State of the City of Laredo: Stronger Than Ever and Moving Forward to an Even Brighter Future

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen. **Buenos dias!**

It is indeed my honor to be with you here today and to share with all of you, the State of the City of Laredo.

My special thanks to the Laredo Chamber of Commerce for once again organizing this breakfast and of course, to everyone present today, as well as those watching at home on Public Access. Welcome!

Last year, I boldly proclaimed that the State of the City was the best it had ever been, showcasing City of Laredo accomplishments and every member of your municipal government, who truly work hard every day to improve our community.
From your City elected officials, administration and every employee throughout our organization, rest assured that we are all committed to making Laredo the most livable city on the U.S./Mexico border.

After a year on the job, I am happy to report, that I have made significant progress in meeting the goals I had set out in my campaign; especially, making this government more transparent and building public trust.

**PAUSE**

On the City of Laredo’s newly redesigned and updated website, City contracts, records and other financial information can be easily viewed and obtained.

In fact, the State of Texas Comptroller’s Office has recently presented the City of Laredo Financial Services Department with the Platinum Award in recognition of our
financial transparency. Also, as a result of a new City of Laredo Facebook page, citizens can be informed and connected with their city government like never before. By the way, have you LIKED the City of Laredo yet? PAUSE

**STATE OF THE CITY**

My fellow Laredoans, the State of the City of Laredo is Stronger than Ever and Moving Forward to an Even Brighter Future. We are poised for significant growth, moving forward in areas of incredible ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT and investments that will not only strengthen our economy, but will also help our entire community prosper. As the nation’s largest inland port, TRANSPORTATION is the city’s driving force. However, the streets of Laredo, along with our highways and bridges, move more than just trailers and commerce. Finding a way for commerce and families to travel safely
and quickly to their destinations is a priority. The QUALITY OF LIFE that the City of Laredo offers provides our citizens with security, health, well-being and entertainment. PAUSE

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Business

We have long known that Laredo is a pretty good place to live and work, a fact that many national companies have taken notice of. Many of these businesses’ number one stores in their corporate portfolio are located right here in Laredo. Just look around at all of the new businesses that have settled here and those currently under construction. Commercial development is up 18% from last year. New fast food restaurants like Johnny Rockets, Chipotle and Dunkin Donuts, as well as other new businesses such as the Alamo Drafthouse, STAT Emergency Center, Harbor Freight Tools and
Gander Mountain now form part of the growing Laredo landscape.

Others that will begin construction soon or are almost completed include Cheddars, Five Guys, another Palenque Grill, or the newest member of that family of restaurants, Puerto Palenque.

The hospitality industry is also seeing a boom in new facilities, including the Best Western Plus, Motel 6 and the Town Place Suites.

And yes, we are all eagerly anticipating the grand opening of Laredo’s newest retail center, the downtown Outlet Shoppes of Laredo. The outlet mall has already broken ground, with an investment of $80 million dollars. When it opens later this fall, it will bring with it approximately 1,200 permanent jobs and 1,600 seasonal
jobs. In fact, retail construction in Laredo increased 45% to $45 million dollars last year, while industrial development is up 35% to $105 million dollars.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Jobs

Unfortunately, the city is currently experiencing a slight uptick in the unemployment rate of .3% to close out January at 4.8% total unemployment, this is attributable primarily to a reduction of seasonal retail and other jobs and the slowdown in the oil and gas industry. However, overall annual job growth remains strong as the City of Laredo saw a job growth rate for 2015 of 2.6%, with 2,600 more jobs in January 2016 than there were at the same time of the previous year. In fact, the city’s top work force industries alone contribute $664 million dollars to the economy.
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
CONSTRUCTION

As we know, Laredo has always had that entrepreneurial spirit, and local businesses and investments are very important to our economy. The City of Laredo developed different economic incentives, such as the Neighborhood Empowerment Zone, to encourage revitalization of older buildings. To date, neighborhoods in the Heights in District Three and downtown neighborhoods in District Eight have seen a significant capital investment of $7 million dollars in residential improvements and commercial businesses.

Additionally, the Downtown Tax Incentive Reinvestment Zone will help encourage economic investment, downtown infrastructure improvement and neighborhood revitalization.
Private industry is the engine that is moving Laredo forward. Your financial risks and investments mean new developments, new construction, and job creation. We are working to move forward by creating a business friendly city, which in turn will create value-added jobs.

Nowhere is this more evident than in residential building permits. In 2015, there were 1,096 building permits, valued at $156 million dollars. However, this increase in the number of permits represented a $52 million dollar decrease in the total value from the previous year. What this means is that the developers are building more affordable homes.
We need to get families into homes that they can afford so that they can live the American dream and help contribute to our economy as home owners.

In 2014, 237 commercial permits were issued, valued at $154 million. However, in 2015, 231 permits were issued with a value of $207 million dollars for an increase of $53 million dollars, which means more jobs and more people working in our community.

That is why the City of Laredo works to bring proposed investment to fruition by providing incentive tools where and when appropriate. One such project is The Coves, a mixed residential and commercial development by Killam Development Company. The most important thing that the Laredo City Council and Administrators will keep in mind related to incentive tools is the financial
impact to current and future City budgets as a result of committing new and additional City services, not just now, but also, 30 years from now. **PAUSE**

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**  
**Trade**

In order to maintain our position as the nation’s largest inland port, we must vigorously pursue global business opportunities. City officials continue to actively network throughout Mexico and around the world to attract business and trade to Laredo.

With our neighbor Mexico, through its increased trade with China and other countries, City officials have traveled to Culiacán, Lázaro-Cárdenas, Manzanillo, and Mazatlán, convincing them to cross their goods through Laredo. **PAUSE**
Recent relationships established with officials in Mexico include memorandums of understanding with COMCE, the CONSEJO MEXICANO DE COMERCIO EXTERIOR and the State of Querétaro that will further bring additional trade through Laredo.

COMCE is the most important, oldest and most respected Mexican business association related to foreign trade, representing over 1,500 Mexican impresarios and one fourth of all the exports of Mexican companies to the United States. This organization will now begin to channel its export trade from various Mexican states through the Port of Laredo.

Additionally, the City of Laredo recently reaffirmed its Sister City relationship with the City of Jálpan de Serra Querétaro, and as part of our visit, we also promoted the
Port of Laredo with trade industry representatives. In fact, State of Texas officials were also part of the agreement promoting beneficial agricultural trade with Querétaro.

However, the City of Laredo doesn’t just look outside to its southern borders for increased trade partners. A recent trip to Atlanta put City officials in touch with Sunset, a Canadian-based produce importer who has invested $15 million dollars into renovating a warehouse distribution center and has shifted its imports from other areas directly to Laredo. In fact, the refrigerated facilities at World Trade Bridge and Colombia Bridge, the only inspection facility of their kind along the Texas border, were the deciding factors in helping to lure this company to Laredo.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**FINANCE**
Currently, the City of Laredo boasts a healthy fund balance of over $44 million dollars, an increase of $1.5 million dollars from last year. This balance has doubled over the past 11 years and helped us earn a financial bond rating of Double A, from both Fitch and Standard & Poor’s.

This is better than many other larger cities in Texas. The City of Laredo’s 2016 consolidated budget is over $593 million dollars, which includes the general fund and the enterprise funds. With over $159 million in bonds issued last year, you will see new and improved water and sewage infrastructure projects and even lower interest rates highlighting the responsible fiscal management of the City’s debt. PAUSE
Perhaps most importantly to the families in this community is that the City of Laredo has managed to grow our fund balance and weather the recession, without laying off or furloughing any City employee or reducing City services. In fact, we have maintained a **FLAT** property tax rate for the **PAST 12 YEARS**. Not too many cities in Texas can make that claim. With a property taxable value of almost $12 billion dollars, the City of Laredo is still growing and prospering.

Furthermore, to better plan for our future growth for the next 20 to 30 years, we are currently preparing to move forward with the Comprehensive Strategic Master Plan, which will cover the entire city, including downtown, and will require input from stakeholders and the community. Additionally, the City of Laredo has
undertaken a convention center feasibility study, as well, to help make that a dynamic part of our future growth.

**TRANSPORTATION BRIDGES**

The Gateway City, as Laredo is known, is the #1 inland port, the most important and direct trade route from Mexico to Canada. The Laredo Customs District is the third largest district in the United States. The Port of Laredo processes over 71% of the district’s trade, which amounts to over four million commercial vehicles, just under half a million rail cars and 430 million pounds of air cargo processed in our city annually. These statistics represent just over 50% of all U.S. trade with Mexico and a record $284 billion in trade with the world. **PAUSE**
We **OWN** these numbers. We **BOAST** these numbers. And we will continue to work on **GROWING** these numbers.

