
The roads of the future

Here is the prepared text of Mayor Andrew “FoFo” Gilich’s inaugural State of the City address, delivered on Feb. 16, 2016 during a Biloxi Bay Chamber of Commerce luncheon at the Beau Rivage Resort & Casino.

Thank you for such a nice reception. It’s great to see so many of you here today.

Especially welcome and thanks to, Supervisor Beverly Martin, the Keesler Commanders and all the organizations and everyone who helped bring this together.

And of course, members of our City Council. During the course of the election, at the Sun Herald Editorial Board, I was asked if I could get along with the City Council. I said let me tell you something, I was president of the Slavonian Lodge, a colorful organization that has 300 members with 600 opinions. If I can get along with them, I can get along with anybody.

I truly appreciate the support of the City Council.

But, let me express my deepest appreciation to my wife, Serena, for putting up with me for 47 years and especially the last 9 months.

That also goes for all my children, grand-children, my great family and great friends. I would like to go off script for a moment....

If you were in Biloxi in the 60’s, music was special; lyrics were almost poetry. It would get blood pumping and neurons firing. It still does is it for me. You heard earlier, “Get Kronked” ...

Recently, I was reminded that I am in my ninth month as Mayor of Biloxi . Let me assure you as we speak this day, we are in labor and continue to deliver.

Today, we have a video presentation that will show you almost everything going on in your city right now.

But, before you watch it, I want express my greatest appreciation and thanks to the nearly 600 members of “Team Biloxi” who make things happen. Those of you who are here today, please stand and be recognized.

It’s obvious to me that no one cares more about Biloxi and its future than all of us in this room right now. We have the obligation to stand up for Biloxi and to make our city the best place it can be.

As we move forward, we will remember our unique past, our rich history and our colorful heritage. But as we go forward, we keep in mind the lyrics in that hit song by Fleetwood Mac:

“Don’t stop thinking about tomorrow

“Don’t stop, it will soon be here”

I’ll step away in a moment. (Like in the movie “Wizard of Oz”) “Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.” I’ll join you again in about 31 minutes for a few closing remarks.

(Video presentation begins)

Hello Biloxi.

Thank you for joining me today for the State of the City. To put it into one word, the state of our city is STRONG. And getting stronger every day.

I have been on the job as your mayor for 39 weeks and one day. Some days have been longer than others. But I have enjoyed every one of them. It is an honor and a privilege to be Mayor of my hometown.

My goal ... and I’m sure all of you agree ... is to make Biloxi the best city that it can be. To always do what is best for Biloxi. To appreciate our long and colorful history... To cherish the hard work and values of our parents and grandparents and great-great grandparents To instill those values in our children and grandchildren. And, finally, to make sure the name Biloxi ... and everything it stands for ... lives on for many generations to come.

We have daunting challenges before us. But we will meet them together. Biloxi has been around for more than 300 years. In fact, we observed our 317th birthday just last week. We have an obligation to not only preserve the unique qualities of our heritage, but to embrace the future while honoring the Biloxi we know and love.

We owe our thanks to many past leaders, like Mayor A. J. Holloway, who led us through many challenges in recent decades.

But today is a new day. I stand before you to say that we are on the threshold of great accomplishment and even greater opportunity.

It's time for us to put Katrina in the rear-view mirror. We can and will do that with the plans we are advancing. We have a vision for Biloxi that involves each of you in spirit, cooperation and commitment.

I want our 5.6 million visitors a year to talk more about the new Biloxi instead of the destruction from that storm. A Biloxi that cherishes and promotes its history, its culture and its diversity. A Biloxi that offers its residents an excellent, authentic, unique quality of life and visitors a First Class experience that has them coming back again and again, and spreading our message across this country and beyond.

Today, I want to touch on some of the plans that will enable us to achieve that vision.

We took office on May 18, 2015, and we hit the ground running. In fact, you could say we had a double play right away.

First, there was the issue of getting MGM Park open and bringing the Shuckers home. The team played on the road for its first 55 games while the stadium was being constructed, and we were facing costly penalties if we didn't get the stadium ready for play. We brought all the partners together, opened the stadium and did that without any additional cost to the City. Our first game was June 6th, two months ahead of the scheduled August opening.

Next up was the BP settlement. We settled for a Coast-best \$4.9 million, and we got the most money for the city and the Biloxi Public Schools.

