

2006 State of the City Address

Mayor Robert E. Walkup

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“A Strong City and a Strong Region”

I want to start with an important announcement:

I am NOT a candidate for the United States Congress.

And besides, why should I run when so many of you here today are candidates already?

I wish all of you good luck on your campaigns. Except you, Beth. We need you here.

In all seriousness, I love Tucson. This is home. I belong right here, with my family, my neighbors and my community. And I serve Tucson because I believe that home is worth fighting for. I appreciate the incredible honor it is to serve as your Mayor.

As Tucson has changed, the role of Tucson’s Mayor has changed. More and more, the job of being Tucson’s Mayor requires playing a leadership role throughout Southern Arizona. It is more than a part-time job, and now it is even more than a full-time job.

The City may be our home, but the region is our neighborhood. Therefore, it is critically important to be a good-faith partner with fellow Mayors and Supervisors and citizens in surrounding areas. I am proud of the partnerships, based on respect and shared commitment, my fellow leaders in the region and I have forged in the last few years.

Last year I laid out the vision for a strong city and a strong region for the year 2020. The vision includes strong centers of economic development, wise resource management and dramatically improved public safety. Implementation of that vision requires leadership across the City of Tucson and across the entire Tucson region.

The stakes are high.

Without regional strength, Tucson becomes an island with a limited economy and fewer opportunities for its citizens.

By the same token, a weak City of Tucson surrounded by a strong region is equally destructive. We don't want to become like Detroit, marked by urban decay, wide gaps between rich suburbs and poor inner-city neighborhoods and the loss of a community center, a shared culture and a city's heart and soul.

As we remember Lew Murphy, we must heed his great lesson. Politicians can divide up this valley and draw as many lines in the sand as they want. But Tucson's best successes come when we think of ourselves as a single region and a united people. He knew—and we know it today—that we must have a strong, united Tucson region with a strong and united City of Tucson at its center.

So let's first talk about the City and then about the region.

Today, the state of our city is strong.

It is strong because after decades of neglect the City Council and I have embraced a results-oriented, fiscally responsible approach to the city budget.

It is strong because for two years now we have started to take back our streets and reduce the "hidden taxes" our people are paying year after year.

When I was elected, I inherited decades worth of neglect of our streets. Every year the City produced high-minded, noble and sophisticated excuses why the streets couldn't be fixed. And the problem got worse and worse.

The total bill to fix the streets rose to over \$270 million by 2004. Instead of maintaining the streets, many disintegrated beyond repair. Just 12 years of neglect increases the cost almost 20 times more than it would have cost to maintain the street in the first place. This is like taking a payday loan with a 148% annual interest rate.

On top of THAT bill, Tucsonans were paying a “hidden road tax” of almost \$400 per year per household for car maintenance caused by street-related damages. That’s \$33 per month for your family.

And on top of THAT bill, all Tucson taxpayers were paying the bill for higher maintenance costs for buses, garbage trucks, police cars and fire engines.

Similarly, our public safety system was in trouble. When I became Mayor our Police and Fire departments were understaffed and underfunded. Police, for example, was almost 33% below the national standard for officers per capita.

Again, Tucsonans have paid a “hidden tax” for public safety shortfalls: higher crime rates and the highest property crime rates in America, higher home and auto insurance rates, more drug-related crime in our neighborhoods, longer response times for emergency vehicles, and—make no mistake—a serious obstacle to increasing jobs and prosperity.

Just one example: TPD estimates that the value of stolen and un-recovered cars in 2005 is about \$21 million. Your share of that hidden tax: \$12.50 per household per month.

The old way of governance was unsustainable and irresponsible. It was a spiral of neglect and debt and lower quality of life. So the City Council decided to take bold action.

In 2003 we cut over \$100 million and over 300 nonessential positions in city government.

Then, in 2004, we eliminated the subsidy of garbage collection, just as every other major city in Arizona has done and every major city across the country. Why? Because garbage collection was never free. It was never so expensive as when it was free.

And Tucson could not afford free garbage collection anymore. For example, the \$12/month garbage fee costs Tucson households LESS than the \$33/month hidden road tax and the \$12.50/month hidden auto-theft-tax we have been paying all along.

It costs LESS to fix the problems than to avoid them any longer. And it is RIGHT to take care of problems now rather than pass the debt down to our children.

In 2005, we began to address, finally, and honestly, the mounting debt and infrastructure needs that were threatening our quality of life. It took discipline and strength—and a shared commitment to avoiding the mistakes of the past.

