

Thank you all so much for joining me this evening for my last Annual City Council President's Legislative Address. Joining us this evening are my fellow City Council Colleagues Gulli (Pro-Tem) and finishing 8 years, Figueroa, Steele, Menn, Conley-Wilson, and Sorriento, Mayor Madden, Deputy Mayor Nolin, Department Heads, City Clerk Debonis, Legislative Assistant Donnelly, Deputy Clerk Reichelt, Assistant Clerk Cox, and Auditor Cole.

We say that our emergency responders put their lives on the line every day for us. Our city sister, Buffalo, is mourning the loss of a heroic firefighter killed in a fire yesterday. A husband, a father and a brother. Let's all please take a moment of silence for Jason Arno.

Residents of Troy, I have been most humbled and honored to be your first directly elected Council President and I want to sincerely thank you for placing your trust in me over these last eight years.

Each legislative address I have highlighted Troy's number one asset ... That is our people! We persevere together as One Troy and we will continue doing so because we are Troy Strong!

FINANCES

As many of you recall, when the Mayor and I took office in 2016, our City was perpetually on the verge of bankruptcy facing another State Control Board and whopping tax increases. Determined to not go down the path of another Control Board being placed on our City, the City Council at that time implemented several new guidelines and reporting requirements. These necessary checks and balances to the executive branch, in addition to other expenditure measures were critical to averting a State takeover.

While some accomplishments have been made, such as the 25-year debt of the Municipal Assistance Corporation (also known as the MAC) and the fiscal prudence of phasing out the practice of bonding and borrowing for city vehicles, the City Council and I will continue to be the taxpayers and residents' fiscal watchdog ensuring fiscal transparency, accountability, and checks and balances. These are standards and responsibilities that I hope the next City Council continues to practice.

I will continue to work hard every day to find ways to ease the burden of taxes and fees on the residents of our city and continue to stand against shifting the tax burden to residents and taxpayers through regressive taxes and fees, such as the garbage and bulk trash fees. These fees hurt the people in the city who are least able to absorb new costs especially now with skyrocketing inflation, which is why I continue to oppose them and seek alternative solutions.

We need less fees and taxes, more common sense, and most importantly we need fairness.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Tragically, 2022 was another violent year in our city. With over 54,000 calls in 2022 by our police department, the past three years we have seen increased gun and gang violence in our neighborhoods. Some alarming statistics (per the Mayor's office), confirmed shots fired rose by 13% over last year with gun crime arrests rising by 100% and recovered firearms rose 97%. 89 illegal guns were removed from our city streets.

Last year, we lost Ayshawn Davis' mother, Latoya, who died of a broken heart losing Ayshawn to senseless and tragic gunfire. If you happen to drive by the Old Sixth Ave Park we joined Ayshawn's family and friends last year to dedicate a plaque and a tree in memory of Ayshawn. The loss of Ayshawn broke our hearts but not our spirits and we MUST reverse this trend ... And we WILL reverse this trend. Our residents deserve safer neighborhoods!

As the proud daughter of a retired Troy Detective and Police Officer, with strong roots in the law enforcement community, I am personally committed to making our neighborhoods safer. My Dad walked the beat downtown, North Central and the Burgh. Everyone knew my Dad and he knew everyone. Sadly, we lost our Dad unexpectedly last year, but the impact my Dad had on residents throughout our City is lasting.. Just a couple weeks ago, I was in the downtown Post Office and a gentleman tapped me on the shoulder telling me that my Dad saved his life from the "evils of the streets." He opened his wallet and took out my Dad's mass card. Our community police program can be a model program, we can and must build that same kind of trust and partnership my Dad had, with our residents!

There is no single action that will eradicate gun and gang violence issues in our neighborhoods, each piece is a part of a bigger puzzle. So many of our problems are exacerbated by the senseless laws out of Albany that put the rights of criminals ahead of law abiding citizens. Too many criminals are returned to our streets to victimize our neighborhoods again. Albany must finally take action

While Albany dawdles, costing lives, the Council and I have taken several steps over the last eight years to improve safety; Working with the Mayor, we hired six new police officers for an enhanced interactive Park, Walk, and Talk program; Invested in youth programs to work to keep our kids off the streets and being lured into illegal activities; Enhanced present and additional police cameras throughout the city; Implemented body cameras, which during a recent meeting with the PBA President Bill Fitch mentioned to me that this action has proven to be a win-win for our community and our police officers; Expanded 40 hour mental health service training for

officers with over 90 percent of our officers completed training; hostage training negotiations for officers; Coffee with a Cop; and many other initiatives.

I know that each and every member of this City Council is committed to doing everything within our power to tackle neighborhood gun violence in our city. I applaud Chief DeWolf and his command staff building these grassroots relationships.

Turning to another critical aspect of public safety. We must finally address critical staffing shortages in our fire department. There is no doubt that the present staffing shortage issue in our fire department is one of our top priorities.

Our city-run ambulance model, which was one of the first city-run ambulance services in the State, was developed in the 1990's. Today our firefighters are performing dual roles fighting fires and performing emergency services for residents. Since 1996 calls are up 134%. No, that is not a typo ... 134%, and calls are up in 2022 over 13%. Yet staffing is down, with 13 vacancies and rising. Eric Wisher from the Uniformed Firefighters Association has been sounding the alarm on this issue even before COVID-19. This is a recipe for a disaster. As we all know, mere seconds can be precious in an emergency.

Over a year and a half ago, the Council approved ARPA funding to hire an outside firm to conduct a comprehensive review for long term solutions with our ambulance model and the staffing shortage issue. Last year the Mayor stated the RFP would be on the street last spring. On this, like so many other issues we are still waiting, which is incomprehensible to me. Solutions are needed immediately for our resident's safety and the safety of our firefighters.

While we need long term solutions, the crisis is today that is why the Council Minority proposed increasing manning by two additional firefighters in the 2023 budget but it was unfortunately voted down by the Council Majority.

Our fire service needs more staffing and better facilities. And I join with my colleagues on the council in fighting hard to ensure our aging firehouses have clean showers, working toilets and the every-day necessities. I also will continue to push for a new fire house on Second Avenue, or the new firehouse being built in Lansingburgh. Thank you Chief McMahon for also pushing this initiative.

Troy's first responders need and deserve our support and our thanks. Thank you to all of our Troy emergency responders for putting your lives on the line to keep residents safe and provide critical care to our Troy residents. Whether it be our crews out in the field or our office workers, I would also like to give a shout out to all of the city workers who continue to work hard. The

City Council is committed to continuing to provide you the tools to safely and effectively do your job.

HOMEOWNER LEAD SERVICE LINES

Speaking of public safety, clean and safe drinking water is critical. There is nothing more fundamental in our daily lives.

Recently, we all learned that the Department of Public Utilities found elevated levels of lead in the water of four out of 60 homes and buildings tested around the city. Days later we found out from press reports, that a \$500,000 grant was not spent which the Council was informed years ago would be used for the inventory and a grant program.

This is simply an unacceptable breach of public trust.

Lead, in any quantity, is poison.

And we know, young children, infants, and fetuses are particularly vulnerable to lead. In children, even low levels of exposure to lead have been linked to damage to the nervous system, learning disabilities, shorter stature, impaired hearing, and impaired formation and function of blood cells. No mother, no father should be worried that when they open their tap or when they fill the tub they are putting poison into their kids.

Access to clean, safe water is not a Democrat - Republican issue, it is the fundamental responsibility of the government.

We don't have time to point fingers, but frankly I'm mad, confused and disappointed. I'm mad that City Hall chose to not prioritize this issue. Confused, that we only learned about the lack of action because of the press. And disappointed because despite the recent revelations I still see lack of a sense of urgency from the administration.

As a mom, as a resident and as your Council President I am committed to protecting our children. But it takes action from City Hall. This problem cannot be solved overnight but for it to be solved at all, the city needs an accurate inventory and is requesting that all homeowners please get your service lines tested as soon as possible. There is a link on the city website to schedule an appointment for testing.

Please I implore you, if you haven't done so yet, get your water tested. Knowledge is the key to protecting your family today and fixing this problem tomorrow.

The Council has finally received the administration's funding and legislative proposal to address this issue through 2023 and partially 2024, and will discuss and act on this proposal this evening. I implore them to act with the level of urgency that this issue demands.

On a sidenote, I along with a few other Council Members have made it clear that we will not support funding this initiative solely on the backs of our taxpayers and water rate hikes.

ARPA

As reported last year, the City of Troy received American Rescue Plans Act (ARPA) federal relief funds totaling approximately \$43 million. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity for transformational neighborhood and resident driven projects. There are several projects approved by the City Council such as the new Knickerbacker Pool and Park upgrades; Youth organizations funding; Lansingburgh Boys & Girls Club, CYO, and several other non-profit facility upgrades; Homeowner Improvement Program; City Parks upgrades; Business grant program; Building demolitions; Troy Housing Authority demolition of Taylor I and II which is underway as we speak; and several other initiatives.

While I'm pleased with the application and approval process, I am disappointed with the lack of progress on so many initiatives. We need more than press releases and nice announcements. We need RFPs released, contracts awarded and shovels in the ground. On project after project we have seen no or little movement and excuses with little communication from the administration explaining the lack of progress. For example, park upgrades monies approved nearly three years ago with additional ARPA funds approved last year. Each year, we and the public are told "this spring" a shovel will be in the ground. To date, not a shovel in the ground and costs escalating over the past three years.

No homeowner or business grant program. The RFP to relocate City Hall which I have requested since 2016 and the Mayor announced and Council authorized ARPA funding last year has not moved forward.

The same inertia from City Hall which contributed to this current lead crisis is holding back meaningful progress that our city so desperately needs and has the funding to achieve. And like the lead situation, this is unacceptable.

NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION, PARKS, AND QUALITY OF LIFE

I state it each year, but it truly is the heart of our city ... Our people and our neighborhoods! We see our downtown thriving and as I've stated many times let's take that momentum and spread it into the neighborhoods. This effort is beginning to happen folks! Several major revitalization

efforts are happening in our neighborhoods. It's truly inspiring to see our resident's passion and dedication in working to improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods.

I have lived my whole life in this city, I love this city, I breathe it - and I am every day reminded of what a tremendous community we are privileged to call home. Whether it be Burgh, North Central, Sycaway, Downtown, Eastside, and South Troy ... I will continue to work to make us ONE TROY -- BRINGING PRIDE BACK TO OUR NEIGHBORHOODS!

The City Council Neighborhood Improvement Program (NIP) continues to be a huge success toward building partnerships and pride in our neighborhoods and revitalizing one block at a time in every corner of our city. These small grants build the velocity of positive momentum in the economic development, recreation and revitalization for our neighborhoods. The 2023 NIP applications are available and due back at the end of March. I am looking forward to continuing working with all of you and hope to see even more great projects this year.

Well, last year my four words to the administration regarding the Knickerbacker Pool in Lansingburgh was "Diving in. In 2023". While that may not happen the demolition of the prior pool is underway and I am imploring the administration and Knickerbacker Park Board to work with the neighborhood residents regarding the location of the new pool.

As some folks may be aware, as part of the City Council's "Think Differently" initiative, I was pleased to work hard with the Epilepsy Association to get our first handicapped swing in Troy and pleased to see more installed at other city parks, such as 112th Street in the Burgh. However, more needs to be done to make our parks, streets and facilities more accessible, user friendly, and inclusive - much more. As the mother of a son with special needs, this is an initiative near and dear to my heart! Let's get to work utilizing the \$3 million the Council already approved toward making our parks more inclusive and accessible.

But there is more we can and must do. It is past time for the administration to collaborate with local disability advocates and residents to develop a plan to improve access for individuals with disabilities to municipal services, programs, and activities. I am imploring the Mayor to reinvigorate the effort started in 2018 and I continue to stand ready to join him to continue our progress.

The Council Minority over the past few years have pushed for black barrel garbage bins for all neighborhoods and not just select neighborhoods. I am pleased the Mayor and administration listened to us and worked with the Council to finally implement this initiative. Barrels will be rolling out next month.

There are so many residents working so hard to keep their properties neat, and as many folks know, it takes only one neglected residence or business to blight a neighborhood. Council Members Gulli, Sorriento, and I sponsored and the Council unanimously passed last year a resolution establishing a Quality of Life Task Force which would hold negligent property owners more accountable. Unfortunately, the Mayor refused to implement this important initiative.

But the need for enforcement continues today. One example is the store at 71 Congress Street which has been the epicenter of crime downtown for years. From the illegal sale of cigarettes, selling stolen merchandise, providing cover to drug dealers and more. This store has racked up over 30 violations. People understandably go out of their way to avoid this block because of past stabbings and shootings. The police and code enforcement have done quite a bit but until it's closed it will continue to be a hotspot. I am imploring the Mayor to close this store down for good and let's use the power of the nuisance abatement regulations for not just this case but others as well. Should the Council need to act on additional legislation or amendments, please let us know.

Over the years, I was proud to work with struggling waterfront communities as they were revitalized by utilizing the waterfront as the front door to economic development and recreation. This is truly a passion of mine. Working with hundreds of communities statewide through my roles as the NYS Canal Director and the Hudson River Valley Greenway Executive Director, I had the honor to partner and promote waterfront and economic development projects, water and land trails, and protect our natural and cultural resources.

We have a national treasure and majestic river, the Hudson River, in our own backyard stretching seven miles connecting South Troy to Downtown to North Central to Lansingburgh, and it is incredibly rewarding to see our city's waterfront transformation begin. Whether it be the \$26 million dollar Troy Seawall Stabilization Project and several other waterfront initiatives in the works, we will use the Hudson River as the front door for economic development, water and land trails, and dovetailing into revitalization into our neighborhoods will continue to move forward.

Working with the Mayor, we are moving other major projects forward such as the South Troy Industrial Roadway, the Little Italy Market and neighborhood revitalization project, the \$40 million water transmission line, transformation of the Atrium, historic designation for portions of Lansingburgh, 112th Street Park overhaul in Lansingburgh, and other initiatives.

These infrastructure upgrades and other projects happen when the Mayor and the Council work together!

It has been my honor to serve as your Council President over these last 7 years. An honor I will always cherish, a privilege I was blessed to realize, a responsibility I was humbled to accept. It

has been an eventful and historic time in our city and our nation's history. I want to thank Mayor Madden, his team and the members of the City Council I served with over the years for your partnership. Together, we have been through the trials of Covid, the grief of Ayshawn but because we came together, because we are much more than just the sum of our parts, we emerged stronger than ever from these trials.

Today, there are too many people in public life who think what we do is about them or about a party. But the issues confronting our city, the city we all love, transcend politics. