



CITY OF SAN ANTONIO

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Councilman Ron Nirenberg's 2014 State of District 8 Address

SAN ANTONIO (Feb. 15, 2014) – “Good evening. It is an honor to be here with you as your Councilman, and to tell you that District 8 is and will continue to be a place we are proud to call home, a place where - no matter your age, your profession, your politics, or your religion - you will find families and businesses like yours finding quality, safety, and prosperity.

On every measure from demographics to socioeconomic, District 8 is a microcosm of the city, a place as diverse as can be found in Texas. According to the latest Census, we are 43 percent Hispanic, 42 percent Anglo, 6 percent African American, 7 percent Asian. We have areas of majority upper-income, areas of majority lower-income, and all strata in between. We have a place of worship for every religion practiced in San Antonio. And we are growing twice as fast as the city as a whole - nearly 34 percent since the last Census.

In District 8, we have an opportunity to demonstrate that communities can come together despite their challenges and differences. We can demonstrate that local government still works for everyone. That, as a community, we thrive BECAUSE of our diversity, not in spite of it.

So this evening, I thank you for joining your neighbors, sharing your priorities, and helping us set an agenda for 2014. Now, we need your help to make it happen. Today, I want to share with you how local government is working for you, and how you can get involved.

First I'd like to acknowledge my two toughest constituents: my son Jonah and my wife Erika. I love you both. It is a personal challenge to inspire the same passion and respect for public service in Jonah, and though he doesn't quite understand the details of what we do, he always aptly measures the success of my day by asking, “Did you make our world better?”

In the last six months, our team has been working round-the-clock to meet the standard set by past leaders of District 8 – thank you also to my friend and former Councilwoman Bonnie Conner – and we’ve been doing the vital work of managing community issues. When you have a pothole on your street, a stray dog in your neighborhood, or graffiti on your property, your city government is here to help. My District 8 office has a goal with no exceptions: return every call, respond to every email and letter, and treat every neighbor like your own. In District 8, every voice will be heard and every issue will be addressed.

The challenges we face in District 8 are not ours to face alone. My first responsibility as your Councilman is to establish a capable and energetic team to respond to the specific and varied needs of our community. I’m pleased to report we have done just that.

Alice, Jackie, T.J., Eloy, Coda, Harjot, Chris and Noah: please stand and be recognized. On behalf of my neighbors in this district, I want to thank you for your service. They are working every weekday, every weekend to keep District 8 a great place to live and to work. They are problem solvers, and they are working tirelessly for you.

Together, we are working to make the District 8 office more accessible, present, and relevant in our community. Since the summer, we’ve hosted a family picnic at Bonnie Conner Park, a Back to School event at Brandeis High School, and a Holiday Party at the Firefighters Union Hall. We collected canned goods for the Food Bank during Thanksgiving, donated toys to Elf Louise, and participated in charitable events to bring disaster relief to the Philippines.

This summer, we created the District 8 Community Academy whose mission is “proactive constituent services”: if you can’t come to our office, our office will come to you. We organize volunteer block walks to let neighbors know about the issues we’re addressing in the city. We are gathering teams for on-call graffiti abatement. We are adding to our “District 8 Bandit Sign Brigade” to remove the nuisance signs that bring down the appearance of our neighborhoods. Through the Community Academy, my office listens to our neighbors, identifies challenges, and solves issues together.

Today, you’ve taken time to help organize priorities for our community. I hope, soon, you take time to attend one of our monthly D8 Dialogue town hall events or join one of our Citizens Advisory Councils that examine and advise my office on issues like energy policy, job creation, or neighborhood safety, among others.

Boosting participation throughout the District cannot happen without a corresponding commitment to increasing transparency. My office is leveraging technology to bring government closer to you through every media, from public access to social media. And I am excited to tell you that we’re leading a charge with city staff to broadcast the Wednesday City Council ‘B’ sessions. For local government

junkies, interested citizens, or those who just want to see more of Salon.com's seventh sexiest man, you're welcome.

Every resident should have access and input on how we balance growth while maintaining the quality of life we want and expect. And as you know, in District 8, that growth is rapidly unfolding.

This district is home to three Fortune 500 corporations, a university in pursuit of Tier One status, the hub of our region's health care industry, and world-class shopping districts like La Cantera and the Rim. We are an epicenter for economic development, and as your Councilman, I will push strategies that drive job creation, including conservative – but effective – use of incentives to bring new businesses and retain existing ones in our community. Return on investment is what matters, and that's why I will push an agenda that prioritizes job training and workforce development, small business opportunities, and business incubators like those that can be found in biotech and medical research right here in District 8. Job creation and workforce development is absolutely vital for our future here and throughout the city.

The challenge of growth is that, often, it is occurring faster than infrastructure can keep pace. "Balance" comes at a higher and higher premium. I've pushed for an approach in zoning, planning, and economic development that is pro-growth but protects cost of living and quality of life. This means making the right investments in infrastructure and working with businesses and residents to anticipate and mitigate the impacts of new development. Balance achieves the outcomes our community needs: new jobs, broad economic impact, quality neighborhoods, and respect for our natural resources.

This pertains to industrial, commercial, single family, and multi-family projects. And it means we will work with businesses to achieve quality development, observant of the fact that private property carries inherent rights for the owner and obligations to be a good neighbor in the community. In every case, we will work with stakeholders to mitigate impacts, including aesthetics, safety, environment, and traffic. So far, we've done exactly that.

On the top of everyone's list of growth issues to address in the city, and certainly here in District 8, is traffic. If you've spent any time on Wurzbach, DeZavala, Prue, Hausman, or most any other road that goes east-west in District 8, you know that traffic is a strike against us on this side of town. Two years ago, I sought this office in part because I wanted to do something about our growing traffic problem. Today, I am.

Recently, I was appointed to the Metropolitan Planning Organization, where we work with officials in surrounding counties, the city, the Regional Mobility Authority, and TxDOT to secure federal and state funding for improving traffic

across our region. Just last month, transportation officials joined together to announce investments in local road infrastructure that total \$825 million.

As a result, we will be conducting a thorough study of the Wurzbach corridor, which will soon take freeway traffic right into the heart of residential congestion around the Medical Center. I hope that solutions presented in this study can be applied to other problem areas throughout our district – hot spots like Prue Road, Dezavala, Huebner, and Babcock.

We will be constructing managed lanes on IH-10 between 1604 and Ralph Fair Road; these new lanes will provide guaranteed uncongested, priority travel for mass transit and emergency vehicles, a revenue source for construction and maintenance, and consumer choice for private commuters.

We are revising the Infrastructure Maintenance Program to identify streets that have been mired in disrepair far too long. I am collaborating with colleagues in neighboring districts to help improve intersections and traffic flow on streets that we share. And I am working with engineers at the city and in private practice to identify creative solutions to the most vexing residential bottlenecks that slow down your commute to work.

The unfortunate reality, however, is that it will take bond-size, multi-million dollar projects to truly make significant progress for many of our district roadways. Over the coming years, as we look toward the next bond program for the city in 2017, I am asking you to help identify our area's most critical road infrastructure needs. That process needs to start today.

This will take collaboration among you in this room to help prioritize limited resources on seemingly unlimited infrastructure need throughout the district. When we work together to set priorities, it allows us to focus our efforts and resources to make effective, long-lasting improvements rather than spreading resources too thin and ending up with a lot of change, but not a lot of improvement.

A good model of how we have done things right – and differently than in the past – is right here in the heart of District 8. The marquee project in the 2012 bond package is the roadway and drainage improvement on Hausman Road. At a total cost of \$62 million, the Hausman project is the largest voter-approved roadway improvement in city history. I want to thank my predecessor, former Councilman Reed Williams, for demonstrating leadership on this and for being my guest at the groundbreaking in December.

Despite the enormity of the project, Hausman will be completed on a much shorter timeline than conventional construction, and will include roadway expansion, dedicated turn lanes, hike and bike trails, and new utility and drainage infrastructure. With this one massive project, we are making significant progress to

address east-west connectivity in our District. If we do things right, we can celebrate more groundbreakings like this in the coming years.

It's important to note that Hausman Road would never have gotten done without the approval of voters and were it not for the success of our city's financial management. We recently learned that not only San Antonio is the lone only big city in the country with a Triple-A rating from all three credit agencies, it is the only Top 10 city with a Triple-A from ANY agency.

This is not merely window-dressing for our city. For instance, a two-notch decline in rating for San Antonio would have increased borrowing costs by the same amount as the entire road construction of Hausman. Were it not for San Antonio's strong financial position, a road like Hausman would remain undone for years. No bike lanes, no bridges, not one square inch of asphalt on one of most congested roadways in the city.

However, this year, we learned that new criteria by rating agencies have put San Antonio on notice, however, and we must respond. That is why, in the coming year, I will be advocating for an increase in saving to reserve funds, from 9 percent to 10 percent. This is a starting place, and with ever-stretched revenues, it will likely mean additional tough choices during our budget talks this summer.

