

Jackson Mayor Randy Heath issues Annual State of City Address, 2019

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

“My state of the city address was not about my future, but about the future of our city and our county. We have been dodging bullets for 30 years financially, both in the city and our county. But the bullets are obviously now hitting home. I wanted to stress how imperative it is that we now be fully honest with not only the residents of our city, but our county as well. When Jackson succeeds, the county succeeds. When the county succeeds, Jackson succeeds. It goes hand and hand. For one to succeed, they both must succeed or they both will fail.”

THE ACTUAL SPEECH

Mr. Council President, Jackson city council members, guests, and most of all, citizens of Jackson.

Standing before the community I have called home for basically all of my life, the community I have loved and served all of my life, there can be no greater honor than to be its mayor.

And as it was the ultimate honor to stand here 12 years ago and give you my first State Of The City Address, it is equally humbling to deliver to you tonight my 12th, and final, State Of The City address.

When I was re-elected for a third term as mayor three years ago, I knew this term would complete my 20 consecutive years of elected service to my community, equaling the second longest tenure as mayor and the longest serving elected member of my party ever in Jackson history.

But for me, it was never about letters and labels, D or R, conservative or liberal, it was about being Randy, totally honest, brutally forthright, and a mission only to do what would serve the best interests of our community as a whole moving forward.

It was not about unjustifiably helping this person, or unfairly retaliating against that person, it was equally about everyone, knowing what we could accomplish to help everyone as a whole while eventually benefitting everyone individually as well.

And although we are facing the greatest financial general fund crisis of our city’s history, the fact is I can report the State of Our City has a very strong foundation, there to build successfully on, but only if we have the courage and the commitment to do so. This foundation for success for years, and even decades to come, is there for the taking, but it must continue to be nurtured, invested in, developed and be accomplished as a community of all people.

Tragically, the success for future generations, our young adults of today as well as our children of tomorrow, is in peril because of the war we are fighting within us, the war over whether Jackson is the only city in all of Ohio that does not believe it is worth investing in itself.

This is why it is so imperative that we resolve this issue and find a way to properly fund our city, so we can live in the future with the same amenities our forefathers provided us for 200 years, safe in our homes, safe on our streets, safe for our children to go outdoors.

Not every community is so lucky, what financial philosophy would you ever make you want to give it all away?

THE POLICE

“Jackson nor Jackson County really has a safe and secure future unless the city of Jackson is able to adequately provide police protection for its citizens and community. The sheriff’s department certainly can’t absorb the city’s protection, and if the city doesn’t have the funds to provide its own coverage, it certainly is not going to have funds to pay anyone else. One of Jackson’s strengths is it is considered by many to be a safe community, but I think it has been the strong efforts of our officers and having sufficient officers to do the job that has enabled that. If you are not safe, our children are not safe, what does that say?”

THE ACTUAL SPEECH

Today, in our nation, we are debating a wall for our country’s safety, but in Jackson, we have already been blessed to have a mighty fortress protecting us in the Jackson City Police Department. A department that began 2018 with 15 officers, or right at the FBI national average of between 2 and 2.5 officers for every 1,000 residents, and matching the national average of over 1,000 departments nationwide surveyed by the FBI of 2.4 officers for every 1,000 residents.

But that department has now been cut by a third. If no additional income is found, it would have to be reduced to a skeleton staff next year with potentially times no officers on duty.

We still have a mighty fortress to protect and hopefully save the lives of our residents, is all but eliminating it going to make us great?

I can quote the numbers I have given 100 times, how 89 percent of the cities in Ohio have more than a 1 percent income tax, many have at least 2 percent, twice as much as we imposed, and every city with an income tax of more than 1 percent had that approved by the people.

A person asked me one time doesn’t these other cities know they can eliminate their income taxes as well?

Maybe my response should have been why do you think they not only didn’t eliminate them, but approved more?

Do you think maybe they said it was worth saying yes, rather than no, to keep our senior citizens safe in their homes, our children not being swarmed over by out-of-state drug lords, having clean streets of snow so you can get to work and not miss a day’s pay that you have to have?

Do you think they said yes to demonstrate they believed in themselves and were worth protecting, and show they would feel the same way about a new industry that could bring them the level of pay they have always dreamed about to clothe their children and feed their families?