Additionally, our Laredo Bridges process just over six million pedestrians and just over 10 million non-commercial vehicles every year, generating over $57 million dollars in revenue and contributing to keeping our property tax rate low. In fact, this was an increase of almost $2 million dollars from the previous year. That is why we are and will continue to be committed to solidifying our place at the top of the trade industry by investing in enhancements to our bridge system, such as constructing a hazardous material containment facility at World Trade Bridge and the future upgrade to the pedestrian and vehicular toll collection system. We are working with our trade partners to add four exit lanes and a weigh-in motion
system for more efficient and secure processing at World Trade Bridge.

During the WBCA festivities, our own hometown representative in Washington, Congressman Henry Cuellar, along with U.S. General Services Administration, announced an additional $26.8 million dollars for the upgrade of Bridge #1 Customs & Border Protection inspection and pedestrian processing areas. Earlier in September, GSA began work on improvements to Bridge #2, with an investment of $62 million.

**TRANSPORTATION AIRPORT**

The Laredo International Airport is currently ranked #7 among all-cargo airports in Texas, ahead of Brownsville, Corpus Christi, Harlingen, Lubbock, and McAllen. In fact, the Laredo International Airport is the “puente
“internacional del aire,” the international bridge in the air.

PAUSE

Late last year, the Laredo International Airport opened the U.S./Mexico Cargo Pre-Inspection program which simplifies, expedites, reduces cost, and enhances security for Mexico bound air cargo. Mexican Customs at the Laredo International Airport, NAFTA’s Cargo Hub, makes Laredo unique in that no other airport outside of Mexico is approved by the Mexican government to pre-clear Mexico bound air cargo and no other airport in the United States has two countries that share one building to house two international customs offices, processing air cargo 24/7.

But the airport services more than just cargo. Since 2012, the airport has seen a 2% increase in the number of passengers a year, with just over 100,000 passenger
enplanements and deplanements a year, increasing the load factors. While the Laredo-Las Vegas flight continues to be one of the most profitable routes for Allegiant Air in their entire system, Allegiant’s Laredo to Orlando flight is gaining popularity.

Congressman Henry Cuellar was also instrumental in securing $13 million dollars in airport improvement grants from the Federal Aviation Administration that will help, among other projects, rebuild Taxi Way G to help increase our cargo capabilities.

And, finally, welcome news for this community: The airport just finalized a consulting contract with GRA, a world-wide airline consulting company to pursue direct service from Laredo to Mexico City/Toluca. This is the
primary destination request from those traveling for business, as well as for pleasure. PAUSE

TRANSPORTATION

Highways

While trade is the proverbial bread and butter for our city’s economy, the congestion created by the trailer traffic is a headache that we all have to deal with as we drive along these very busy roadways and highways. That is why our relationships with the federal and state agencies that control transportation dollars are so important, to help us push for projects vital to our community. In fact, in January of this year, Congressman Cuellar invited ranking Chairman Congressman Bill Schuster to Laredo to announce $114 million in Texas Highway Transportation funds. The congressman worked in a bi-partisan effort with Congressman Schuster to ensure the transportation bill included funding for border communities.
Other future projects the City of Laredo is pushing for include the ultimate development of the Hachar Loop, a 6-lane freeway with 2 lane frontage roads from Mines Road thru the Hachar Trust Tract, ultimately extending north thru the Reuthinger Tract and connecting to IH-35 in northern Webb County. The pavement section will be developed as a future overweight corridor utilizing concrete designed for overweight trucks. These projects are expected to help spur development along 22,000 acres for industrial parkway and warehousing.

State projects include expanding lanes along Mines Road from Killam Boulevard to Muller Road, to help ease traffic congestion.

Additionally, Laredo will see some relief along Loop 20 with a TXDOT overpass interchange at Spur 400, or
Clark, as we know it. Thanks to a $35 million investment, this project will help reduce traffic in an extremely congested area of Laredo and will propel our community’s mobility forward. Completion of this project is slated for Spring of 2018.

Two other TXDOT Loop 20 enhancement projects include widening the Loop 20 bridge over the Kansas City Southern railroad tracks and adding frontage roads over the KCS bridge with the adjoining overpass project.

Also, thanks to land donated by the Alexander Trust, a much needed arterial for North East Laredo is currently under construction. Extending Bartlett Avenue from Jacaman Road to Del Mar Boulevard will not only help relieve the heavily congested McPherson Road, but will also help spawn commercial and residential development
that will boost our economy. In fact, we will host the Fenwick and Bartlett intersection grand opening next week and by the fall, expect to be travelling along Bartlett Avenue from North Laredo all the way to Central Laredo.

