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“Lansing: Believe it!”

Mayor Bernero Highlights Region’s Economic Rebound in Seventh State of the City Address

Calls for Expanded Regional Cooperation to Make Government More Cost-Effective, More Efficient in Delivery of Essential Public Services

(LANSING) – Mayor Virg Bernero delivered his seventh State of the City Address tonight at the new national headquarters of the Accident Fund Insurance Company of America in downtown Lansing. Speaking from the top floor of the rehabilitated Ottawa Power Station on the city’s downtown riverfront, Bernero called the company’s \$182 million investment in reviving the historic architectural icon “a grand stroke of genius” that has contributed to the economic rebirth of the entire Lansing region.

During his speech, Bernero presented Blue Cross Blue Shield President and CEO Dan Loepp and Accident Fund Holdings President and CEO Liz Haar with a ceremonial Key to the City in recognition of their leadership in making the project happen.

“This project was no accident. It was a bold choice, a brilliant gamble by some very smart and savvy people, who took on a massive challenge in order to reach an even higher objective – to help restore the greatness of the urban core,” Bernero said.

In a 30-minute address that looked back at the highlights of 2011 and looked ahead to the challenges and opportunities of 2012, Mayor Bernero hailed Lansing’s economic rebound over the past year, noting that the Lansing region has recovered faster than nearly every other area in Michigan and is now leading the nation in job growth in the manufacturing sector.

“The magic of manufacturing and its generous jobs multiplier is paying off for Lansing,” he said. “Not only are we leading Michigan’s comeback, we are leading the nation’s economic recovery.”

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He cited the region's lowest unemployment rate in more than three years, expanding Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and a recovering housing market as leading indicators of the city's and region's economic resurgence. Bernero also lauded GM's strong comeback and this summer's expected production launch of the new 2013 Cadillac ATS, which will bring 600 new jobs to the Lansing Grand River assembly plant.

"This new Caddy is one extraordinary driving machine," Bernero said. "It's a marvel of technology, design and performance that's going to have GM's competitors believing it, too. Move over Mercedes, beat it BMW, the new standard of the world has arrived!"

Bernero touted a series of recent milestones in strengthening regional cooperation, including the historic agreement with DeWitt Township to create an Aerotropolis economic development zone at Capital Region International Airport, but he noted that more work needs to be done to make local governments more efficient in the delivery of public services.

Calling for expanded efforts to consolidate local government services, Bernero exhorted regional leaders to set aside parochial concerns and outdated thinking and to embrace proposals that reduce the cost of providing essential public services through regional cooperation and consolidation. He noted the city's recent agreements to share East Lansing's fire chief and to allow deputies from the Ingham County Sheriff's Department to patrol city streets as vital efforts to increase regional collaboration.

"It is time for all of us to rethink the way we provide essential public services in order to get the biggest bang for the buck," Bernero said. "We have too much wasteful duplication, too many layers of bureaucracy -- and too few resources to continue doing the same things the same way. The economic realities of our time demand that we take decisive action now."

Bernero said the recent announcement of a tribal casino gaming facility adjacent to the Lansing Center will have a profoundly positive impact on the city's economy by creating more than 2,200 good-paying jobs and would help strengthen Lansing's public school system by guaranteeing 4-year, fully-paid college scholarships for graduates of the Lansing School District.

"Our program will be modeled after the game-changing Kalamazoo Promise that resulted in a 20% enrollment increase in the Kalamazoo Public Schools. We've always known that a city is only as good as its schools, and good schools have a catalytic effect by bringing families back into the city and uplifting our neighborhoods," he said.

Noting that "strong neighborhoods are safe neighborhoods," Bernero said that even after last summer's layoffs, Lansing still has the second highest number of police officers per capita of any comparable city in Michigan and that violent crime in the city continues to decline, as it has for more than two decades. He applauded the return of the School Resource Officers the city assigns to Lansing's high schools, which was made possible by a \$2.4 million federal grant for community policing, and called on Lansing residents to help make their neighborhoods safer by participating in Neighborhood Watch.

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“While we can’t eliminate the threat of crime, we can each take steps to keep our families and our community safe,” Bernero said. “If you don’t belong to Neighborhood Watch or you don’t have one in your area, please call me at 483-4141 and I’ll get you connected to a safer future!”

Bernero said in 2012 the city would expand its efforts to help Lansing homeowners, businesses and public facilities adopt green technologies and practices that are affordable and adaptable to an urban environment.

Working with the Lansing Board of Water and Light and the Greater Lansing Go Green Initiative, Bernero said the city will launch a “Live Green Lansing” program to evaluate consumer-friendly green technologies and practices. The program will include a pilot installation of micro-wind turbines produced by Windstream on several city-owned buildings. He also noted the “wildly successful” pilot of the city’s new cart-on-wheels recycling program, which he said has tripled recycling rates among program participants and will be expanded to cover the entire city this year.

“The added convenience for our customers triples the volume of recyclable materials collected, while it reduces the solid waste stream that ends up in our landfills,” he said. “Instead of paying to get rid of our solid waste, we actually earn money by selling recyclable materials. And our residents and businesses save money, too.”

In his characteristically feisty style, Bernero said he would bring the “same tenacity, the same intensity, the same energy” to his job as mayor in the year ahead and that he would not accept any excuses for slowing down Lansing’s progress.

“We will continue to jump hurdles that others throw up, pick up the pace when others slow down and dream big dreams while others scale back,” he said. “We in Lansing will work harder, faster and smarter because that is what we are called to do.”

Mayor Bernero concluded his annual address with a reminder that Lansing is a city of innovators with a rich history of getting through difficult times and emerging stronger than before.

“Big dreams and the hard work that makes them come true is what Lansing is all about. It's what we do. It's who we are,” Bernero said. “We don't buckle under pressure, we produce. We don't break under stress, we innovate. Lansing is a city of doers - from our creation as the Capital City, to our rich automotive heritage, to the entrepreneurial spirit and true grit of our business leaders and residents today. And together, we will take Lansing from good to great!”

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The full text of Mayor Bernero’s 2012 State of the City Address is available online at <http://www.lansingmi.gov>