On my fifth day on the job, the council met and was told that San Antonio faced a \$35 million budget shortfall in FY2014. We made some tough decisions and delayed others, and we will face similar challenges in the FY2015 budget. Though one-time fee increases and efficiency measures help ease the pain of core service cuts, they don't stop the bleeding an overall structural budget deficit.

We must address the fact that, despite cuts in services over the past several years, growth in revenues is not keeping pace with growth of expenses. As a community, we must engage the difficult conversation of which core services we are willing to live without, and which taxes and fees we are willing to pay.

One thing I learned in the FY14 budget process was the importance of reforming how we fund social service agencies. We currently have a pool of \$22 million in the Department of Human Services that goes to 60 delegate agencies performing a host of services, from homelessness transformation to AIDS prevention.

Rather than offer a strategic direction for the city, the current system encourages agencies to lobby council for funding. It's demeaning to the agencies themselves and often results in duplication of services paid for by taxpayers. In response, we are pursuing improvements to an anti-lobbying policy that add procedural integrity and efficiency to the process. We are well on the way to achieving these goals.

In addition, I believe we need to examine how city-owned properties are leased to third party businesses and organizations. There are good reasons to provide below-

market rate leases to quality organizations, especially those that provide important services to the public.

However, so-called “dollar leases” are revenue lost for the city at time when residents are being asked to pay more for less. We should consider adjusting those dollar leases so that good organizations still save money for delivering good services, but they are also paying a fair rent.

Fairness is an important concept, and this will drive one of the most important conversations for the future of San Antonio’s budget: how to fund and deliver public safety in our community in the years to come. Every year, City Manager Sheryl Sculley reports to the council on the city’s finances. We prioritize based on that fiscal reality. Public safety is the first and most fundamental priority for this city and for most any government entity. As such, it takes up two-thirds of the budget in San Antonio.

Crime has decreased overall, including violent crimes, in District 8. Fire service has improved response times and flexibility, with additions to serve northern reaches of District 8, a mobile command unit, and specially trained firefighters who can respond quickly to crises, including brush fires.

My office has worked with SAPD to identify hot spots for property crime, which has plagued our District 8 neighborhoods for years, and we are working with SAPD to stop illegal street racing, a dangerous crime that has taken the lives of too many young people here in D8. I have also pushed for the continued enhancement of SAFFE department operations that buoy neighborhood quality of life.

This year, we mourned the loss of Lauren Bump, who was murdered in one of our parks. I want to thank the police department for acting quickly and catching the suspect. Though this will not bring back Lauren, we will honor her memory by doing everything we can to deliver justice on this case and to work together to keep our park system safe for families to enjoy. Our parks are the crown jewel of the city, especially here in D8, and we cannot allow them to be held hostage by crime or by fear. Park safety will be a high priority for my office in the coming year.

With two premiere departments, we must work together to keep them that way. But as time wears on, old ways of funding public safety and honoring a commitment to our first responders have challenged the financial well-being of these departments nationwide. We have seen examples where unrealistic expectations and a refusal to work together have led to financial ruin of entire municipalities.

That won’t happen in San Antonio because we won’t let that happen in San Antonio. So the city has undertaken an effort to address increasing strain on our budget caused by medical costs that are rising two to three times faster than revenue growth.

Make no mistake, public safety officers deserve to be treated with respect and paid a fair wage with benefits to match. They put their lives on the line for us, not for the pay or the benefits, but because they are San Antonians who care about their neighbors, too.

I believe that the first and best way to keep first responders safe is to make sure public safety departments are fully staffed and fully equipped. We can't do that, and meet our other core service obligations in the meantime, without fiscal responsibility. We must make sure expenditures in any department don't get out-of-balance with other important services that make San Antonio livable, such as libraries, streets, and parks.

As the public safety operations and benefits are collectively bargained again this year, it will be important to note our fiscal reality: there is a structural budget deficit caused by rising costs and that MUST be addressed. Temperance and realism in those negotiations are vital for everyone. In the end, I am confident that – despite the temperature in the room – we will get this right as a community.

I was reminded of that when I saw the thousands of residents lining the streets to pay tribute to fallen Police Officer Bobby Deckard, as he was laid to rest earlier this year. He was a 31-year-old standout for this city, and his heroism left behind young children and a grieving widow. Yet, our community is safer because of him. Officer Deckard's sacrifice should be honored by all of us, and the four pillars of the department's vision, which Bobby upheld, should prevail: Integrity, Respect, Compassion, and Fairness.

Our public safety mission is also advanced here in District 8 by one of the city's largest and most important assets: the South Texas Medical Center. It employs 26 thousand workers and hosts more than five million patient visits annually. All told, the economic impact for San Antonio is some \$30 billion, and the impact to families is immeasurable. I want to thank our partners in the Medical Center, especially the San Antonio Medical Foundation, led by Jim Reed, and the Medical Center Alliance, led by Bill Balthrope.

