



Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

Jim Gray
Mayor

Mayor Jim Gray
Inaugural Address
January 2, 2011

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Thank you all for coming out today!

Al Smith. My friend, thank you so much.

And Bill Goodman, and Wayne Bell, Isabel Yates and Judge Mary Noble,
my sister Julia, and this extraordinary musical talent that Peggy Stamps
has assembled.

And to our chair Linda Breathitt and everyone who has helped with this
event, thank you all so very much.

I look at this audience and I know, so many of you worked hard to get me
here.

Like the turtle who found himself on top of the fence post, I know I had a lot
of help getting up here!

Thank you.

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I join you here today as a fellow citizen of our great city of Lexington, a
shareholder in the future of this national treasure.

I join you today, too, with a very real understanding of the difficult
challenges we face.

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But I join you, also, with gratitude, sincerity, and humility,
for entrusting me with the role of guiding this great city, our home.

There is no greater honor in our democracy than a vote of public trust.

And like council members on this stage and elected officials past and
present in this room, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for placing
that trust in me.

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Mark Twain once said he'd never met a Kentuckian who wasn't on his way
home.

Mark Twain was surely talking about Lexington.

You know, a city is like our home. It's not just about streets and roads,
bricks and mortar.

We take pride in our home, we try to make our home more beautiful, more
warm and more inviting, the best place to live, the best place to raise a
family; we try to fill our homes with life and love and laughter.

I feel the same way about Lexington; Lexington is my home.

I am so proud to say that. Proud to say, "I love my home!"

"Come visit my home!"

"Come live here. Come start a business here. Come create some jobs
here."

Lexington is our home, and I will work with all of you to make it better;
for our families, for our children, for our friends, for tomorrow.

And I will say it to all who will hear me:

"Lexington is the place to be!"

"It's the best city in America!"

"Come on home to Lexington!"

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Yet, we know that today, Lexington grapples with some unprecedented
challenges.

Some of our major industries are weak, and our signature horse industry is
really struggling. We're faced with stubborn unemployment and distressed
business. Our city government is spending more that it takes in. We have
staggering pension obligations and spiraling health costs. We are burdened
by debt. Our people need jobs.

Some would say we are broke. Now, in that respect, a friend of mine Pete
Mahurin, who's here today from down home, tells a story of growing up on
a little farm in western Kentucky just after the Great Depression.

“My brother said we were broke,” Pete says, “but I just thought we were temporarily out of money.”

That just proves it’s all in how we look at it.

This is a city rich with assets, the most desirable City to live in Kentucky. And we can’t forget it.

We do have profound challenges, but we also have a responsibility, a shared duty as community leaders, employees, and as citizens, to band together.

To band together to make our *great* city even greater, especially when times are tough.

My own experience in life and in business reminds me that during times of adversity the human spirit triumphs; it does not fail us. I’m sure of Lexington's future, because I know we will band together, we will seize opportunity in our adversity, and we will emerge stronger on the other side. The good news is Lexington can do this...because Lexington has done it before.

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Standing here today as your new mayor, I am humbled by those who have come before us, by remarkable people who shaped and formed this city. In our modern history, many of those people are in this room today.

We stand upon their shoulders and this rich history. Five former mayors are here today, and I want to thank them, and say again today on behalf of a thankful city, how much we appreciate the dedicated service of Mayor Jim Newberry.

In 1832, Charleton Hunt was elected the first mayor of Lexington. Together with his friends - Henry Clay and Benjamin Gratz - Hunt sought to build a railroad from Lexington to Louisville. It was an extraordinary project at the time. They raised nearly \$1 million, an enormous sum at a time when the entire federal budget was only about \$50 million.

So, what were these fellows doing?

They were creating commerce; they were connecting Lexington to Louisville, the Ohio River, and the world beyond. They were expanding our markets and revolutionizing our city's economic potential. They imagined themselves as builders of a great city, not just a hamlet or a town, but a Great American City. They were demanding excellence in all they did.

They were risk-takers. They were building the city from within. They were lifting themselves up by their bootstraps. They were working together.

Now we should never pretend to be more than we are. But we should never fail to imagine all we can be.

How does this story inform us today?

Clay and Hunt imagined Lexington as a special place in America with unique assets—a unique identity.

They also imagined that our uniqueness was an asset which could be deployed to create economic prosperity. To create jobs, to build businesses, and to invent a better future for Lexington.

As we band together to make this great city even greater, their story has important lessons, universal lessons for what we need to do today: We must amplify what makes Lexington special.

We must create greater prosperity throughout our community.

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Today, we have a duty to announce what makes Lexington so special, to preserve and enhance what makes it authentic, unique, and original.

In other words, we have a duty to make our home more beautiful, more inviting, more welcoming and pleasant.

Historian Richard Wade wrote that Lexington in the early 1800's, "was not just the mercantile center of the west, but its social and cultural center as well."

He compared Lexington to a "Renaissance city of Italy."

Henry Clay and Charleton Hunt worked within that Renaissance Lexington, and today, we are on the path to being that Renaissance city again.