Or is it about not caring if every job left or not, because Jackson was no longer safe and the only income would be public assistance. Is that our vision of the future?

The foundation for a strong future is here for the asking. Is it really not worth building on?

MY FUTURE

“I am certainly not abandoning Jackson. This community has been my heart and soul for as long as I can remember, and there are many ways to successfully serve my fellow citizens. I have just been humbled and honored to have served as their mayor for the past 11 years.”

THE ACTUAL SPEECH

As I said, my decision to step aside as mayor on December 31, 2019, was one made long ago, nothing that has happened during the last 15 months had any influence on it.

But I am not disappearing. I am still going to work for the betterment of this community as I have since the day I left Jackson High School and began coaching Little League baseball. That commitment will never end.

I hope to continue my nearly quarter century commitment to improving the business environment for the businesses and industries of Jackson. I have been very blessed to continue in that role as mayor as they both have the very same goals, doing what can be done to make Jackson a better place to live, work and play.

If something is good for the people, it will be good for the businesses, and if something is good for business, it will ultimately be good for the people. Those philosophies will always go hand and hand and no one should ever be deceived to believe otherwise.

I have been selected this year to serve as the chairman of the executive committee of the 11-county Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission, only the second non-county commissioner to ever hold that distinction in the organization’s 52-year history. It is a tremendous honor for myself and our city.

I will also continue to serve on other economic development boards to further hopefully help every resident of Jackson to have the opportunity to earn the living wage they desire, because in the end, it is all about the jobs, the income you can earn, the quality of life you can attain, your family that makes your life worthwhile and making the lives of our children everything they can be.

THE EMPLOYEES AND THE CITIZENS

“I have been so blessed to have the employees I have had and the support of the citizens over these past 20 years. A good city employee is like a good sports official, you know they are doing their job if it goes unnoticed, and because of the great job so many of them do, it is sometimes taken for granted.”

THE ACTUAL SPEECH

The tremendous foundation, though, I am leaving behind to be build upon by my successor, which includes a first class utility system that is a priority for any incoming industry, was not done by me, it was done by a team of very dedicated, knowledgeable, experienced and most of all talented individuals.

These are not individuals that you just find anywhere, interchangeable with anyone on the street for any amount of pay, a city is a very complex operation. You don’t just hand someone a gun today and say you are a police officer, you don’t hand someone the keys to a bucket truck and tell them you are the city electrician today. Never be misled into thinking otherwise.

And no one, I mean no one, could have been more blessed than I to have had the wonderful team I have had the honor of working with.

Number one, my service/safety director, William R. (Bill) Sheward, our city's \$9 million man.

He might not have super natural powers, but he has been the steady, deliberate leader who has watched over every penny of the more than \$400 million included in city budgets since I have become mayor.

No, the city hasn't spent that much, and less than a quarter of it has come from the residents for all the many services the city provides, but Bill has not only worked to make it successful with our money, but brought approximately \$9 million into our city in grants that have built streets, built bridges, improved utilities, and maybe saved our community.

We have a newly re-built McCarty Lane and major utility improvements along Veteran's Drive, inviting to industries and those valuable potential jobs, rather than having a "Road Closed" sign because we could no longer repair it.

What if Huron Street had to be closed at the pool or Harding Avenue going into Jamestown because we had to close the bridges due to deteriorating conditions. Thanks to Bill Sheward, they are strong for the next 30 years.

His contribution to this community should never be underestimated and I am proud to walk away with him knowing he was my service director.

City Auditor Brett Reed. No city auditor has ever had a better handle on the city's finances than Brett, his commitment to making sure everything has been done right to the letter of the rule and law has been never-ending.

The eight years I worked with him on city council and the eight years I have worked with him as city auditor, I am sure he would say 16 years with me under any circumstances is too long, but I have truly valued his judgment and insight, and his strength and courage is a testament to be proud of.

City Attorney Joe Kirby. The pitfalls of serving the public are prevalent every day, and there are always those who want to deliberately steer you in a wrong direction for their own personal or political benefit. His wise and thoughtful judgement has been a tremendous asset to this city I have used often, and his commitment to make sure it is always right with legal precedent behind it and not be influenced by political considerations has been a strong attribute.

My superintendents, Tom, Alan, Dave, Roy, Greg, Karen, Steve, Ron, Robin, Joan. I know our citizens do not realize the valuable service each of them performs. Our citizens don't realize the guidance they must give daily to make sure everything works right, something that goes unnoticed so often, and sometimes responsible for the management of millions of public dollars, it is not a side job or a hobby, it is a tremendous responsibility that must be respected as much.

The employees. It always saddens me when they are attacked in public as a result of some personal or political motive.

I can tell you that each and every one are committed to serving you, the citizens, our businesses and industries, that each and every one cares about you, the citizens, as well as our businesses and industries.

They are human beings, though, not machines, they might make mistakes, they might not do everything the same way we might, but it has been the daily goal of my administration to get the very best out of each employee, to make sure that every dollar they are paid is returned to the citizens, businesses and industries through effort, diligence and commitment. I know our

employees might be paid more than in some other cities, and that is why I have never been afraid to ask more from our employees, and they always come through when they could say no, as they do in other communities, but ours always say yes.

For a safe city, dependable utilities and clean streets among many other services, they do deserve our appreciation, and not out-and-out resentment.

To the members of city council, thank you for caring about this city, thank you for doing what you felt was best for our citizens, thank you for leading our city through one of its most turbulent times in our history.

It has been my administration's goal to take the politics out of our decisions, to base our decisions solely on substantiated facts and not some political insinuation. It has been our goal to make sure all the preliminary work has been completed before making presentations to you, so you have all the facts in front of you as to why this legislation is truly in the best interest of the community.

I covered city council as a journalist for more than a decade, and served as a council member for eight years. It can be frustrating, confusing, at times even overwhelming. But you have remained strong in the most difficult of times, you have always placed the interest of our citizens first, sometimes having to look beyond their concerns, and realizing the future of our community tomorrow is in our hands today.

The 6,000-plus residents of Jackson. For 20 years as an elected official, you have supported me despite the hardships you might be experiencing, knowing that every one wants more and less expensive utilities could do that, although being responsible forbid myself and this council from making arbitrary changes.

And thank you for understanding that no matter how much you might disagree with a decision I made or a direction I undertook, it was always about trying to make your life better, that no decision was ever made because of how it might reflect on me, that everything I have done in the past 20 years was with complete honesty and integrity. I would never do anything that would create a situation that would cast a negative light on this community, that never one time did any self-consideration have any influence on any decision I ever made.

Jackson first and always first.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU

“I have been so blessed to coach the hundreds of young people I have coached over all these years, with so many still being dear friends all these years later. But the girls I have had the privilege to coach these past five years really gave me a renewed energy to help our young people be the best they can be. There have never been more challenging times for a young person than there are today, this is certainly not the time to abandon them.”

THE ACTUAL SPEECH

While I know I have left out so many I should offer my gratitude to, will you please indulge me while I thank one very special group of people who have been my inspiration the last five years and constantly reinforced in me why I have always reached out my hand to help our leaders of tomorrow.

Five years ago, I was asked to serve as an emergency coach for one game for our girls age 12-and-under softball team. I knew one girl on the team. I had not coached for 17 years after giving of my time to coach 535 games as a volunteer youth coach.

But what was one more game. Well, that game proved to me that the young people we have in our midst today are certainly among the finest we have ever been blessed to have. Finishing out that season, I realized I wanted to continue to do what I could to help them be the very best they could be and continued every year since, adding about 100 more games to the tally.

But through all the hardships our city has endured, they became the light I focused on to remain strong throughout whatever adversity I might face. They never quit, they never said it was too hard, they were always ready for the next challenge, no matter how daunting.

Those girls who have been at the core of my teams for these five years remind me why, as human beings, there are always those more important than us, why we must continue to fight for the future, why their lives are absolutely worth it.

I'm not going to mention them by name, they know who they are, but I hope they know for the inspiration they have given me, I will always be there for them and they can always count on me. I will never be able to thank them enough and can only pray that for those who follow me as mayor will have that same commitment, because all of our young people deserve it.

WHAT LIES AHEAD

“Anyone who underestimates the critical situation we are facing now is hurting not only themselves but everyone around them. We must fix our financial structure moving forward if we are to serve the basic needs of our community. It cannot be done for free and we cannot continue along the path we have been tortured with the past 15 months. We must find a new direction and find a new direction now.”