Early on, we visited our Congressional delegation in Washington to help in advancing Biloxi. About the same time we began meeting with our state representatives and state senators, and our municipal colleagues across the Coast.

We shared one clear message: There was a new leadership in Biloxi. We're going to be progressive, and we're going to stand up for Biloxi, and we're going to work with our neighbors to promote the entire Coast.

I say "we" because I cannot do it alone. One of the first things I did was to assemble an economic development team, headed by City Attorney Gerald Blessey, the former mayor, former legislator and former Coast housing czar for Haley Barbour.

Gerald's task is twofold – to make sure we're controlling our legal costs, while also aggressively pursuing economic development that will mean more jobs, more opportunities for our citizens and more revenue to provide more quality services.

At Gerald's suggestion, we placed \$4.1 million of our BP settlement into a perpetual Economic Development Security Fund, to provide revolving loans for city cash flow and to incent new businesses.

Right away, the City Council accepted my recommendation to use this fund to pay off \$2.7 million in old loans, saving interest and improving our financial statement.

We dare to dream big, and we are earnest in our effort. We have developed a plan for waterfront revitalization and economic development through aggressive pursuit of Tidelands funds and other state and federal monies.

We know that Biloxi is the engine driving the Tidelands train. We dare to point out that last year we sent \$6.9 million to Jackson but got only \$680,000 in return.

A fair investment of Tidelands funds in Biloxi will be used for large-scale waterfront development projects to expand tourism, create jobs AND produce more revenue to the state than Tidelands funds ever could.

In pursuit of that goal, we have submitted to the state and our legislative delegation Tidelands projects that total nearly \$15 million to. We want to:

- Expand Point Cadet Marina and the Biloxi Small Craft Harbor, putting all charter boats in the Small Craft Harbor to recreate an authentic fisherman's wharf experience.

- Create a new commercial harbor on Back Bay, where we will have boardwalks and pathways that connect restaurants, casinos and innovative water-related businesses along the bay.

- Create boardwalks and pavilions to serve as book ends for the row of restaurants on west beach, and, yes, build a boat ramp in west Biloxi.

We are a waterfront community, and our residents and visitors should enjoy the abundant beauty, spectacular vistas and recreational opportunities of our peninsula.

We can create more jobs and growth here in Biloxi and more opportunities for everyone, if the state reinvests in our waterfront. Now make no mistake. We are not looking to shortchange any of our neighboring cities.

Over the years Tidelands money generated here in Biloxi has built boat ramps and piers from Moss Point to Waveland.

I'm glad that we could help do that. Biloxi is the tourism leader not only on the Coast, but throughout the State. And we need to develop more and new amenities to expand and secure our tourism base and in an expanding, competitive marketplace. For too long some state leaders have thwarted the Coast through a divide and conquer strategy. They play one or more of us against each other.

To help change that, I have worked with my fellow Mayors to establish more regular forums, to bring together local government leaders from all three Coast counties to discuss common concerns to work together on a consensus agenda on key issues. Like high-speed, affordable broadband expansion and state BP economic damage monies.

Our collaboration has already gained the attention of State leaders and forged a new dynamic of cooperation and shared endeavor that strengthens our profile and reach.

I envision a day when anyone anywhere in Biloxi can turn on their computer and have instant, affordable, ultra-high speed access to the Internet.

We are aggressively pursuing that vision to assure the entire Mississippi Coast is able to compete with the rest of the country in high-tech applications that enhance every aspect of our lives.

Doctor appointments can be made from the comfort of your home. Businesses can download and upload information in seconds instead of minutes or hours. Public Safety can respond faster with more focused resources. Education can more easily transition from the classroom into the home.

This new Internet capacity will attract new businesses and expand those we have now. Biloxi and the Mississippi Gulf Coast will be recognized as a 21st Century community on the cusp of innovation and ingenuity.

Ten of our 15 cities and counties have signed up for the Gulf Coast Broadband Initiative.

Governor Bryant said \$15 million of state money was available, and our Initiative suggests we use it to build the middle mile of high speed connectivity.

Our plan is to own that fiber optic ring, and have private enterprise to take it the last mile, to our homes and businesses.

We MUST HAVE faster Internet connections in a timely, affordable and universal fashion. We will make sure there is no digital divide in our neighborhoods and businesses.