And now we are seeing strong results. In 2005:

- We promised to fix 40 miles of city streets. We fixed 44.
- We promised 20 miles of new sidewalks. We delivered 26.
- We promised 131 new police officers, firefighters and paramedics. We delivered 132.
- We promised 13 new Van Tran vehicles so that our Seniors and disabled population didn't have to wait for hours to get a ride to the drug store or the doctor or the senior center. Nine are on the street today and 4 more are on the way this year.
- We promised to open and expand 10 Parks and Recreation facilities including two new senior center expansions and a recreation center for children with disabilities. We opened all 10.

We should all be proud of how much we have accomplished in 2005. The first big steps in the right direction are always the hardest.

And now in 2006 our new City Council has a great opportunity to build on the progress that has been made. I have every confidence that this new City Council will demonstrate great leadership. Each wants to make a real difference in this community and do what is right.

You can trust that **WE WILL CHOOSE PROBLEM-SOLVING OVER POLITICS**. Because we already have: since taking office in December, 85 out of 87 votes have been unanimous.

The City Council's great challenge this Spring will be to put together a budget that implements the vision for a stronger and safer Tucson.

This year I recommend to the City Council that we continue to show leadership by paying down the debts we all inherited so that we don't pass them down to our children. The desire to reduce or eliminate the garbage fee is understandable, but the dollar we save today will cost us and our children many more dollars later. We must keep revenues stable and begin significant, sustainable investments in areas of critical need.

- In 2006, first and foremost, we must follow the example of Governor Napolitano, and the House and Senate leadership, in pursuing a fiscally responsible budget. Their goal is to utilize current tax revenues to reduce debt and attend to neglected infrastructure. As our state leaders have pointed out, even though economic forecasts are strong for 2006, we know that the future will bring good years and bad years. We must resist the urge to radically increase spending or radically reduce taxes at both the State and the City.

We must continue to invest in infrastructure that has been so badly neglected during leaner times. This includes border safety, education and health care at the State level. And it includes police, fire, paramedics, parks and streets here in the City.

And we must protect the programs that serve our neediest citizens so that they are not cut when the economy slows. Our people depend upon these government services; they must be funded.

- In 2006 we must fix our neighborhood streets. We have already made great progress on our major streets, and approval of the Regional Transportation Plan will accomplish even more. But we cannot leave our neighborhoods behind.

This year, I will recommend that the City Council fully-fund a \$100 million investment in neighborhood street repair across Tucson over the next ten years. This investment will increase the quality of life of our neighborhoods and reduce the hidden tax you're paying your mechanic and your insurance agent.

- In 2006 we must make Tucson safer by hiring more police officers, firefighters and paramedics. I will recommend that the City Council fully-fund a NET INCREASE of 400 Tucson police officers over the next 7 years. This should include more officers in our

schools, in our neighborhoods and in our parks. Many of these new officers should be bilingual and as diverse as the Tucson community.

And I will recommend that the City Council fund enough firefighters and paramedics over that same period. A four-minute average response time for emergencies must be assured.

Make no mistake—training and hiring more police officers is THE BEST way to achieve more crime prevention, intervention, investigation and criminal apprehension.

These investments in our public safety will help us save lives, fight property crime, auto theft, sexual assault and methamphetamine abuse. These new public servants will help keep Tucson prepared for emergencies, natural disasters and other potential incidents of mass destruction. **THE BOTTOM LINE IS THIS: WE WILL NOT TOLERATE BEING TOPS IN THE NATION IN PROPERTY CRIME ANY MORE. WITHOUT PUBLIC SAFETY THERE IS NO ECONOMIC SECURITY AND NO QUALITY OF LIFE.**

- In 2006 we must improve our City parks. In order to be a great City, we must have great City Parks. I will ask the City Council to finally adopt a Parks Master Plan so we can get on with the work of funding and implementing it as soon as possible. While other cities have up to 10% of their land area as parks, Tucson is now down to 3%. Therefore, our priority should be increasing the amount of park space, urban trails, recreation centers, senior centers, ball fields, soccer fields, skateparks and bikeparks across the city.

I recognize the importance of our Parks and Recreation programs. They must be maintained and strengthened. However, the lack of investment in Parks infrastructure must become a higher priority than it has been in the past. Programs like KIDCO should be expanded to eliminate the waiting list. But the truth is that without more space in our Recreation Centers, we cannot expand such worthy programs.

I will also recommend that the City Council increase the replacement of deteriorated playground equipment and add new playground equipment across Tucson city parks. I am committing \$300,000 of my Back to Basics budget to match any Council office dollar for dollar to replace or add children's playground equipment in their wards. I will also invite the Council to join me in soliciting contributions from the private sector to assist our effort.

I started this work with some of my Back to Basics budget last year, and the need to expand the effort is clear. Much of our existing equipment is decades old, of poor quality and insufficient to meet the needs of our children.