THE ACTUAL SPEECH

While the past 15 months did not have any influence on my decision to walk away as mayor, it certainly has had one major effect. The terror and turmoil of the past 15 months has broken my heart in one million jagged pieces never to re-heal, a nightmare I live with every day and every night.

But although it has broken my heart, it has absolutely not broken my spirit, but only strengthened its resolve. Over the next 351 days, I will give every effort within my soul to place this community back on the strong foundation we have built as a community these past 11 years, to stand up to anyone who wants to bring harm to this community in anyway and leave Jackson as the best community it can be.

But how can we survive, how can we ensure we don't throw away our strong foundation and have a future we can believe in?

First, we must view today as the first day for our future and the rest of our lives. We must find ways to put to rest the issues and actions of the past in the past, realizing what must be done today for the benefit of today and tomorrow, and not be extinguished by those who want to demonize and destroy this community with its past.

A community is a family. A family must have sufficient income to survive, a city is no different. If a family member through no fault of their own loses a job, then they must go through the trials and tribulations of finding new employment. You can't just say "That's it".

The family of 6,000 plus known as Jackson is no different. The city lost money from potential interest income and state government cuts, totaling potentially about \$700,000 a year and more than \$6 million since 2009.

Then when you combine that with the opinion from one man, State Auditor Dave Yost, that there were issues in the manner the city utilized its rents and right-of-way program, and then they would not define for the city what was proper methodology, you add another \$1.3 million in lost income, making the total a potentially overwhelming \$2 million a year lost.

Like the person who is entrusted with supporting his or her family, the city just can't say "That's it" and hope to have a future because there is no public assistance or safety net for the city, it just dies.

No, not physically disappear, but becomes a city without jobs, no jobs means crime, and no officers to deter it, properties in constant decline, a future generation instilled with the lifestyle there is no way out.

No, Jackson will physically always be here, but will it be one with a thriving economy powered by business and industry, or one controlled by drugs and crime.

So, to keep our family going for the benefit of our 6,000 plus family members, plus the thousands who go to school here, work here, visit here and shop here, strengthening our economy for every resident, we must find a way out of nothing and back into being a full-service community.

And there is only one legal way to adequately do that, and it is the method chosen by every other one of the 246 cities in Ohio, through a tax. The majority of residents don't want it, even those who voted for it don't want it, council doesn't want it, I don't want it, but maybe the question we need to ask is why over 200 of those 246 cities have a level of income tax of more than one percent and every single one approved by the voters in those over 200 cities! What do they know that we don't? Why did they say yes?

These are the reasons, not just to add more money to the coffers, not to pay for things that cannot be justified, but because almost every other city in Ohio has had to take this route to support their families, and Jackson, to its credit, was the last to have to say, "we have no choice but to do it as well". In the big picture, that was a plus, not a negative. Chillicothe has had one since 1957.

It is not about me or this council. It is not simply about politics from those who want you to believe there is some magic fix where no one should ever have to pay for their services, no, it is all about you, the citizens, the businesses, the industries, your future, your safety, your families, everything you want in life.

Isn't having a future, being safe, ensuring the best for your family worth investing in? Is it worth so little, is it really worth nothing to keep your children safe and have a future for yourself, because it doesn't happen by accident and the money is not going to fall from the sky.

We control our own destiny, we determine our own success, no one else.

If you remove the dedicated cost allocations from the equation, the city's general fund will be operating next year on only 39 percent of the income it spent in the general fund in 2007, which means even less when you consider inflation.

We can politicize these numbers all we want, but they are the cold, hard facts. No one can lose 61 percent of its funding and continue providing the same services. The income, at least a

large portion of it, must be replaced or the community we know will slowly, or very quickly, die depending on how fast the out-of-state drug lords and youth gangs can move in.

We could propose a property tax, which would need to be about 13 mils and only a portion of the people responsible for the entire amount.

We can revisit the rents and right-of-ways program, and go through the terror and torment again, sue the state and be torn apart for years as a result, regressing while all other cities move forward.

