

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS



Peoria, Illinois



Mayor Jim Ardis
January 25, 2006
Holiday Inn—City Center



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I want to thank the Chamber for the opportunity to speak today on the state of our city as we begin 2006.

The tradition of giving an annual state of the city speech is taken from the federal level, where presidents have given state of the union messages since the days of George Washington. Tradition has it that the president always says that the state of the union is strong no matter what the circumstances. Today I stand before you to say that the state of the city of Peoria is strong, but I say this not because of tradition. Rather, I say this because I truly believe that Peoria and central Illinois are aggressively moving into the future, and that our best days lie ahead. But we also have some challenges that we need to address to ensure that we can realize the promise before us in order to make our city even stronger.

This afternoon, I will try to provide a high-level overview of what has led me to have this degree of optimism about our city, including recent accomplishments since I have taken office, continuing progress on ongoing initiatives, and some new proposals I will bring forth in the new year to address the challenges and continue our momentum.

Before I get into this, though, it's important to pause and give credit to those I have the privilege to serve and work with to make Peoria the City we all know it can be.

- I'd like to ask my fellow council members to please stand and be acknowledged
- I'd also like to recognize our City Manager, Randy Oliver, who has the task of implementing the policies and direction given him by the City Council
- I would also like to recognize our City Clerk Mary Haynes, City Treasurer Reg Willis and other department heads who are leaders in their fields and don't often receive their due credit.
- And I also need to give overdue credit to the hundreds of city employees who keep our community moving forward every day.
- We couldn't do what we're doing without a complete, focused team effort and on behalf of all Peorians I sincerely thank you all for your commitment.

In some ways, it seems like just yesterday that I was standing in the council chambers being sworn in as Peoria's 47th Mayor. Then again, sometimes those nearly 9 months seem like 9 years. I'm sure you can all relate to that feeling. My goal at the swearing-in was to hit the ground running by offering specific proposals designed to address the most critical issues the city is facing, most specifically in what I believe are the four pillars of community vitality: Education, Economic Development, Public Safety, and a Philosophy of Teamwork. I'm happy to say that significant progress on those initiatives has already been made, and it is paying off for the citizens of Peoria.

A major focus has been placed on my commitment to stronger, closer and more proactive relationships with area school **districts**....plural. *For the first time*, actions are speaking louder than words, and we are laying the foundation for

greater city-schools cooperation to improve education in the Peoria area. Several meetings have been held involving administrators and board members from all of our local school districts, addressing issues that all have in common. These individuals — representing both public and private schools — have pledged to continue meeting, and the relationships between them will grow stronger because of their common belief in the importance of a strong educational community, and because we are now working together to act upon our shared commitment to providing the best education for all children in central Illinois, regardless of city or street address. I would like to thank Councilman Grayeb and Dr. Bill Collier for their assistance in these efforts.

Of particular note is our keen interest in partnering with the City of Peoria public schools to leverage our common interests and resources to further the goals of this great community. In that regard, I applaud District 150's efforts to get its fiscal house in order, and I support their initiative to re-invest in our community's infrastructure with new schools. Superintendent Hinton and I are in close contact on issues of mutual importance. I applaud him and his administrative team, as well as President Alicia Butler and the entire school board for their tireless efforts to bring District 150 back to a level of prominence in the Illinois public school system.

One specific example of improved collaboration and communication is the establishment of the truancy assessment center put together by the city and district 150. The objective of the Truancy Assessment Center is to promote student success through daily attendance at school, and to decrease juvenile daytime crime, through the collaborative efforts of the City of Peoria, Peoria Public Schools and local social service agencies. This unprecedented collaboration has brought a spirit

of teamwork to our city's school system, which will pay off both in terms of us better preparing our youth for the road ahead of them, and as a key point for our economic development initiatives.

Another key to stimulating economic development is streamlining the process to start and grow businesses in our city. At my installation ceremony, I announced the creation of a task force to examine the city regulatory structure and propose ways to reduce the regulatory burden in order to make Peoria more competitive and business-friendly. The task force will present their findings and make recommendations to the council in the next few weeks, and I am confident that the proposed improvements and the areas identified for further attention will be a strong first step in making Peoria more of a partner in stimulating the birth of new businesses, and the expansion of companies — like those represented here today — that have already invested in our community.

As Mayor, I participated in an expansive reorganization of the Economic Development Council ---- creating the first organizational change of that group in 30 years. The relationship between the City of Peoria Economic Development Department and the EDC has grown and will continue to grow as our relationship continues to develop and mature. I am confident that the close cooperation of these two organizations will lead to a better future for the community. It is of critical importance that we take our community into the knowledge economy, and doing so will require heavy reliance on the ability of our own Economic Development Department to partner with the EDC and other regional entities to fully amplify all this great community has to offer — a point that I will comment on in more detail in just a few moments.

I noted that quality education and streamlined regulatory requirements are two fundamental pillars that support vital, thriving communities. The third pillar is public safety. In line with a commitment I made at the start of my term as Mayor, the formation of a group to proactively address crime issues has both taken shape and made strong first steps forward. *For the first time*, a diverse group of community leaders with a mutual and vested interest in crime reduction are meeting to focus on the *causes* of crime and proposing workable solutions to reduce it.

Among the individuals serving on the Mayor's crime group are Peoria Police Chief Steve Settingsgaard, Peoria County Sheriff Mike McCoy, Tate Chambers from the U.S. attorney's office, School Superintendent Ken Hinton, Chief Judge John Barra, Judge Steve Kouri, Councilman Eric Turner, and representatives from our local FBI and MEG offices. Some of the strategies we are putting in place include:

- Fast-tracking repeat offenders through the court system
- Community service hours for municipal ordinance violations, and
- Using new technology in high crime areas. One example of this is the council recently budgeting \$150,000 towards utilization of new camera technology in high crime areas in 2006.

During the first six months of last year, Violent Crime in Peoria increased 13%. Responding to this problem, the Police Department moved to aggressively address all street related violations whether criminal or ordinance related in nature. With the new initiatives, violent crimes and crimes against property dropped significantly in the second half of the year. The police department placed a renewed emphasis on improving the quality of life in our neighborhoods and enforcement of the various Quality of Life ordinances rose by 49%. After getting

our Police Department to full budgeted strength an analysis of our Uniform Patrol allocation was initiated in the 2nd half of 2005. The results of that study have spurred a re-deployment of officers, assigning more patrol resources to the critical hours with high call load demand. We believe that our increased efforts will continue to have a positive impact in 2006.

An important element I want to emphasize regarding our crime fighting efforts in Peoria is the leadership and creative energy being provided by our Police Chief, Steve Settingsgaard. Chief Settingsgaard has his new command team in place and I can assure you that the Chief, the City Council, the Mayors crime group and others interested in public safety, will leave no stone unturned in the search for ways to reduce crime and make Peoria the model of a Safe Community.

I hope you share the encouragement I feel because of the great progress we've made in a short time on the first three pillars. However, none of this progress would be possible without the fourth pillar — a Philosophy of Teamwork. If there was one overarching reason that I ran for Mayor, it was my firm belief that so much more could be accomplished if we could put aside petty bickering and posturing, and develop a new attitude of inclusion, mutual respect and collaboration. Indeed, the examples I've already given illustrate how much can be accomplished when individuals commit themselves as a team to a cause higher than themselves. And these are just the tip of the iceberg — other examples of this dynamic new approach include:

1. The growth of our City — *literally*. The council recently annexed over 700 acres into the city of Peoria, which is the largest annexation in over 40 years. Not enough attention has been given to the significance of this growth.

Millions of private dollars will be invested in sewers, land acquisition and new development. I commend Councilman Pat Nichting for his inclusive and collaborative leadership on this nearly 2-year project that brought together many land owners and developers, our State Representatives, the Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources, Peoria County, the Sanitary District, Peoria Park District and many City of Peoria departments, and in particular Planning Director Pat Landes. Six subdivisions will be developed over the next 15-17 years consisting of over 1,400 dwelling units. A conservative estimate places the market value at nearly half a billion dollars. Our new State Award Winning stream buffer ordinance will have a positive impact on this development, and the area will include open spaces totaling almost 50 acres, along with a biking/walking trail throughout the project.

2. The City Council being able to balance the budget without tax increases or layoffs. This is significant for maintaining our economic competitiveness, and is especially noteworthy because other taxing bodies raised their taxes. The council's belief is that a growing economy and continued good stewardship of tax dollars will enable the city to continue to balance the budget without placing additional burdens on citizens. This is perhaps the most tangible example of a new, real sense in the community that there is more focused, meaningful discussion beginning to take place on issues important to the community. People in our community want focused debate on the issues, not personal attacks. The City Council has made outstanding progress at turning down the rhetorical heat and engaging in intelligent, substantive debate. The improved tone will help in the coming year, especially as we enter into strategic planning sessions in the first quarter.
3. For the first time, elected officials from all local area governments, the city, the county, school districts, park district ---all met in an informal setting,

initially just to get acquainted. Just imagine it — no agenda, no microphones, no speeches. Just an opportunity to learn more about each other and utilize the opportunity as a building block to better relationships.

“Connections” is the theme of these continuing get-togethers, and City Clerk Mary Haynes earns and deserves thanks for developing the project.