We have so many unique assets here and so much potential:

An extraordinary landscape.

A rich history.

Great schools and universities.

An exciting and entrepreneurial arts scene.

A great place to raise a family.

Smart and incredibly talented people.

We're not too big. We're not too small. We're just right!

And you know, too, that this event today announces far beyond our borders that Lexington's brand and spirit is all about fairness, inclusion, and real diversity, for all our citizens who deserve and aspire to a fair share of the American dream.

When we leverage all these qualities we can create an even better brand. And you can expect me to take an active role in promoting what makes Lexington special-- to visitors, to new businesses, and to our own citizens.

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As we're amplifying what makes Lexington special, we have a more important - and more urgent - duty to create greater prosperity throughout our community.

- We must find inventive ways to create jobs.
- We must help our people find jobs.
- We must attract new business to Lexington.
- We must help entrepreneurs get started.
- We must create new opportunities for the businesses we already have.

And you know what?

All these qualities which make us so special, so unique--our history, our place, our people, our talents--these are also our competitive advantages.

These are the very things that will help us win the global contest for business and for jobs.

At a time in history when cities are providing enormous gravitational pull for all age groups, we can grow in ways that encourage a sense of family, of neighborhood, of young and old together, of diversity in all its forms...a Norman Rockwell slice of America, Ecton Park on a baseball or jazz night...the commercial and cultural resurgence down on Jefferson Street, Southland, the East End, North Lime, and the Distillery District. And Festivals like Pralltown Days and don't forget the Dirt Bowl...and the opportunity to continue with all the energy created through the World Equestrian Games.

Our unique history and authentic places are connecting all over Lexington to create new economic opportunities, where industrious and imaginative citizens are taking once-underutilized properties and creating new homegrown communities of art, creativity, business, and culture.

There are new galleries, restaurants, new trails, and new shops which are unique to our town. These amenities are essential to keeping Lexington attractive and competitive.

This represents a movement-- what we can do throughout our city: Apply ingenuity and insight and teamwork, and leverage Lexington's uniqueness, to create new, one-of-a-kind economic opportunities, to create competitive advantage, to create prosperity for our city.

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Finally, we have a duty to build a better, smarter, and more accountable government. We will elevate the role and results for preservation, planning, and economic innovation and development. We need our government to be efficient and accountable...like a good business.

And, in saying that, I want to also say I believe our city's employees are part of the solution, not the problem. Our employees signed up for public service. They really want to do the right things, but are all-too-often hamstrung by inefficient systems that don't work. I've promised our employees seats at the table, even when the decisions are tough ones for them and everyone around the table.

I've moved my office to an open space on the first floor of city hall, because it works. It's a proven path to open and productive work. It reflects my own passion for good management, and the opportunities we have to rethink how all of city government can serve Lexington better.

I have spent my life in business: running a business, branding a business, growing a business. And when I look at the business of our city, I know we need to do a lot of things differently.

Today I wanted to lay out my most important priorities:

First, announcing what makes Lexington special.

- Our uniqueness.
- Our authenticity.

Second, creating greater economic prosperity throughout our community.

- Jobs.
- Healthier businesses.
- Competitive advantage.

And third, applying sound business principles to the practice of government.

- Efficiency.
- Accountability.

Today, I wanted to talk about these priorities, and about why they're important. And, I wanted to give you just a taste of our approach.

In the next two weeks, our transition reports will be completed, where more than eighty citizens have worked together to examine both our internal operations and how we Build a Great City. This has been a unique transition approach, where both operations and strategic visioning are engaged. Between now and my State of the Merged Government Address on January 25, recommendations of from the Transition Work teams will be shared.

Like many of you I'm fortunate to have traveled some and worked throughout the world. I've seen great companies, and seen failing ones. I've visited some great cities, and some that were slipping. Out of all these places and like so many of you, Lexington is the City I chose to live in.

Lexington is my home. Lexington is a top notch place, a great place. Sure we can do better...indeed in these times we **must** do better.

So let me share my vision simply and clearly: let's make Lexington one of the greatest cities in America, one of the greatest places in the world.

Will you join me in that effort?

Will you work to make our city better?

Will you band together to help us make the tough choices, to face the tough challenges?

Will you become an ambassador for our city? Will you tell anyone who will listen, "I'm from Lexington!"

"I love Lexington!"

"Here's what makes us special..."

"It's a great place to live and work, to raise a family, to start a business."

"Hey, check us out!"

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I said when I started that surely one of the greatest honors a person can receive is a vote of confidence from his friends. As I look out at you all, I see friends and familiar faces. People I've worked with and done business with, people who I have worked with on community projects--at church gatherings and neighborhood meetings.

And, I see my family. Today, like each one of my colleagues on the council, I am reminded of what Lexington has meant for our families. To my mother, to my brothers and sisters and their families. This town has been the greatest home for us; the greatest home for me.

Lexington is my home.

It is your home.

It is our home.

And I pledge to you today that I will work harder than ever to make our home the very best it can be.

I thank you, and God bless you each and every one.

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