Or we can follow the lead of 600 other communities in Ohio and have a municipal income tax, of which the majority we believe comes from other people, not the residents, and then hopefully never having to fear another unexplained assault by the state auditor's office of Ohio.

AVOIDING CONFRONTATIONS WITH THE STATE AUDITOR'S OFFICE

“It has been heart-breaking that yet another battle with the state auditor's office has crippled this community and impeded our time and effort to move this community forward for all of its residents. I am certainly hopeful the new oversight measures I would like to see instituted regarding the state auditor's office are put into place so this community never has to be burdened with this kind of divisive turmoil ever again.”

THE ACTUAL SPEECH

Putting the past in the past and resolving the issues also means making sure the past cannot harm us again, and that means this city must insure it can never be blind-sided by the state auditor's office of Ohio again, as it has not once, but twice.

There are those who believe the city should fight for the right to re-institute the rents and right-of-way program. Since the state auditor's office has refused to give the city any guidance, which would mean suing the state of Ohio.

While there are those who have been falsely misled to believing this methodology “stole” and “cheated” the residents, politically preying on the emotions of innocent residents and what must be paid to responsibly operate a utility system, the true fact is the methodology used was really a benefit for the residents.

When you consider approximately 75 percent came from non-residential income, that for every one dollar a resident would invest they would get four dollars of valued service, protection, police officers willing to put their lives on the line every day for you, the resident, and it only cost you a quarter for every dollar the city spent, wasn't that a good investment, that is if you care about keeping the citizens and children safe from harm?

An interesting stat is that it appears not one employee of the city of Jackson has the majority of his or her salary paid for by the residents. Non-residential income supports almost two-thirds of the city's operation, proving the city is truly a family of residents, businesses and industries and without all members of the family working together, you have no family at all.

But if the past is to be the past, never to rear its ugly head again, the city must make sure it is never terrorized or tormented again by an arbitrary ruling by the state auditor's office that leaves more questions than answers, and division instead of guidance.

What has happened to this community as a result of the state auditor's opinion in October of 2017 can never happen again. When I became mayor, my first goal was to make sure the

terror and torment of 2002 and 2003 never happened again, that we would reach out to work with the state auditor's office to ensure that.

But that kind of effort must be a two-way street, and I learned a very hard lesson.

Of course, there will be those who will say why did the city do the very same thing that caused all the problems before?

But the political furor of the state auditor's opinion drowned out the fact it was not done like before, that the city took every precaution to make sure it was done correctly this time.

The city contacted and met with the agency the state auditor recommended to be consulted concerning it, and followed its recommendation.

Before the ordinance was passed, it contacted the state auditor to gain further direction. The request was not honored reportedly because the city had no ordinance in place.

So the city passed the ordinance, and again the state auditor refused to clarify its appropriateness, basically saying the city could move forward then the state auditor would determine if it was done right. That sounds backwards, doesn't it?

So the city only allocated a very small amount the first year as a test to see if it was legal or not. Nothing to my knowledge from the state auditor ever came back saying it was wrong, even after they said in writing it would be reviewed.

State audit after state audit, for seven years approved in state audits, each audit, as an extra measure of security, having the city pay the state auditor to review it for accuracy, awards from the state auditor for clean audits, and the auditors asking questions during multiple state audits about the very methodology being used and every question answered.

In matter of fact, the chief auditor of the Athens division of the state auditor's office in July, 2016 wrote in an internal email, and I quote "The IPA, Julian and Grube, have addressed the two concerns requested be addressed during the 2015 financial audit...1) Review the allegations regarding the improper transfers associated with the Electric Fund and 2) the allegations of potential bid splitting on a contract that was underway at the time the complaint was made. Upon reading J&G's responses, no audit concerns were identified...I am requesting this Case be closed."

That was July, 2016, case closed. So why in June, 2017, is everything so wrong the city must be thrown into this political and financial chaos? What changed, or who made it change and why?

And now knowing this, how can anyone blame any locally elected official here for the state auditor's opinion and the chaos that has ensued?

As a result, I have sent a request to State Representative Ryan Smith and State Senator Bob Peterson to strongly consider a list of five possible new oversight measures to ensure not only Jackson, but no other governmental entity in Ohio would be placed in this kind of anguish again by the state auditor's office.

