



STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Mayor Al Suarez

Tuesday, February 16, 2010

Good evening Everyone! City Council-Members, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentleman,

IT IS MY HONOR AND PRIVILEGE TO DELIVER, THE STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS. It is also a distinct honor to be Mayor this evening and deliver this address on the year before our 50th anniversary. Let me take a moment to acknowledge our key public officials that have contributed to making CONVERSE a better place to Live:

- **US Congressman Henry Cuellar, District 28** - assisted us by securing millions in federal funding from President Barak Obama's – American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 “stimulus package.” Funding that will be used to Expand FM 1604. We sincerely appreciate Congressman Cuellar for keeping our city at heart when it comes to funding and support for local community improvements.
- **State Senator Judith Zaffirini, District 21** – was very instrumental in negotiating with the Texas Department of Transportation Commission, which governs TxDOT. Her influence and relationship with this state agency was extremely helpful in ensuring that the Federal Funding secured by Congressman Cuellar was allocated specifically for the FM 1604 Expansion Project. A personal thanks to State Senator Zaffirini.
- **State Representative Joe Farias, District 118** – was the first representative to bring state government to Converse. His office is located next to our library and has made our city a “one-stop shop,” providing NE Bexar county

citizens with hands on assistance with state issues. We are grateful to Representative Farias for his continued presence and active support to the city of Converse and the entire metrocom.

- **State Representative Roland Gutierrez, District 119** – Recently established a joint office with Representative Farias. He also provides NE Bexar county citizens with hands on assistance with addressing personal and state issues. We are also grateful to Representative Gutierrez for his support.
- **County Commissioner Tommy Adkisson, Precinct 4** – a personal friend, statesman and long-time advocate for the city of Converse. He has faithfully served as our county commissioner for many years. He has brought thousands of dollars, through Community Development Block Grants to assist Converse with infrastructure, drainage, and economic development. In addition, he advocated on our behalf, as a member of the SA/Bexar Metropolitan Planning Organization, to secure funding for the expansion of both Kitty Hawk road and FM 1604. A sincere thanks to Commissioner Adkisson for his active and hands on support to the city of converse and metrocom.
- **Judson Superintendant Dr. Willis Mackey & School Board Trustees** – It has been a privilege to work closely with Dr. Mackey. Under his leadership, we now have a new Converse Elementary school and very soon, a new Judson High School, despite the numerous challenges. I would also like to commend Dr. Mackey for reaching out to the community and allowing the citizens to participate in the development of the new JISD Strategic Plan. My personal thanks to Councilman John Shadron & Councilwoman Renee Paschall for their active involvement with the JISD Strategic Planning process. The professional leadership of this School Board has provided this community with a unique educational approach, the recent establishment of the Judson Early College Academy. This new High School will provide our children (upon graduation) with a high school diploma and an Associates college degree.....free of charge.

I'm humbled by the privilege to have been re-elected to serve as the Mayor of Converse. As I stand before you this evening, I'd be remised not to thank all of my fellow citizens for the trust and fidelity you have placed in the Council and me to govern our city with fairness and respect. It is in that spirit that I've compiled a brief summary of our many accomplishments and a progressive list of future goals that will propel our city to even more prominence within the Northeast METRCOM.

Let's start by talking about what we've done. We've had tremendous success with our **INFRASTRUCTURE**. Under the leadership of our city manager and Street Director we've had excellent success with our Tier 1 and Tier 2 Street initiatives. We've completed the drainage work on Toepperwein Road and South Seguin road. And thanks to the Judson ISD, and our City Council, together we were able to secure funding for drainage & road improvements to Schaeffer Road. And because of the close partnership with this school district, working together to serve this city, we were able to fund two additional street projects: Rocket Lane & Thornton Lane. The enormous undertaking of widening Kitty Hawk road is complete and we've received numerous accolades from constituents on how it has improved their commute and reduced traffic congestions. The new streetlights currently under construction will also be an asset to the entire community. And thanks to the EDC for partnering with the city to complete the renovations to the Gibbs-sprawl Railroad Bridge. One final major road project that is starting in mid-March is the FM1604 Roadway Expansion Project that is being funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 "stimulus package." This will include widening FM1604 from two to four lanes from FM 78 to Graytown Road (just past Autumn Run) and installing additional traffic lights at Hanover Cove and Miramar subdivisions.