Another critical shared pursuit is for the \$750 million in Economic Damages that Mississippi is going to receive from the BP oil spill. With our colleagues across the Coast, we started an initiative that implores the State Legislature to commit at least 80% percent of that \$750 million to the local governments of the three Coastal counties. This is where the oil spill had a direct impact.

Of course we believe that 100% of that money should come to the Coast, but we are realists. Mississippi state government has a budget shortfall and other community leaders elsewhere want a share of those millions.

We stood together to tell the State that we're sympathetic to their position, but the lion's share should be invested on the Coast, because we have not yet been made whole.

AND redevelopment here will give a return on investment to the state that would be far greater than shoring up infrastructure in other areas of the state.

Here in Biloxi, we've also proposed more than \$100 million in waterfront projects that could and should be funded with BP and Restore Act funds. We have a unique opportunity to turn an environmental disaster into unprecedented waterfront redevelopment. We can spur economic growth while honoring our history as one of the nation's premier seafood producers.

We believe we are only asking for what is fair. And we know competition can be tough. For example: the Mississippi Department of Archives and History recently announced its grants for 2016. 22 grants were announced. 10 were awarded north of Jackson, totaling \$1.28 million. 11 were awarded for central Mississippi, for \$1.5 million, and one grant, for \$150,000, was awarded in the six coastal counties.

That's almost \$3 million in funding, and only \$150,000 for the entire Gulf Coast. And NONE for Biloxi, which sends millions to the State each year in gaming taxes and sales taxes.

We don't think it's fair when the Gulf Coast, so rich in history and culture, is overlooked, especially when we have the Saenger Theater in such dire need of rehabilitation and renovation.

One of our legislators tells us that there's always a lot of horse trading that goes on in Jackson. I don't mind that, as long as we get a few horses.

Now, what are we doing about it? We are pursuing other opportunities to help restore not just the Saenger, but all of our Downtown...including repopulation and retail expansion. And we're pursuing other available monies for various enhancements.

Last year, our Fire Department worked with our Federal Programs office to secure a million-dollar grant for a new ladder truck. This new truck replaced a 20-year old ladder truck. Our fire department also worked with Senator Cochran's office to obtain a \$1.2 million grant that pays for 12 firefighters for two years.

I've taken steps to ensure more of that.

We have formed an interdepartmental grants committee that meets weekly to identify and aggressively pursue public and private grants of every type. And we are succeeding.

Just like the Biloxi Public School District. Because of Biloxi's record of academic achievement, our school district was awarded a five-year, million-dollar grant from the Dept. of Defense.

This grant will allow our school leaders to provide further support for military students and families. This grant will enhance Science, Technology, Engineering and Math opportunities within the district.

The grant focuses on increasing military student achievement and support, all students in the district will benefit.

Let's not forget that in the past few years, our school district is home to four national blue ribbon schools, and we're recognized for our wide array of advanced placement classes and rich curriculum.

2015 was also a great year for Keesler Air Force Base. Keesler Medical Center ranked in the top 10% of the nation and was one of only 20 sites in the country to use new coronary stent technology.

In March, the Keesler Air Show and Open House hosted 170,000 visitors on the base, a huge success for our community. And more than 100 distinguished visitors and support staff arrived from bases all over the country to Keesler in March for the Senior Leader Conference at Keesler, which highlighted the premier installation and local community.

2016 promises to be another banner year. After years of inaction on a new Keesler entrance gate at Division Street, we brought together the stakeholders and focused on developing a unified plan. Today, the multi-million-dollar gate is finally in the pipeline, thanks to the help of our friends Senators Cochran and Wicker, and the State of Mississippi.

Keesler Medical Center also is in the midst of a 3-year, \$74 million renovation set for completion in 2017, and a Joint Land Use Study is helping determine solutions to land uses that may impact Keesler.

The Biloxi Housing Authority continues its great work. Before Katrina, the housing authority served 779 total families. The day after Katrina, it served about 202. Today, the housing authority serves about more than 1800 families.

We have 10 public housing sites encompassing about 1,140 units, and there are 701 Section 8 units, including those that serve veterans. I also want to thank the housing authority, the Biloxi VA and the homeless advocates who brought us positive nationwide attention for our work with homeless veterans.

I know we have more work to do in the area of homelessness. I have tackled that problem by identifying and soliciting outside developers interested in public-private partnerships to create more affordable housing, especially for our seniors.

In November, Coast Transit rolled out five new state of the art hybrid electric buses in Biloxi. These new buses are quiet, comfortable and are 20% more fuel efficient than a diesel bus. They are clean and green.

Coast Transit also installed solar powered bus stops and automated fare boxes that collect data. Coast Transit even unveiled an app to let customers know when they can expect their bus to be at any stop.

I appreciate the work being done by our city departments and employees. They've had another great year of accomplishment.

Our Biloxi Police Department last year had a 45 percent arrest rate on assigned felony cases, which is better than twice the national average and 15 percent over the past two years.

The handled the opening of MGM Park and a new nighttime Mardi Gras parade, the Neptune parade. Both of those events went off without a hitch.

At the same time, the department handled 126,000 calls for service, wrote 21,000 traffic tickets, responded to 2,846 accidents, and made 7,300 arrests. And only 3 percent of those arrests required force, which is a testament to the department's professionalism and training.

Our Biloxi Fire Department has seen a number of milestones in the past year.

For the first time in history, the fire department achieved a Class 3 rating, one of only 3 in the state. This means we have the highest professional standards and lower fire insurance costs for homes and businesses. In the past year, members of the fire department completed more than 31,000 hours of training.

In another first, the department has also reached the National Fire Prevention Association's mandate of having 15 firefighters on the scene of every first-alarm fire.

Despite all of these accomplishments, we still had a fire fatality last year, the first in several years.

As a result, our fire department launched "Your Attention to Fire Prevention." Firefighters installed more than a thousand new smoke detectors in 300 homes. We also made more than 4,000 fire safety inspections in the past year.

At the same time, the department responded to more than 6,400 calls for service, with nearly 4,300 of those calls being emergency medical calls.

I thank Chief Joe Boney and his group of firefighters who volunteer their time in communities that have seen their share of disaster.

We all know the importance of help after a major disaster. Our firefighters, on their own time, helped in the aftermath of Super Storm Sandy, they were in Oklahoma in the wake of deadly tornadoes, and a few weeks ago they were in central Mississippi, at the small Three Forks Community.

Let me tell you a quick story about the impact of this work.

At Chief Boney's suggestion, the city council and I donated a surplus fire truck to the Three Forks community, which lost everything. When our people drove the truck up to Three Forks, a local businessman up there told their chief that he would pay to have the Three Forks name put on the truck.

Their chief said, "Well, we're going to leave the name Biloxi on the front, and we're going to paint 'God Bless' above it."

This year, in July, Chief Boney and the Biloxi Fire Department will be hosting the 88th Annual conference of Southeastern Fire Chiefs. We'll have 500 chiefs in town. The subject of the conference will be something our people are very familiar with "Dealing with Disaster."

Our Community Development Department issued permits totaling more than \$86 million last year. That's \$57 million in commercial development and \$28 million in residential development. We are slowly regaining our pre-storm population.

You see work underway at the old Casino Magic site. The gutting of the old Santa Maria site. A new 119-room Hyatt Place going up west of Porter Avenue. A new Walmart Neighborhood Store opened on Pass Road and another is under construction on Popp's Ferry Road, near where the new Arbor Landing Apartments are being constructed.

We saw the Sal & Mookie's open at the Town Green, and three new restaurants, The Reef, Beach Bums and Baja Beach opened on west beach.

The state rating bureau says we have one of the best departments in the state, and the federal government says we are doing an outstanding job in managing our floodplain. This is vitally important to those 6,000 property owners in Biloxi who pay lower flood insurance rates because of our efforts.

We took major steps this year to help reduce the risk from future flooding.

All new construction in Biloxi must now be built to a 100-year flood event. This is a huge step from the 25-year standard we had operated under for generations. This means we are being responsible as we grow the city, and we'll be in a better position when the next storm comes.

Our Parks and Recreation Department has always prided itself on being innovative and all-inclusive.

In previous years, we touted the department's Challenger League for those with disabilities. We've talked about the disc golf course at Hiller Park. And now the hot new sport is Pickle Ball.

In the simplest terms, it's a mixture of tennis, badminton and ping pong. And it's popular among seniors. Last year, we converted a tennis court to Pickle Ball and we've seen 200 pickleballers, and we're expecting 300 this year.

I like to think our Parks and Recreation Department is about fun and innovation, but it's about numbers, too. And, like I like to say, numbers are my friend.