The new oversight measures I would like to see strongly considered are as follows:

1. An independent Inspector General for the State Auditor's office, as well as the Attorney General's office, Secretary of State's office and the State Treasurer's office.

If you have an inspector general for the governor's office and all of his or her employees, and the legislature, why not one for these offices, including a state auditor's office which a newspaper article last fall said had approximately 800 employees? This way, every question I have posed here can be addressed through responsibility and not side-stepped through political intimidation.

2. Create an avenue where governmental agencies can have its questions answered responsibly prior to moving forward rather than after the fact.

If a person came to Mr. Sheward wanting to build a structure and ask about zoning requirements, he wouldn't say to them, "I'm not going to tell you, but go ahead and build it and if it is wrong, we will make you tear it down". If we would not act with that level of irresponsibility on a local level, why should it be a core philosophy of the state auditor's office to answer questions in that fashion? A simple answer in 2009 and this never would have occurred.

3. Be allowed to discuss publicly any potential state audit finding.

As the laws of the state are now, city council does not even have the right to go into an executive session to discuss an issue such as this, let alone educating the public as to the situation at hand. By the state auditor demanding secrecy and then not being able to discuss it until it is made public by them, allowing for dissension, negativity and political intimidation to rule over responsibly being able to address the issue, is a violation of the people and their right to have a full, honest and uninfluenced response. If this could have been addressed in June rather than days before a contentious election, the response could have been much different.

4. Create some level of assurances that audit results are correct and cannot arbitrarily be changed years later unless there is clear evidence of intentional fraud or previous non-disclosure of the facts.

In the 2002 special audit of the city, the city was issued a finding of more than \$6 million in conjunction with findings that almost all had been approved in previous audits, thus potentially throwing the city into a fiscal emergency which could have allowed the city to be taken away from its citizens. The city of Jackson pays more than \$30,000 a year for these audits, shouldn't there be some level of security the audits are worth more than the paper they are written on? Why should anyone believe in the results of any audit if they can be changed so easily and so arbitrarily years and years later?

5. Allow only for audits to be released 75 days prior to any upcoming election.

Twice, the city of Jackson, in 2003 and again in 2017, have had audits released less than a month before very contentious elections that many believe influenced the elections and as a result, comprising the democratic rights of the people, especially when learning of all the questions regarding the audits after the elections. Democracy should never be compromised, under any circumstances and not by a state agency that cannot be practically held fully responsible for its actions.

If these five oversight measures would have been in place since 2009, none of the terror, turmoil or exploitation of our community over the past 15 months would have ever occurred.

STABLIZING THE COUNTY'S FINANCES AS WELL

"As I said earlier, when it comes to the city of Jackson and Jackson County, if one succeeds, they both succeed, if one fails, they both fail. There is absolutely no separateing the two. If the city of Jackson has the courage to finally address its financial standing in a positive manner, the county needs to honestly look at its financial standing as well and resolve the sales tax distribution issue which has been dividing our county for 30 years. The county deserves to have the same chance for success as the city, but it has to be financially supported by all the county residents as well."

THE ACTUAL SPEECH

Erasing the past can only be accomplished if you learn from the past. As a city and a county, that must be done to move forward, and there is one other issue that must be settled if the governmental entities of Jackson County are to move forward in unison for the benefit of all citizens.

There is an old saying that simply throwing money at a problem will not fix it, but the problem can never be fixed without it.

In the late 1980s, the county was in financial chaos. County offices were closed, and it was almost an exact replica of what the city is facing today. We want the services, we expect the services, but someone else needs to pay for them.

At the time, the county had no sales tax and neither Jackson nor Wellston had an income tax.

All three needed one. In an article I penned in 1989, it showed even then, 30 years ago, over 200 cities in Ohio had income taxes, eight did not including Jackson and Wellston. One of the eight declined so much is not even a city anymore.

What if all of Jackson County would have been honest in addressing its financial needs then? The sheriff's department would not have been shorthanded all these years, and the county could have done their part in promoting economic development and bringing better jobs to all our people.

But instead, the only consideration was for that day and that day alone, no forward thought, everybody fighting for the same dollar. The cities and townships just needed something to help out, not solve the issues they had. If they could just get a little, although the county needed it, they wouldn't have to ask for the taxes themselves.