Upon completion of the FM 1604 Roadway Expansion by TxDOT, Randolph Air Force Base has projected a new security entry gate off FM 1604. These projects will significantly increase the appeal to developers and bring future business developments to Converse. We will continue with the Tier I & Tier II Street Maintenance plan implemented in 2007. The Council will enhance the efforts of the Economic Development Corporation's acquisitions to move the Toepperwein Road Realignment Project to final completion.

We will continue our efforts to have **Responsible Commercial & Residential Economic Growth** and move our city in a direction that will facilitate this in a positive manner. We still have obstacles to overcome before all of the necessary improvements are realized, but we are well on our way. We must continue to explore the possibilities of expansion through annexation. In the weeks and months to come, the Council will work with the Economic Development Corporation to facilitate a directed focus on commercial growth with an overall emphasis on expanding our mix use developments. We will look at ways of modifying the Smart Code to give developers more flexibility to build in Converse. And even with an emphasis on commercial growth, we will take all the necessary steps to preserve the historic values and properties of Converse. We will continue to look at ways to get construction started on the retail aspect of Converse Town Square. And explore the unique possibilities of “cultural commerce.” “Cultural commerce,” embraces and utilizes the resources and dynamics of a small community like Converse. Many of these future challenges with responsible growth will be realized with the update to our **City’s Master Plan**. The Master Plan is a 5 to 10 year outline of the city’s Short and Long term Visionary Goals. Some possibilities we want to aspire are building a Community Center for events and entertainment, expanding our Library Services, obtaining a Hotel, and bringing more quality family restaurants. Together, in conjunction with our Master Plan, we must develop a “Strategic Plan” to facilitate our short & long term goals.

I am pleased to report that for the last three years the City of Converse has had a **Balanced Budget**. Our current tax rate is similar to that of 1999 of 51 cents and today it is 51.5 cents. We also raised the Homestead Tax Exemption to \$10,000 for our senior citizens 65 & over to provide immediate relief. As you can see, the Council & City Staff are doing an excellent job of conserving and expending the citizens’ tax dollars. In other words, we are **FISCALLY RESPONSIBLE!**

We did not have to downsize, layoff, or reduce operating hours to meet our payroll obligations. In fact, our diligent and conservative spending has resulted in the city being able to purchase additional Police & Fire emergency services equipment.

With respect to **Employee Compensation**, we progressed significantly last year by raising salaries (for the 3rd consecutive year) and continuing our

salary increases to help reach a competitive status for all employees. We continue to be grateful for the tremendous work our city staff performs because it has successfully elevated our city into a great place to live and work.

Enough cannot be said about the excellent work our city provides with respect to **Basic Quality Services**. The **Police department** has provided outstanding services to our community by maintaining a low crime rate and taking a proactive approach to crime prevention. We are grateful for the selfless dedication of our Police Officers, who put their lives on the line every single day to protect and serve our citizens. We will continue to address matters dealing with manpower, equipment, and safety.

Thanks to **Municipal Court Judge Robert Ramirez** and the Court Staff for their outstanding services to this community. To assist the Municipal Court & Police Department, the City Council, thanks to Councilman Lindgren's efforts recently approved to have all City Ordinances codified. This will also allow our citizens to have easy online access to ALL City Ordinances.

Our **Fire/EMS department** has provided outstanding services to the city of Converse as well as to the entire metrocom as members of the Emergency Services District #1. Our Fire Department maintains one of the best ISO ratings in all of Bexar County. This is a reflection of the excellent Fire/EMS services our men and women provide to our community on a daily basis. As a future goal to enhance our emergency services, I would like to invest in a reverse 911-communication system. This system will provide an excellent tool in times of emergencies and disaster preparedness.