4. I’ve also been involved with the Heart of Illinois Mayor’s association and the Illinois River Valley Council of Governments. Mayors and other leaders from the largest cities to the smallest towns in the area are getting together and I can tell you that there is a new spirit of cooperation emerging --- a spirit that reflects our desire to set aside the past and work together toward a prosperous future through cooperation and dialogue.
5. I am also very optimistic about another network of communications I’ve been a part of bringing about, and it involves meetings with Mayors along the Route I-74 corridor. We have met informally and discussed issues of mutual interest and plan to continue meeting and expand the discussion with Mayors of Champaign and Urbana and eventually Galesburg, Monmouth and down to Decatur and Springfield.
6. I hosted a conference on terrorism earlier this month and invited area mayors to attend. The Mayors of Springfield, Bloomington, Normal, East Peoria, West Peoria and Bartonville were all in attendance. We want to broaden our outreach to other cities and explore ways we can achieve common goals involving economic development, transportation, public safety and other key issues.
7. And my final example of new teamwork in action is none other than the progress in relations between the Chamber of Commerce and the City Council. For too many years, the Council and Chamber have engaged in limited dialogue. I have made an effort to change that relationship. Now, the

council is partnering with the Chamber to conduct meetings with a focus on relevant business issues in each council district. These meetings help to build a stronger relationship and better understanding between government and business. You can look forward to a continuation of these efforts in 2006.

As I said at the outset, I am optimistic and more hopeful than I've ever been about our community, and the exciting and important new initiatives I have just outlined are a big reason why. However, in addition to these developments, it's also important that we recognize and continue to support the extraordinary aspects of, and activities in our community that began before I was elected Mayor, but that continue on more strongly than ever.

We have a lot of good things happening here!

Of course, it's nice to see some of our dreams beginning to take shape after many years of planning and hard work by so many.....Central Illinois Regional Museum, CATERPILLAR Visitor's Center, the Riverfront, Ren-Park, the Zoo and many others. There are large private projects taking place as well, not the least of which is OSF's quarter-billion dollar expansion on their downtown campus. And, we're finally going to see growth and development on the University of Illinois School of Medicine campus. Thank you to all who worked so hard to make this happen.

Equally exciting are the wide variety of economic development projects and opportunities that will be center stage during 2006. The economic development

opportunities before our community have never been more promising. Think about it:

- The Heart of Illinois Port District, or TransPORT. Even after serving in city government for almost 7 years, I didn't realize the significance of port activity in the region. For example, more than 60 million tons of freight flow in and out of the area annually and the Peoria region is rated a 5-star logistic-friendly region. TransPORT allows a six county region to leverage existing transportation resources to grow and attract new business to the area.
- Next is **Peoria NEXT**. Most people are not aware that nearly one BILLION dollars are invested in research and development in the Peoria area each year. Peoria NEXT was created to facilitate this type of research activity. I support and strongly encourage the work of Peoria NEXT. The Peoria NEXT Innovation Center will serve as a key component for a new economic development model based on innovation and technology commercialization. The Peoria economy is on the cusp of historic change. The Innovation Center will serve as a catalyst for future development on West Main Street and will function as the anchor of the area now know as Renaissance Park.
- Third is Peoria Wireless. One hundred years ago, leaders in this community looked to bring water and electricity to the Peoria area as an essential component of basic infrastructure. Today, our community is looking to bring advanced communication technologies to the Peoria area in the same way. The creation of a wireless Peoria will put our area on the map as an advanced technology community. Whether it is through private industry or public—private partnerships, I am confident that Peoria will engage in this type of activity. Currently the Chamber of Commerce is working with area technology and business leaders to analyze the possibility of bringing

wireless internet to the Peoria area. I believe you will see important developments on this front this year.

If there's one thing I hope you take away from today, it's that there truly is an energetic new spirit developing in our city. What I've described thus far is only a small part of the picture, and while it might seem like a lot to bite off for a community that has been in need of stimulus, I'd remind you that a large part of this has occurred in just the nine short months since I took office. So, my belief is that what I've described is just a start and, therefore, in the coming weeks I will propose:

- A city-school liaison to foster better communications and collaboration. I initially proposed this role in my Mayoral campaign, and I remain convinced that such a role would accelerate the progress we've begun. In addition to facilitating the dialogue between our school districts and the city, this person would also work with our state and federal legislators to identify possible grant-funding opportunities for area schools and the city. For instance, one issue the liaison could begin working on is lobbying for the passage of the state school construction grant program. The potential for up to \$120 million in new construction would create jobs in our city while also greatly improving an infrastructure in which one out of every two primary- and middle-schools in Peoria was built prior to the Great Depression. I've examined models from other cities such as Springfield and Rockford and have found that they provide a solid template for us to build upon. Likewise, the liaison could stress the importance of a successful referendum in March by District 323 for their new schools. I fully support their efforts and see that referendum passing with strong community support. I will bring more information on this to the council and discuss this opportunity to put our

money where our mouth is when it comes to showing how important schools are to a successful city. I am hopeful we can establish this position and work with the school district and its many other community partners to see up to seven new community-schools dot the city landscape in the near future.

- As I discussed last Spring, I am proposing the appointment of a person to head-up and coordinate clean-up efforts in our City. A “Garbage CZAR” if you will. Or maybe a “Trash Master”, a “Litter Lama”, or a “Wizard of Waste”. Simply put, the garbage and litter in our city is unacceptable. Taking pride in our city block by block is the foundation of all the efforts we’re undertaking. Waste Management and PDC, along with Sue Dewey and Peoria City Beautiful and our Public Works Department stand waiting to assist. There are over 450 of you out there today. I’m asking one or several of you to contact me with a sincere desire to spearhead a focused drive to clean up our streets and neighborhoods... starting THIS YEAR...starting NOW.
- Summer jobs for our kids. Especially our disadvantaged kids. I am beginning work on a program, based on a recommendation from Councilman Bill Spears, that will encourage you — our area businesses — to hire teens for summer jobs. It is an idea that has had a lot of success under Mayor Daley in Chicago, and it instills in teens the proper discipline and work habits necessary for future success in the job market. Sometimes, all it takes for kids to succeed is a chance. And I want to help give them that chance in cooperation with the business community. As business people, no one knows better than you the importance of having a well-trained and qualified workforce. This program won’t solve all our problems, but it will be a start. Councilman Spears and I will be announcing more details on the program soon.

- Another plan I will pursue this year is one we may call the “Peoria Promise”. It is based on a similar successful program in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The premise is this: Any student graduating from Peoria’s Public Schools will be eligible for a scholarship to any Public University or College in Illinois. Maybe it will give those graduating in the top 10% of their class a chance to attend Bradley. How does it work? The scholarships would be available to anyone who has been in the Public Schools at least four years at the time of graduation. The amounts are dispensed on a sliding scale, with those who have been enrolled since kindergarten eligible for one hundred percent of their tuition costs. How will it be funded? Through anonymous donors....like in Kalamazoo. What will be the impact? I believe that you will see colleges and universities competing for our students. And, I also believe that you will see the program result in more businesses, jobs and homebuyers being attracted to our area, creating the need for more schools and good teachers. Is this pie-in-the-sky? Am I being unrealistic? Can Peoria do this? Can we duplicate Kalamazoo’s success, where the benefactors underwriting the scholarships have promised funding for at least the next 13 graduating classes? Can we make this happen ---right here in Peoria? You tell me. I believe we can and I invite anybody in this room with an interest to contact me.

That’s an aggressive agenda. But it’s one that I think is vital to keeping positive momentum in Peoria and making 2006 a better year than 2005 and many years before that. I want to take advantage of the opportunity here today in front of this large group of distinguished leaders and people who care so much about our community, to issue a challenge.

For our city to prosper, we can't continue to have two Peoria's --- one with sparkling new buildings and multi-million dollar investments and the other still struggling to meet basic needs. Regardless of background or political philosophy, we all know that our city and region cannot achieve our dreams without helping those whose talents and skills are not being utilized. There is so much more that can be done. We need you to help create.....

- Opportunities to learn, through mentoring.
- Opportunities to work through summer jobs.
- Opportunities to participate by bringing new volunteers into your organizations to learn about what it is you do

A moment ago I gave some very specific ideas that are already in the early stages of planning, but that need some additional leadership to help drive the necessary change. You can start there. Or I'm sure there are scores of other ideas and opportunities out there in this very room and beyond that could have equal or even greater impact — IF you are willing to join the team that has begun truly moving this city forward at long last.

Before I end, a few sincere thank-yous need to be given. On behalf of the City Council, thank you to the citizens of Peoria for the opportunity to serve this great city. On behalf of me as Mayor, thank you to the Chamber and all its business partners for the investment you've made in Peoria. Thank you to CATERPILLAR. Where would this city be without their leadership, vision and community support? CATERPILLAR sets the example for all businesses in this community to follow.

You know, we don't need millions of dollars from you. But we do need **every single one of you** to participate. EVERY SINGLE ONE. I ask you to reflect on

what you're doing. How can you improve on it? Ask yourselves that in your weekly management meetings.

- We need mentors in our schools. Will your company or your department adopt-a-classroom and help kids learn to read, improve their computer skills or master algebra?
- Will you take the initiative to adopt-a-block near your business or in your neighborhood to promote my litter initiative?
- Will you come forward with an idea or proposal that hasn't been mentioned this afternoon and help make it happen in Peoria?
- Will you be a part of the TEAM that we need to make Peoria "THE" premier city in the Midwest? I hope the answer is yes.

Thank you for your attention and have an outstanding afternoon.