This resulted in the county commissioners voting to split the one percent sales tax with the other municipalities in hopes of getting it passed and the county just getting something, because they were absolutely desperate for anything!

And every county commissioner since has been compromised by the agreement, never having the revenue that other counties have to work with, and it is clear that the resentment of having to share that money is growing more and more entrenched, and I believe part of the reason for the differences the city and county now have.

I fully understand that. Once again, to circumvent reality, Jackson County found a way and later on it just creates more and more problems, like we built a jail too small and only for males. Perfect example.

It would not be practical to attempt to terminate this agreement now. But a county wide property tax of three mils needs to be proposed by the county commissioners to replace that income, and the residents of the municipalities and townships must know if not for this agreement 30 years ago, they would have been asked by their own municipal and township officials for the very same amount of tax levy for streets, bridges and roads.

Clearly, there are always going to be those who want to see government fail its people for their own self-serving personal and political agendas, who are going to fight all entities who are working together to strengthen the city and the county, not weaken it.

Thus, all citizens of Jackson County must find the courage to realize what they must do in the present to preserve the future, like the more than 200 cities in Ohio where their residents have voted to increase their income taxes, not eliminate them and the incredibly valuable services they provide.

MAJOR COST REDUCTIONS IN THE CITY GOVERNMENT

“It has been so frustrating when there have been those who have lead the charge to fight any additional income for the city by saying the city has not been run efficiently, which the facts have proven just the opposite. I wish they would have the courage to say exactly what they would cut, who they would shortchange, rather than just using erroneous insinuations to emotionally influence people.”

THE ACTUAL SPEECH

There are those who will prey on the innocence of our citizens to convince them their money has been wasted and savings have not occurred. But the clear facts show that is absolutely not true. Nothing could be more false.

This year the money budgeted for the general fund is \$1.5 million less than 12 years ago, or a 40 percent reduction when excluding the dedicated cost allocations. The city has 10 less full-time employees than it had at the end of 2007. There have been occasions when every department has worked with less to save as much as possible, with the police department having no full-time replacements for the six members it has lost in 2018 and the 50 percent reduction in the administrative staff in the mayor’s office.

So when you hear people say cuts have not been made, or not enough cuts yet not demonstrate the courage to specify the cuts they think need to be made, you must ask yourself, do they really have a legitimate complaint, or just a vicious exploitation of our innocent citizens?

That is not to mention that when the city began losing as much as \$700,000 a year of income from investment income and state funding losses, we just made cuts to make ends meet when others were raising their income taxes even more to offset the losses.

No, my administration has done the job and has done the job well. The facts must always erase the political insinuations.

Over these next 351 days, I am more dedicated than ever to leave Jackson as the best city in southern Ohio, to not let our enemies defeat us, to show the world what Jackson is really like, those who cheer on our children in sports or whatever endeavor they choose, who decorate Manpower Park to show our community’s true spirit. That is the Jackson, the one who down deep believes in itself, the world needs to see.

And during these next 351 days, we must all have courage, we must all have conviction and we must have trust. No state auditor, no political operative, no one else should badger us to doubt ourselves.

We must do right by the facts, we can never let them be obscured.

The lives of our residents will ultimately depend on it. The employment of thousands and thousands of people could depend on it. And the future of those wonderful young people who allowed me to be their coach and a part of their incredible lives are counting on it.

The city of Jackson is better than being last in Ohio. Jackson County is better than being last in Ohio. Both have earned the investment of the people to pay no more than anyone else in Ohio pays, but we must catch up so we can be better than the worst, we are good enough that our equal will make us better than most.

The time for playing political games of self-preservation must be over, preserving yourself means nothing unless all can celebrate with you. The time for honest, responsible action is right now, not tomorrow, next month or next year.

People's lives are on the line this very minute, tomorrow is too late if they're gone, never coming back and don't be fooled, it can happen just as easily to you, your son, your daughter, your loved one, yeah, it can happen.

The future is our responsibility to mold. Each day is ours to create. Do we simply collapse under the negativity, or do we courageously move forward. I know the path I will always take. My fellow residents and our children deserve it. I hope you will join me on the journey.

I thank God for Jackson and everything it has to offer, and I thank you with all of my heart.