I am working with both of them, as they revise the area's strategic plan, so that infrastructure investments by the city align with the Medical Center real estate and economic development activity, totaling in the billions over the next several years. Collaboration at this level will help us to realize an enormous opportunity for continued job creation in this sector.

While economic development at the Medical Center is important, ensuring that each employee, patient, and visitor travels safely is even more important. Since this summer, we have directed resources to street, sidewalk, and signage improvements. We have dropped the speed limit throughout the Medical Center, and we've bolstered police presence to make sure drivers slow down.

In December, we broke ground on a \$6.6 million project that will improve Hamilton Wolfe and Babcock, and the council approved a \$1 million project to improve the crosswalk and sidewalks at Merton Minter and Wurzbach. These projects leverage private funds and represent the quality collaboration that exists between the city and the Medical Center community, and that will continue on my watch.

The medical industry, centered in District 8, is advanced further by worthy public and private investments in advanced technology, biosciences, cancer therapy, regenerative medicine, and research. The world will take notice of that in December, as San Antonio hosts 2014 World Stem Cell Summit. I want to acknowledge the important efforts of Ann Stevens and BioMedSA, who have worked to bring that conference here and raise the profile of the medical and biosciences sector.

Our community of research and thought leaders in the medical community continues to grow, and it is no coincidence that there is a corresponding growth of the University of Texas at San Antonio and its pursuit of Tier One status. Already, UTSA confers more degrees than any other university in South Texas and contributes over \$1 billion to the local economy.

But like growth of the region in general, UTSA's growth has been accompanied by some pains, including a changing landscape nearby some of our well-established neighborhoods.

On the front end, my office will continue to work with landowners and builders to ensure new developments are high quality, and address the aesthetic, safety, traffic, and environmental concerns we share. On the back end, we are working with neighborhoods, SAPD, area businesses, and students themselves to ensure the character and quality of life in these areas is maintained.

We are also meeting with UTSA officials to discuss their master plan. For a university of this size, in proximity to neighborhoods like these, we need a student cultural zone around the university that helps provide a place for student-friendly activities but protects against the erosion of the family-friendly environment in adjacent neighborhoods and business corridors. I am ready to work on this, for the benefit of area residents, and for the benefit of current and prospective students.

Encouraging good growth like this is what will make our city healthy and our economy strong. However, we need to have a more comprehensive discussion about the basic element of our economy – and the one that can either support positive growth, or hinder it: water.

Recently the Dallas Federal Reserve Bank released a report that cited water scarcity as the biggest threat to economic security in Texas. Water is, and always will be, an economic issue for San Antonio. Our water supply comes primarily from the Edwards Aquifer, a quickly replenished and unfiltered underground source of water that is regulated by local, state and federal laws. Yet, with growth projections of our

region and persistent drought conditions, the need to secure new supplies, protect current ones, and diversify the system overall, has never been greater.

It is clear that every action that we undertake at the city – from building of transportation infrastructure to annexation to a push toward higher density residential communities – has an impact on the availability of water in the future, both for sustaining life and for sustaining our economic well-being.

This week, I filed a Council Consideration Request, directing city staff to assemble a report that compiles all policies, procedures, regulations, and standards that impact or are impacted by water supply, our ability to provide clean and abundant water for future generations. I look forward to the dialogue we will have with the entire community, and I am hopeful that the result will be that this and future councils will be able to act at every level to enhance water security. It is economic imperative.

The challenges for water supply, transportation, education, job growth, and so many others are daunting, and in District 8, the challenges are especially acute. However, my office is leading a charge to meet the demands of growth in San Antonio, to secure the quality of life you've come to expect, and to help us build a San Antonio we can be proud of.

Today, I am asking you to take these conversations beyond this room.

Be a part of our office's efforts to improve our district. Help us push forward the agenda we've built together. The next two years will be turbulent, at times controversial, but always moving forward. We are working to save the largest bat colony on earth from encroaching development in the Hill Country. We are finding ways to provide more efficient services to refugees that are brought to the city and into the heart of our district. We are working to ensure that the explosive growth in northwest San Antonio and throughout the city brings prosperity and bolsters quality of life. We are working hard for you and your family.

And while there will be debate, you can count on me to always ask three basic questions:

1. Is it fair?
2. Is it fiscally responsible?
3. Have we done our homework?

I thank you for the privilege to serve you and represent our many neighbors in District 8. Now, let's get to work."

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