**PAUSE**

**QUALITY OF LIFE  
Security**

Securing our prosperity would not be possible were it not for the safety of our city. Laredo is the 10th largest city in Texas and I can say with certainty and pride, that Laredo is a safe city, one of the safest cities in Texas and certainly along the border. That is the result of the hard work, dedication and bravery of your Laredo Police Department which has worked to reduce crime in our city, partnering with all of the regional, state and federal law enforcement agencies in Laredo.
The Laredo Police Department, with a force of almost 470 strong, including 24 new cadets, has focused on solving crime in our community. The City of Laredo invested over $6 million dollars in equipping and training the force, modernizing the equipment and even securing the first drone for the department, to assist in police operations, including safety aerial surveillance of the community. In fact at our most recent City Council meeting, the Council approved a Compressed Work Week for all Laredo Police officers, which aside from reducing the amount spent in overtime and improving police officer morale, will also increase coverage during peak times, significantly reducing police response times to various emergency situations.

The Laredo Fire Department, a cadre of first responders, are among the best trained and equipped
group in the state. Just this past January, a new academy just started, composed of 33 cadets including three female cadets. The department is also beginning construction on a new $3.25 million Fire Station #8, to be located on the same grounds as the Fire Administration Center on Del Mar Boulevard.

The EMS Division just received national accreditation of their paramedic classes, only one of three Fire based EMS Education programs in the whole United States. This is important because 85% of 9-1-1 service calls are EMS calls. The department is also well equipped with a fleet of ambulances and a new $250,000 ambulance on the way.

The focus of the Mayor and the Laredo City Council has always been the safety and health of our citizens. In fact, public security is the City of Laredo’s #1 priority,
which is why 60 percent of the general fund – comprised of your property taxes – goes to fund Police and Fire services. Thanks to these investments, we will continue to fortify our ability to respond to any emergency.

**Quality of Life Partnerships**

We, your elected officials, are reinforcing our partnerships with Webb County, our sister city of Nuevo Laredo, all of our school districts, Texas A&M International University and Laredo Community College, all of our local, state and federal law enforcement agencies, educational, civic, charitable and social organizations, and of course, you, our business partners in helping to move Laredo forward.
Nowhere is this more evident than in the initiative to develop the four-and-a-half-block boulevard that is at the beginning of the IH-35 approach from Bridge II. The City of Laredo and the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) partnered together and hosted workshops asking for community input into the naming, development, design, and function of the area. The development will offer an important aesthetic welcome to those who visit Laredo from Mexico.

District Eight Council Member Roberto Balli was able to gather the AIA’s pro-bono support, as well as other stakeholders, including TXDOT and of course, the City of Laredo, to turn this idea into reality. TXDOT has agreed to deed the property over to the City and to provide initial funding of $300,000 for improvements to this area.
The vision for the boulevard is not to merely upgrade the area from bad to good. “It should be spectacular. It should say, ‘This is who we are. Bienvenidos a Laredo.’”

However, key to the success of this project, of many other projects, is the participation of the private sector to help fund these ideas.

For example, this past December, the City of Laredo was joined by the Lamar Bruni Vergara Trust and the A.M. Bruni Family, to unveil plans to renovate the historic Bruni Plaza, to create a more inviting urban park space that pays tribute to the contributions to Laredo by Bruni Family Patriarch, A.M. Bruni,. Aside from additional landscaping, look for the final area to feature more tables and park benches, perfect for summer concert series and other community events. This project is jointly funded by both
the City of Laredo and the Lamar Bruni Vergara Trust and the master design plan has just been completed. PAUSE

QUALITY OF LIFE

HEALTH

The City of Laredo Health Department offers medical and preventive services for the community, including the elderly, women and children. Whether it is public health emergency response, diabetes and weight management, monitoring the safety of the food we buy and consume, testing the quality of our drinking water or assisting the community with vaccinations or signing up for federally required insurance mandates, your health department is keeping Laredo healthy and safe.

A project near and dear to my heart is the Mayor’s Wellness Council which builds on the department’s efforts to improve healthier choices and nutrition, increase
physical activity and get regular health check-ups which assist with early detection of potential health issues.

Thanks to the new tire ordinance, there is a 40% increase in tires going to the landfill, as tire shops now keep tires when customers purchase new or used tires. Aside from the reduction in mosquito borne diseases, this has also curtailed illegal tire dumping and helped to clean up our city.