- In 2006, we must improve customer service delivery to ALL Tucsonans—especially our Seniors. (I'll let you in on a little secret: I'm a Senior.)

And there are a lot of others like me. By the end of this decade the percentage of Seniors in Tucson will have grown from 12% to 16%. I believe we have a moral obligation to address Senior issues, and the City of Tucson must begin to think differently about how we provide services to the senior population. More and more Tucsonans will need Van Tran in the future. They will need assistance getting their garbage cans to the curb. As more Seniors live longer and often live alone, they will need improved access to emergency care, mental health services and to community centers.

My office is working with Marian Lupu and the Pima Council on Aging, and I will submit to the City Council this year a plan to improve the quality of life for Tucson's Seniors. A key component of this plan will propose a new city service for low-income and disabled Seniors with code violations in their homes. I've seen this again and again. Instead of ticketing Seniors for tall weeds in their yards when it's clear the owners can't do the work themselves, the City should figure out a way to get the weeds cut. Let's do the work instead of the paperwork. Let's assist instead of assess.

- In 2006, we must continue to demand results in downtown. Downtown redevelopment is important for all Tucsonans for three key reasons. We must preserve Tucson's unique history and culture. We must begin the revitalization of the entire central city of Tucson as an alternative to urban sprawl, and that begins with a successful downtown. And we must provide a new center of economic activity that provides revenues for increased city services across the entire city.

I strongly support the City Manager's recent re-organization of his staff and his commitment to taking a more direct role in downtown's success. A private-sector-focused approach is

required to get the restaurants, shopping and entertainment that people want to see downtown. I ask the City Council to support the City Manager on these changes.

At the same time, I want the Council to know that my commitment to the cultural and historical projects is unwavering. Downtown Tucson must be authentic Tucson. The public commitment to the Convento, Mission Gardens and the museums is sacred.

There is a great deal more to be done, but let us not lose sight of some significant accomplishments downtown in 2005:

- We promised two dollars in private investment in downtown for every one dollar in public investment. We now have \$381 million private dollars invested compared to \$32 million public dollars spent—almost 12 private dollars for every public dollar.
- We promised 710 new parking spots downtown. We delivered 890.
- We promised 2000 new housing units downtown in the first 10 years. We are now up to over 1200 in development in just five years.
- We promised that the Historic Fox Theatre Restoration would be completed in time for New Year's Eve. After months of 16-hour work days, seven days a week, it was ready on time, and it looks incredible. Thousands of Tucsonans have already attended shows there.

This year, the focus must be on discipline in the organization and results that the public can see and touch. I have directed the City Manager to present to the public a list of projects they can expect to see COMPLETED by the end of 2006.

Additionally, TOUGH DECISIONS must be made on a number of key projects. These include the proposed lowering of I-10 through downtown, the Arena, Science Center, the Thrifty Block and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue Underpass among others. There needs to be one plan, not many plans. And the City must set tough financial and schedule goals. That's how we got things done in the private sector. That's what works.

The City Manager will have his hands full. I ask the City Council to join me in supporting him. He will need our trust and clear direction. Let's give them to him.

These budget priorities and initiatives are critical to making Tucson a more safe, vibrant and accessible city for all of our people. But the strength of our city also depends upon the strength of the Tucson region.

I am proud to say that the Tucson region is working together like never before. We should be proud of our fellow Mayors and Councilmembers and Supervisors and top administrators who have worked diligently to create a more collaborative approach to government. Working together, we are much more efficient and effective.

In 2005, we promised a regional approach to transportation. We delivered the Regional Transportation Authority, and in May citizens will vote on the FIRST EVER Regional Transportation Plan. The Regional Transportation Plan is a better plan than those in the past because citizens from across the region designed it. And most importantly, our citizens will oversee it to make sure it's done right. It leverages federal and state dollars and impact fees to stretch the value of every local dollar.

The plan includes roads, transit, bus pullouts, walkways and even a continuous bicycle loop around the region. This year we're #2 in the nation in biking. This plan will help us become #1.

Approval of the RTA plan in May is vital to our future. Every year we wait to get this done these transportation projects cost more and more. It's finally the right plan for Tucson, and it is time to say yes.

In 2005, we promised a regional approach to economic development. We delivered the Tucson Regional Economic Opportunities (TREO) organization. For the first time, the city, county and private sector are working under the same roof to expand local companies and recruit new businesses that are right for Greater Tucson.

TREO's success bringing Pella Windows here is an early indicator that we are on the right track. Pella required NO INCENTIVES. They just made the right decisions for the right reasons. Our newly consolidated economic development team provided everything they needed.