The department handled 958 special events at the Gruich, Snyder, Visitors and Civic Centers, at Hiller Park and at Point Cadet Plaza. There were more than 75,000 visits to the Snyder Center last year, 15,000 in the pool at the Natatorium, and 7,500 at the Snyder pool.

Our Seniors luncheons and special events saw more than 4,400 participants, and our Farmers Market observed its 40th year. We had more than 2,100 youngsters in our youth leagues, and more than 500 kids took city swim lessons, and another 200 were on our swim teams.

That's a lot of numbers and a lot of quality recreation time for our residents.

This year, our Parks and Recreation Department will again host the State Seniors Games. Let me tell you about what we've done with this program. It used to be held in Clinton and they'd attract 300 to 400 athletes. That's what we drew for our local Seniors Games.

Now that the State Games have been moved to Biloxi, and we're a qualifying site for the national games, we're drawing from 700 to 800 athletes from across the state, and as far away as California and Alaska. They know the name Biloxi and they know the quality of the experience they will have here.

Since I became Mayor I directed our Parks and Recreation and Public Works departments to clean up Highway 90.

Some people may question whose responsibility Highway 90 and its medians are, but in my view it's our front yard and needs to look like our front yard.

Our Public Works and Parks crews edged and shaped up the medians a couple times last year, and a few weeks ago we rented equipment to help us pick up sand that had been in parking bays and turning lanes for months.

Moving forward, our goal is to sit down with MDOT and Harrison County to see how we can work together to keep highway 90 looking the best it can.

We're going to do our part, but I think the taxpayers deserve a coordinated and well-planned team effort on Highway 90.

Our Public Works Department is also coordinating the widening of Popp's Ferry Road. You're going to see this final phase, from Cedar Lake eastward to D'Iberville open this summer, and it's going to be a milestone occasion for Popp's Ferry Road motorists. You'll see a road that looks more like a boulevard, with four traffic lanes separated by a 16-foot wide center median. It's going to be SAFE and efficient.

I know this may be cold comfort for those who live in east Biloxi, but our Public Works Department spent \$5 million to do paving work on 49 streets, made concrete repairs to seven more, patched 3,800 pot holes, and made 10,000 trash pickups along the way.

We saw hundreds of on-street parking spaces created in downtown Biloxi to meet the demand created by MGM Park, and we created more than five miles of bike lanes on major thoroughfares.

Another important aspect of our city services is our public harbors and marinas. Larry Sablich, who manages our harbors and marinas, likes to say he manages a floating apartment complex. And it's a big one, too.

Consider this: We have 86 commercial vessels and 214 recreational vessels. We're full at the commercial docks and at the Sherman Canaan Back Bay docks, and we're at 90 percent during the summer months at the small craft harbor. Point Cadet is about 50 percent, but that swells to nearly 70 percent during summer months. We actually have more than a dozen people who live on their boats year round.

I should also point out that Point Cadet Marina continues to be home to five big fishing tournaments that attract hundreds of people and boaters from across the Southeast.

Of course, even with all of these accomplishments, I drive the same roads that you do. For years, the city has talked about and worked on its massive \$355 million infrastructure project. And there's much more work to do, which means even more frustration.

For years, you heard the promises of new streets, new drainage and new sidewalks. Work has been completed in Sunkist, Ancient Oaks, and the Hollywood Hills subdivisions. Work has been completed in Eagle Point.

But the big story today, of course, is the state of the roads in east Biloxi. Let me repeat ... I drive the same streets as you do. I know the conditions of the roads. We have a contractor that came in and tore up 55 miles of streets at the outset of the project.

I have worked to bring more accountability from the contractor, provide more information to residents. We have even proposed temporary paving for some of the major thoroughfares.

Here's what I can tell you today. This work north of the CSX Railway in east Biloxi is a three-year contract, and it began in August of 2014. That means we have another 19 months to go. We are going to continue to stay on the contractor, to do everything we can legally do to keep these roads passable and this project moving forward.

Here's something else I can tell you. When this work moves to south of the CSX railway, it's going to be a whole new ballgame – MY ballgame.

We're not going to see a contractor come in and tear up 55 miles of streets. It's going to be controlled. It's going to be supervised, and it's going to be orderly. But make no mistake. It IS major construction. It will be inconvenient. I'm sure we will hear some complaining.

And speaking of complaining. Let me tell you about a group I have worked to meet with every single week since I became mayor. It's what I call the Woolmarket Planning Commission. It's a group of residents from that area who want to know what the city is going to do for them.

I am familiar with the issues in Woolmarket. I know that the city MUST live up to its promises. To address the needs, the City Council and I have commissioned a broad analysis of the water, sewer, drainage and fire needs in Woolmarket. We will have a master plan to move forward.

We are also working on issues in the meantime. Just last month, we moved forward on design work for major drainage improvements on the east side of Woolmarket road. This year, we expect to be moving forward with this 18-month construction project.

Finally, let me address another important issue – city finances. In fact, in nearly all cases, our taxes and fees are the lowest on the Coast and maybe the lowest of any city our size. But, as Mayor Holloway said in his later years in office, the surplus that we had from gaming is gone. We were healthy, not wealthy.

Our annual police and fire budget was about \$5 million the year before gaming. Today, 20 years later, the annual budget for police and fire is \$31 million, half of our \$58 million operating budget.

I'm proud of the job that our men and women in the police and fire departments. And the advances in Public Safety have not only benefitted our quality of life, but helped reduce our insurance costs, too.

I also like the idea of having the lowest water, sewer and garbage rates of any city around. But I also like to have sound financial management. The state tells us that we should not and cannot provide ANY service for a fee that does not cover the cost to the city. It costs us almost \$17 a month to pick up your garbage, and Biloxi was only charging you \$10 a month.

That's not good business. In addition, our credit rating will suffer and we'll spend hundreds of thousands of dollars in interest payment. That's why we need to adjust those rates. And we'll still have the lowest rates on the Coast.

Our goal is to provide you the services that you expect AND deserve, at an affordable rate.

These challenges that I have outlined for you here today are not things that we will accomplish overnight. They require planning, patience, political will. And yes, we have to remain aggressive.

One of the reasons I ran for mayor is to help this brand we call Biloxi. We built that brand over 300 years. It's known around the world. Hard work, hospitality and culture are our trademarks.

Our role is to protect and promote that brand – not only for new residents and new businesses, and new opportunities, but for our children and grandchildren, so they will enjoy the same Biloxi – a better Biloxi, the one we all love and call home.

God bless all of you and God bless Biloxi.

(Video presentation ends)

(Closing remarks from podium)

Thank you once again, as you saw, we are moving Biloxi forward. A few more things need to be mentioned.

I need your help. This Thursday, at 11:21 a.m., an AMTRAK passenger train will make a stop in Biloxi at the CTA Transit Center. It will be the inspection tour for possible passenger rail service from New Orleans, Jacksonville and beyond. I promised the Rail Service Committee a big 10 minute party and that they would be impressed with Biloxi. The head of Amtrak and the Governor will step off the train and we want them to see a big crowd.

In 1941, Keesler Field began operations. Today it is Keesler Air Force Base. And it's hard to describe what it means and how important Keesler is and has been to Biloxi, its citizens, and in fact to the Coast and this state. 75 years! You're going to be hearing all about the 75th anniversary of KAFB throughout this year.

Another exciting opportunity centers around the Merit Health Biloxi and Healthcare Industry Zone. It is designed to bring new medical services, businesses and housing development downtown. Merit is continuing to work through the process for a second hospital at Cedar Lake.

How about all that development at and around Popp's Ferry Road? The four lane expansion, Walmart, Arbor Apartments, and a new Biloxi junior high at Jam Lane is planned to open 2017.

There are two other important things that are in the pipeline. They tie into our past and our future. We're working with Commission Tom King and MDOT on the U.S. 90 pedestrian crossover from MGM Park. The design is going to be old Biloxi. It will bring you back and you're going to love it.

Today, we are working with the Skrmetta family and expect to re-establish daily Ship Island Excursions to and from Biloxi. Everyone remembers those boat rides on the Pan American Clipper and the Pan American. How much fun did you have on the beaches and surf on Ship Island? Another great experience for our visitors.

I want to say one more thing, that in Biloxi, we have the whole package: the people, places and things. We will continue to polish it and it will shine more than ever.

Thank you for being here today. Allow me to close by using the words of another song:

"I can see clearly now, the rain is gone.

"I can see all obstacles in my way.

"Gone are the cloudy skies. (and for Biloxi)

"It's going to be a bright, bright sun shinny day."

May God bless you and CONTINUE to bless Biloxi.