Our **Water Department** was able to provide quality water services to all Converse residents despite numerous water main breaks and one of the worst droughts in Texas history. We extended the use of Recycled Water and held workshops to consider further options to begin a solid plan for acquiring Alternative Water Rights. This year we will act on those plans and move towards final implementation. This City must have Alternative Water Resources. Because of the demand of our citizens, especially our active duty military, we have established an on-line Water Bill pay service.

As our country makes sweeping legislative changes for us to become more environmentally friendly, our city has developed its own **Environmental Initiatives**. We developed one of the first Storm Water Management plans in the MetroCom, to meet the state's unfunded mandate. It is imperative that the

Council consider revitalizing the Beautification and Environmental (B&E) Commission to help facilitate the needed input from concerned citizens as they relate to making our city cleaner and environmentally friendly. We re-negotiated the waste management contract and lowered the monthly fee for all residents. In an effort to ease the financial burden on our senior citizens (65 and over) the Council waived the monthly brush pick-up fee.

Our work with the **Parks & Recreation Commission** continues to be of great value to both the city and its citizens. We have proposed many improvements to North Park by purchasing and installing playground equipment, adding a new paved driving entrance, adding a new paved parking lot, and constructing a new restroom facility. Night in Ole Converse was a success and continues to serve as a gathering for the citizens of Converse and the surrounding communities. Future plans for our city parks, will require our focus to be on infrastructure improvements and faithfully addressing citizen requests. We will solicit citizen input by sending out a **Community Needs Assessment Survey** that will be used to determine the final improvement plan.

No city could be great without providing and supporting a variety of **Community Youth Programs**. We are proud to continue our partnership with the Judson Youth Sports Foundation, JISD, and Cardinals youth football Organization. Our kids have benefited from their programs by developing team cohesion, sportsmanship, responsibility, and commitment. We are partnering with the Amateur Athletic Union (better known as AAU) and the JISD to conduct a sports festival this summer. We will reach out to our local community & church organizations to set up personal, career, and professional development programs to help our youth plan for their future. This will be an exciting time for our young residents.

Mayor's Call will continue every 2nd and 4th Saturday from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. and Council Call every 1st and 3rd Saturday from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. These two proactive forums will continue to provide an unrestricted opportunity for citizens to meet face-to-face with their local government officials. As an elected body, we will increase citizen awareness and request their participation at our Council meetings. For our working adults and those who are unable to attend Council meetings, we will be exploring alternative options to get them the information. It is time that we establish a Quarterly Newsletter to keep our citizens informed. We will also consider Video Recording our council meetings

to provide citizens the opportunity to view them at their convenience. We must continue to reach out to our citizens.

We must continue to strive for the Best Customer Service that our city can provide to our citizens. I desire for our city Council to be tangible to the citizens we serve. And we must continue to be Accessible & Accountable to the Citizens of Converse. We welcome and need continued input and participation from each and every Converse citizen.

In closing, it is a privilege to serve as your Mayor. I will continue to listen to you and I am confident each Councilmember will do the same. We have already entered a new year that is filled with possibilities, challenges, opportunities, and successes. We may not always get it right, but we will endeavor to do it right. Your input, support, and criticisms are needed to make us better. I appreciate the support I have received from you, Converse citizens, from the leaders and staff of our city, from the Superintendent and School Board trustees, from our Community & Church Leaders and from our county, state, and federal representatives. I would like to thank and recognize the members of the city council, the city staff and the city employees for their dedication to the city of converse. In reviewing our accomplishments for the year, I realize just how much we all care about our community and how hard we work to make converse such an amazing place. I would also like to thank the many citizens, who have also contributed to our success – whether you serve on a commission, attend public meetings or just call occasionally with an idea – you are what makes our community strong. Remember, success is not a destination but rather a journey and I am grateful you are on this journey with us. **THANK YOU.**