And TREO's focus on retaining, expanding and creating local companies FIRST is the right focus. Growing our own businesses in Tucson is the least expensive and most effective economic development approach. We must continue to support TREO and monitor its success.

In 2005, we pushed for a regional approach to library management. Today, I applaud the leadership of the Pima County Board of Supervisors for their decision to consolidate the regional library system and use their dedicated County-wide funding source to support the system. In an information age, our libraries are too important to be left under-funded. This is a strong step in the right direction. I ask all of our citizens to support Pima County's plans to fund the libraries at a level our people deserve.

I am pleased with our regional progress to date, and time will tell how far these efforts towards greater consolidation and coordination will go. But while I am proud of how far we have come, there is still much more to accomplish.

In 2006 we must take a more professional, scientific and regional approach toward dealing with water and other resource management issues. The separation of water and wastewater in the 1970s between the City of Tucson and Pima County has led to inconsistent approaches to planning intelligent growth in our region. Some new developments form their own water companies and pump from the same aquifer we all share. And some new developments are now building their own private wastewater treatment plants to avoid the cost of hooking into the County wastewater system.

Let's put the politics aside and SPEAK THE PLAIN TRUTH: maximum, efficient use of water and wastewater is the most important resource management issue facing our region in the future. It makes no sense to have many different water and wastewater companies across our region. And it makes no sense to have completely separate systems for the planning and management of regional water and regional wastewater systems.

It is true that the Southern Arizona Water Users Association helps local water providers cooperate for the good of the region. But this is not enough. In 2006 I will ask the City Council to support the formation of a new commission to address our water and wastewater issues in a comprehensive and regional way. Water and wastewater providers in the Greater Tucson area must work together and the work must begin now.

In 2006 we must begin to establish consistent and complementary land-use-plans for the entire Tucson region. Competition between the City and County in the past has led to a lowest-common-denominator approach to land use and development standards. Also, the lack of available and appropriately planned land in the City and the County has led to leapfrog development in Pinal and Cochise Counties. This year I will ask the City Council to support formal discussions with Pima County regarding coordination of our land-use-planning efforts.

In addition, the City must have its own Desert Conservation Plan and it should complement the County's Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. Better quality infill, sensible densities and more green space are required to ensure a high quality of life for generations—no matter whether you live in the City or the County.

Open-space set-asides will be smaller in the City than in the County if growth is to pay its own way. But open-space protection and habitat conservation must be a high priority in the City nonetheless. These open spaces are for all of our people to enjoy.

A great desert city embraces the desert within the city. Trails, parks, natural corridors and open spaces should extend throughout the city and county. They should not start and end at a city limit.

In 2006 we must work to complete a coordinated regional public safety communications system. This new system is required for law enforcement to work together for the benefit of the region. Having witnessed what occurred on 9/11, and more recently with Hurricane Katrina, we all should understand how important it is that our regional emergency personnel can communicate with each other in a large-scale emergency.

And as more illegal drug runners use homes in the Foothills and in other areas outside the City of Tucson for storage and distribution, a seamless public safety net covering the entire region is critical.

The voters of Pima County wisely approved about \$90 million for this system in 2004. About \$13 million more is required to fully fund it. I will ask the Tucson City Council, the Chair of the Board of Supervisors and my fellow Mayors to support adding this priority to their 2006 federal legislative agendas. Let us all speak to Washington DC with one voice and get this critical public safety project completed.

So if any of you candidates want our vote for Congress this year, you now know what it will take.

In summary, a strong Tucson region depends upon continuing what we've already started with transportation, economic development and libraries. And it means getting started on water, conservation and land-use-planning and public safety communications this year.

Last year I compared local government in our region to a car with two engines and no transmission. The City and the County each have \$1 Billion budgets and many duplicative departments. Historically, they have not coordinated well and have often gone in different directions.

Today there is a new model emerging in the Tucson region: City and County government working together, recognizing each other's strengths and partnering on critical issues facing the region. Two engines working together—not unlike the hybrid cars many of us are driving.

This hybrid model—still relatively new for all of us—has its challenges. It depends upon City, County and each town and Native American government working synchronously with the others.

It will not be smooth at first. There will be fits and starts. The car will make new sounds we may not recognize yet. But I think all the elected leaders, the business leaders and the community leaders recognize in our minds and hearts that this is the only way to go. And there is no turning back.

We are one region. We are one community. I firmly believe that by unifying the talents and resources of Greater Tucson, and by directing our passion and effort all in the same direction, we can build a stronger and more vibrant community for ourselves, for our children and for future generations.

Once again, thank you for the honor of serving this great community. God bless you. And God bless Tucson.