**Quality of Life Water**

Water is life. Just last year, the City of Laredo invested almost $157 million dollars to improve, construct and repair our water, waste water and sewer treatment systems.

We now have new water lines, storage tanks, sewage treatment facilities, and water treatment plant that is
meeting the demands of our current population, including the South Laredo Waste Water Treatment Plant expansion from 6 million to 12 million gallons of water a day, at a cost of almost $52 million dollars and the almost $86 million dollar *El Pico* Water Treatment Plant project. Already ongoing for 2016 are projects totaling over $18 million dollars, with many more to come. **PAUSE**

**QUALITY OF LIFE: AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Providing affordable housing is a must for any community. To that end, the City of Laredo’s Community Development Department assisted families with funds totaling $1.7 million dollars through their Affordable Housing Programs. The Down Payment Assistance Program provided 13 low income families the opportunity to purchase their home. Program funds assisted with over
$1.3 million dollars in private mortgage financing. In addition; the City leveraged over $700,000 dollars with Habitat for Humanity, constructing 5 homes for very low-income families; additionally, we provided $383,766 dollars in Tenant Based Rental Assistance by subsidizing 100 elderly residents, and assisted 29 families with $465,727 dollars in repairs to their homes thru the Housing Rehabilitation Program. Also, two duplexes were constructed to address the growing need for elderly housing. The City will continue this effort with two lots donated by the Fernando Salinas Trust Foundation.

Addressing homelessness, the City partnered with Bethany House, Catholic Social Services and Casa Misericordia utilizing over $240,000 dollars and assisting 2,653 individuals. We are also reaching out to the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development and the
Veterans Administration to increase our VA vouchers in order that we may reduce veteran homelessness in our community. **PAUSE**

Keeping Laredo beautiful, healthy, secure and well-maintained is literally a full time job for inspectors from various departments. The City of Laredo recently cross-trained all code enforcement officers, so that they are more efficient and effective in issuing citations for various violations. Look for them during regular inspections, targeted weekend task forces, or the monthly Operation Clean-Ups held in each district. **PAUSE**

**QUALITY OF LIFE PARKS AND RECREATION**

Our children and future generations will enjoy playing in Laredo. The City of Laredo has invested over $58 million dollars in our parks over the past nine years, building several new parks, improving on those in
existence and adding new recreational centers throughout Laredo.

Residents in District One can now enjoy the new swimming pool at the El Eden Recreation Center. The Merida Pond and Trail System improvements, which was completed in partnership with the Webb County Drainage District highlights the area’s natural features and provides recreational activities including hiking, biking and fishing.

District Two residents are looking forward to the upcoming Sisters of Mercy Lazy River, to be built next to the Cigarroa Recreation Center. The Lazy River will be just under a mile long with Kiddie Pool, bucket and spray play, slides and deck areas.

Meanwhile residents in District Three have seen multiple park improvements to their area, including
expanding the Canizales Boxing Gym & Recreation Center and new amenities added and court resurfacing of the Market Street Tennis Courts.

District Four saw community exercise equipment and trails added at the Bartlett Fire Station and playscape and picnic areas to the Maryland Toddler Park.

In the heart of the city lies District Five, which saw improvements and upgrades to just about every park in the area, including a special designed turf for the blind at the De Llano Track. However, late last year, construction began on a swimming pool to be added to the Bartlett Soccer Complex, which should be completed in time for the last few months of summer.

Residents in District Six take full advantage of the amenities at North Central Park. Just last week at the
annual Spring Break Kite Festival, thousands of children and their families enjoyed the park together. Additionally, property around Divine Mercy will have two Little League baseball fields developed, while new playground equipment and other features will be added to the Shiloh Crossing Park.

Muller Pond in the Indian Sunset Subdivision in District Seven was recently upgraded, thanks to a generous donation by the Robert Muller Sr. & Jr. Families. Over $1,000 worth of native Texas fish were dumped into the pond earlier last month. Residents can expect to enjoy fishing once a floating dock is constructed. A community garden at the nearby Barbara Fasken Recreation Center features fruits, vegetables, herbs and native plants to revive and sustain the neighborhood.
District Eight park improvements include field improvements, a basketball court, shade, benches, bleachers, swings sets and more at Seven Flags Park and a new park will be completed soon in the San Francisco Xavier Neighborhood. **PAUSE**

**QUALITY OF LIFE Libraries**

But it's not just your body that needs exercise. You must work out your mind to, and what better place to do that than at the Laredo Public Library which has grown to include six branch libraries and one cyber mobile. In fact, 2015 was the first year all branches were fully operational.

All libraries feature continuous activities throughout the year including programs that impact the community with thought-provoking messages, such as One City, One Book; the Laredo Book Festival; and the annual Poetry
Festival. But perhaps none is more powerful than the Holocaust Remembrance Day Ceremony, hosted in partnership with Congregation Agudas Achim and IBC Bank, that feature as the keynote speaker a survivor of this tragic period in human history, as well as participation from school children and community leaders so that we will never forget. PAUSE

QUALITY OF LIFE GREEN INITIATIVES
In late October, Laredo was ranked as one of the top 50 greenest Cities in the United States – and one of five in Texas – Laredo ranking #43 and only Austin at #11 and Dallas at #29 scored better. Initiatives that the City of Laredo has undertaken to earn such an accolade include: developing a fleet of CNG (compressed natural gas) El Metro busses and other City of Laredo vehicles, as well as a CNG fueling station for City vehicles and outside
business fleets; downtown solar trash compactors that lower the amount of fuel spent and greenhouse gas emissions produced; and downtown LED lighting retrofitting, that use less energy. Also, an energy efficient program through AEP Texas City Smart Program has helped the city save money and energy and receive an annual rebate of over $60,000 dollars.

**QUALITY OF LIFE**

*Trash*

Talking trash is never a fun topic, but in Laredo, we are getting good at that. Recycling collection continues to increase, last year collecting almost 11,545 tons, an increase of 24 tons from the year before.

**QUALITY OF LIFE**

*Entertainment*

The Laredo Energy Arena has hosted a variety of acts that appeal to different age groups, from children’s shows
to international pop stars and everything in between. Last year, over 21,000 attended the Laredo International Sister Cities Festival, almost tying a record set back in 2013, which has become a community favorite for shopping for Mexican treats and treasures.

Together with championship baseball at the Uni-Trade Stadium or world-class golf offered at the Max A. Mandel Municipal Golf Course, these attractions and events are economic boosters for our community, drawing in people from outside of our city who stay at our hotels, eat at our restaurants, shop at our stores and more importantly, share their experience about the beauty, safety and reality of our beloved Laredo. PAUSE

QUALITY OF LIFE
Well-Being
Just last month, the cell phone ban ordinance was fully enforced. No other ordinance will have a more profound impact on our community. If you are caught using your cell phone while driving you will receive a ticket. No excuses. No breaks.

**QUALITY OF LIFE**  
**CUSTOMER SERVICE**

The City of Laredo is here to serve you. If at any time you ever need any information or need issues to be addressed by the City of Laredo, you can always count on 3-1-1.

3-1-1 is staffed from 7 AM to 11 PM everyday of the year except Thanksgiving and Christmas. Call in a complaint, find out your recycling schedule, or get information on other community services.
QUALITY OF LIFE  
CITY OF LAREDO EMPLOYEES  

I have only been in office for a short time, but I believe you have a city government you can be proud of. I am encouraged and impressed by the professionalism of the over 2,500 City of Laredo employees who are true public servants. City of Laredo employees work hard every day to fulfill their duties. Our employees are what truly keep your city safe and running efficiently. I salute them ALL and thank them for being the foundation of good government.

I also, want to make sure we recognize the efforts of our Washington congressional delegation who work tirelessly supporting our great City, namely Congressman Henry Cuellar, Senator John Cornyn, and Senator Ted Cruz. In our state capitol, equally supportive in championing the needs of our community, we thank
Senator Judith Zaffirini, Representative Richard Raymond and Representative Tracy King.

***OPPORTUNITIES***

Laredo, like many other communities, faces many challenges, but in resolving these challenges, we find opportunities for us all; these are growing pains of prosperity. We are growing faster than our road infrastructure can keep up with; poverty is still prevalent despite our low unemployment rate; and we must work on improving the educational levels and training opportunities achieved by our students that will allow them to better provide for themselves and their families. Train-traffic congestion is still a major concern and we are working with all stakeholders to minimize wait times.

My vision is to meet these challenges head-on, to be proactive, open and inclusive. But we, the City of Laredo,
cannot do it alone. No one entity can handle all of the challenges that face us. It takes the partnership and involvement of government and industry, education and business, and public and private partnerships to propel Laredo to the next level.

**CONCLUSION**

My friends, the State of the City of Laredo is stronger than ever and moving forward to an even brighter future. We are poised for significant growth. Together, with God’s favor, we will stay strong and make that future even brighter, for all Laredoans.

Thank you!

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