Costco near U.S. 65 and Chestnut Expressway is proceeding on schedule with the grand opening now set in August. There are many job opportunities within this company for growth, advancement and good benefits. We are so pleased to welcome Costco here.

After launching in Springfield in August 2020, Paddio, a full-service mortgage lender specializing in conventional and FHA home loans, has announced the addition of 100 new jobs in the region. By the end of this year, the company will grow its operation to 200 employees.

Deere & Company, a world leader in agriculture and construction, is also expanding operations. The remanufacturing division of Deere & Company, John Deere Reman, will add drivetrain and hydraulic remanufacturing operations to their existing facilities, creating 130 new jobs. The Springfield region is home to multiple remanufacturing companies and has seen significant growth from this industry over the past 10 years. This has allowed companies to create and access a workforce with the skills needed to succeed in the industry. Further

advancements like Ozark Technical Community College's Center for Advanced Manufacturing are continuing to be a wise investment in the future.

## **EDUCATION**

Seeing the steel girders go up for OTC's Center for Advanced Manufacturing and the construction of Drury University's new school of business are two positive signs. The City continues to have a strong town-gown relationship with our higher education institutions and perhaps there is no better time than now to celebrate the impact that Drury, Evangel, OTC and Missouri State University have on our community. Our 40,000-plus college students bring about a vibrancy that is unmatched. Simply put, they are the future of Springfield.

### **Drury**

**Drury University** continues the fulfillment of a master plan that provides a clear vision for how the institution will develop, grow and evolve, physically, over the next 25 to 30 years. A member of our community since 1873, Drury students continue to provide thousands of hours of community service and graduates continue to serve in leadership roles throughout our community. Drury successfully hosted in-person classes the entire 2020-21 school year, while

keeping COVID-19 case counts very low. Thank you, Tim Cloyd, and the team at Drury, for your commitment to our community.

## **Evangel**

Evangel University continues its mission to educate and equip students to become Spirit-empowered servants of God who impact society worldwide. They continue to share their resources, such as the use of this fine Robert H. Spence Chapel Auditorium today, with the Springfield community. Thank you, Dr. George Wood, Michael Kolstad and the team at Evangel for all you do for Springfield.

## **OTC**

Ozarks Technical Community College is hard at work creating more opportunities for our community and workforce. They continually expand programs, and build new facilities to help meet both the needs of students, and industry demands. In addition to considerable progress on the Center for Advanced Manufacturing, OTC distributed \$3.4 million to its students - made available by the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund – part of the federal CARES Act funding. Thank you, Hal Higdon and the team at OTC for all you do for our community.

## **Missouri State University**

Missouri State University, as a partner in the community's fight against COVID-19, administered more than 15,000 vaccinations on the MSU campus alone.

Throughout this past year, MSU's Long-Range Plan Steering Committee has collected information and regularly met to develop the university's 2021-26 Long-Range Plan. Plenty of history has been made at Missouri State over the past 20-plus years. Its reputation and profile have grown exponentially, and its influence is greater than it has ever been. Milestones include adopting the public affairs mission, changing the university's name, and establishing IDEA Commons, Innovation, Design, Entrepreneurship and Arts, and a campus in China. More recently, it fought for funding, advocated for new programs outside of its traditional mission, and leaned into public-private partnership opportunities.

Thank you, Clif and the team at MSU for all you do.

## **Springfield Public Schools**

We say goodbye to two secondary education leaders. Dr. John Jungmann, superintendent of Springfield Public Schools retired just last week from public education after serving Missouri school districts for 23 years. His unwavering

commitment to our 25,000 kids and 3,500 staff leaves a significant, meaningful legacy for our community. Thank you, John.

Deputy Superintendent Carol Embree, also retired from Springfield Public Schools, after a 29-year career serving Missouri's public schools Carol's professionalism, work ethic and sincere commitment to serving our students, staff, taxpayers and community-at-large is extraordinary. Thank you, Carol.

We welcome with open arms, our new Springfield Public Schools superintendent, the first woman, and first person of color to lead Missouri's largest school district. We welcome Dr. Granita Lathan. Dr. Lathan's 30-year career in education demonstrates a proven track record of enhancing public education with an unwavering commitment to all students and educators. We are happy to have her join our community and our high-quality school district.

Finally – I would like to thank our teachers for navigating the very difficult waters of virtual classes and successfully and safely leading us through the year. You are true heroes and your service will be remembered as crucial support in difficult times.

## **QUALITY OF PLACE**

The Springfield region continues to focus on creating unique places and experiences for residents and visitors alike. The City of Springfield has made strides on placemaking and improving quality of life, specifically, as illustrated by the plans underway, created with record-breaking public engagement participation for the Forward SGF comprehensive planning process, the Grant Avenue Parkway and Renew Jordan Creek projects and, the reimagining of Springfield Art Museum as a 21<sup>st</sup> century civic asset. Continued investment in our award-winning parks, recreation facilities and greenway trails has also spurred growth, while essential services such as provided by the Public Works and Environmental Services Departments play an important role in creating a great place to live.

Now, more than ever, citizens are depending on Springfield's infrastructure to support the community and local economy as it gets moving again. Throughout the pandemic they relied on sidewalks and trails to provide an outlet for recreation outside their homes and they also looked to upcoming projects like the Grant Avenue Parkway, Renew Jordan Creek and others as a vision of hope for the

future. The pandemic has served to highlight the critical nature of the work these departments do as they are vital to our residents' ability to remain safe and healthy in their homes.

### **Grant Avenue Parkway & Forward SGF**

Thousands participated in the public engagement sessions to help us plan the Grant Avenue Parkway and corridor. The \$26 million Parkway will create an off-street pedestrian and bicycle pathway along Grant Avenue between Sunshine Street and College Street, through the heart of Springfield. The three-mile stretch will connect downtown Springfield with the Wonders of Wildlife National Museum and Aquarium – linking authentic Springfield experiences for both residents and visitors. The Parkway route will further connect parks and recreation amenities, neighborhoods, schools, and fill a vital gap in the Ozark Greenways trail network.

Forward SGF also includes planning for catalyst sites downtown, including spaces around a creek daylighting project known as Renew Jordan Creek.

### **Renew Jordan Creek**

In the late 1990s, the Springfield community came together to form a collective vision for a community gathering place – Jordan Valley Park. This vision that was

cast nearly 30 years ago still rings true today. So much so that in 2020, City Council identified the concept as a priority for the community, and the Renew Jordan Creek project demonstrates this ideal. The study area which is located in in the IDEA Commons, is envisioned to serve as an urban amenity within Springfield that will encourage private redevelopment in this part of downtown.

### **Art Museum**

While developing the Springfield Art Museum's 30-year Master Plan it was discovered that the Federal Emergency Management Agency was in the process of redrawing flood plain maps. To address this, the City of Springfield is currently working to widen and naturalize Fassnight Creek. These improvements will include native Missouri plantings to create an urban wildlife habitat, pedestrian/bike trails, and outdoor sculpture. A key goal of the 30-year Master Plan is to connect the Museum and its grounds to sites and amenities throughout the City via greenway trails. It will be exciting to see these plans become a reality over the next few years.

In the glow of these impressive projects and plans, Springfield has, over the past year, received national recognition for a variety of indicators including being

among the best cities to start a business, for job growth, for business and careers, for recovery and for being a top place attracting young adults and a top place to live.

***NATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR SPRINGFIELD (Shown on screen, but not read aloud)***

- *Top 5 Best Cities to Start a Business | WalletHub*
- *Top 10 Recovery Leaders | Business Facilities*
- *Top 20 Magnets for Young Adults | USA Today*
- *Top 30 Best Cities for Job Growth | New Geography*
- *Top 40 For Business and Careers | Forbes Magazine*
- *Top 100 Places to Live | Livability.com*

**Addressing Systemic Racism & Embracing Diversity, Equity & Inclusion**

In the days and weeks following George Floyd's death in Minneapolis and corresponding community introspective discussion, I wrestled with what should be the appropriate steps I should take as Mayor to make sure that we as a community acknowledge racism and deal with it appropriately. The actions in Minneapolis that caused the death of George Floyd are intolerable and cause us all to think twice about the dignity of all persons, the value of life and our

responsibility as a local government. This catalyst event compelled Springfield, like many communities around the country, to reflect and to commit to positive and needed change and to commit with both our words and our actions. Several action steps followed.

City Manager Jason Gage drafted a formal resolution that was unanimously endorsed by City Council. The resolution is very direct and on point, as intended, and allowed all of us to collectively be intentional with regard to our thoughts concerning the horrific incident - and provided us with a chance for introspection before taking actions. Police Chief Paul Williams also condemned the actions in Minneapolis, reminding us that although that tragedy occurred hundreds of miles away, it affects us all in a variety of ways. The members of the Springfield Police Department assured the citizens of Springfield that they stand with them and respect their right to voice their concerns. These partnerships continue throughout the community. The City remains a place of which we can all be proud.

The Police Department also took immediate action and published a website called “Where We Stand” detailing the policies, procedures, and practices of our local police force.

Springfield hires officers who care about protecting this community. They have taken on additional responsibilities, while helping our community navigate both the health pandemic and racism pandemic. They seek to listen and also be heard. We are so very grateful that ours is such a collaborative community.

Last fall, the City Council hosted listening sessions on the topics of race relations and policing, race relations and the community and police relations in the community and conducted a quantitative survey on the topics. The survey showed very favorable indicators for trust in our law enforcement and the relationship between minoritized populations and police. A qualitative survey conducted by the Mayor’s Commission on Human Rights & Community Relations, however, revealed concerning experiences our citizens are encountering in our community as a whole and with certain institutions.

As the local representative government, the City is held to a higher standard as a beacon and guiding organization. We are committed to taking a leadership role in addressing direct and systemic prejudice, bias and racism, the issues at the center of protests across the country and around the world demanding justice. It is my hope that we, as individual members of our community, respect each other, seek to walk in each other's shoes and through our attitudes and actions, find common ground that will lead to a better Springfield.

City Council also unanimously approved the creation of a Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and we are so very pleased to have Taj Suleyman officially on board now. Taj will work collaboratively with the City's Leadership Team to provide advisement coaching, training, and expertise to staff on issues related best practices and applicable laws related to diversity, equity and inclusion.

Taj's position will provide more structure to help the City and City Council meet and go beyond the expectations to address the concerns presented by various advocacy groups advocating for systemic change and not just projects or programs.

And most recently, I appointed the Mayor's Initiative on Equity and Equality - a diverse, multi-organizational, multi-sector group to serve a 12-month term. The group's charge is to develop guiding principles to improve equitable access to opportunities, recognizing the inherent dignity, value and worth of each individual.

We will do so considering five pillars of change:

- Dialogue and Understanding
- Cultural Consciousness
- Advocacy and Partnerships
- Structural and Systemic Barriers
- Personal and Organizational Accountability

These guiding principles will be applied to make Springfield more inclusive and improve equitable access to opportunities. My challenge to members is to confront systemic racism and to find common ground in identifying and dealing with it.

A sincere thank you to co-chairs Doug Neff of Commerce Bank and Saehee Duran of Life 360 Church and all who agreed to serve, as well as Cora Scott and Anita Cotter for coordinating the effort.

## **Public Safety**

While a great deal of our public safety efforts this past year revolved around public health safety measures, it still was a busy year for the Springfield Police Department, Springfield Fire Department, 9-1-1 Emergency Communications, and other departments charged with maintaining and improving public safety.

## **Springfield Police Department**

For the Springfield Police Department, the past year has been a unique, challenging, and tragic time. The department, like everyone else, experienced the unexpected impact of the global pandemic, affecting it at an operational level, but staff was also affected personally as well. Our police family lost one of their own when Officer Christopher Walsh was killed and Officer Josiah Overton was seriously injured during a mass shooting incident which also claimed the lives of three of our fellow citizens – Troy Rapp, Shannon Perkins, and Matthew Hicks-Morris. One additional citizen was injured. This tragic event triggered the

deadliest year ever in Springfield history, as 2020 ended with 28 violent deaths (including 22 homicides) and 29 traffic fatalities.

Important partnerships, like the one with Burrell Behavioral Health's Rapid Access Treatment Center, however, helped provide new avenues for serving and protecting our citizens and working alongside our Building Development Services and new Director Dwayne Shmel, have helped identify and address chronic nuisance properties.

The continued national dialogue brought about some things Police Chief Paul Williams considered positive, such as peaceful protests and enhanced dialogue, but also brought about some things he considered extremely challenging, such as a 50% reduction in police recruits – and a higher-than-acceptable number of vacancies

We all remember where we were that day in June, when an unprovoked man attacked Officer Mark Priebe in front of Springfield Police Department Headquarters. That resulted in life-altering injuries and compounded the stress, trauma and grief experienced by the entire police department.

Through it all, the men and women who have accepted the call to serve and protect the citizens of Springfield continued to serve, and did so professionally, while respecting the rights of others and exhibiting empathy and concern in each interaction.

I salute them. I am proud to know them. And, I am grateful for their service and bravery.

### **Springfield Fire Department**

While 2020 was challenging in many ways, it was also a period of growth and opportunity for the Springfield Fire Department. In addition to responding to more than 12,400 incidents in 2020, the department worked with partner agencies in the community to respond to and address the rise in opioid-related incidents, the prevalence and challenges of vacant structures and the demands presented by COVID-19.

The Springfield Fire Department continued to provide fire and life safety education and information to citizens through newly developed video and virtual

formats, while the Springfield Fire Department's Community Risk Reduction division launched programs to ensure the safety and fire protection needs of Springfield.

A bright spot was the groundbreaking for the replacement of Fire Station 4 in the Doling neighborhood.

### **Community Engagement**

An engaged citizenry builds community and improves quality of life for all residents. This year has seen record numbers in people tuning in and turning up for issues that affect not only our local government, but also our collective consciousness. Springfield's largest march in history occurred last June 6 when thousands rallied on Park Central Square for freedom for all Black Americans from generations of discrimination. We listened. And we continue the important work to ensure equity and equality for all. Throughout the pandemic, at the height of our viewership- 8,000 tuned into the City's live stream and tens of thousands tuned into the broadcasts, virtual public engagement, and educational sessions about a variety of topics, staying in touch with your local government.

Most recently, the City's Clean Green Springfield initiative saw more than 1300 people register to help pick up litter along the city's roadways and trails and clean up area streams. More than 30 TONS of waste was collected in these organized events and in neighborhood cleanups around the city in April and May.

Individuals, companies, civic groups, scout troops, fraternities and so many more, came together and showed that Springfieldians care about the Queen City. I am looking forward to the next steps in this great initiative.

Reflecting upon the past 14 months brings me both comfort and grief. Never in my lifetime did I expect to see such impressive displays of service and valiant sacrifices. To those who have lost loved ones forever due to this pandemic, I share your grief. We will never be able to replace those we have lost. But we certainly can continue to take measures to make sure that their deaths were not in vain.

I can see clearly now the rain has gone. I can see all obstacles in our way. Gone are the dark clouds that had us blind. It's gonna be a bright sunny day.

Thank you for your kind attention. And may God Bless You. And may God Bless the city of Springfield.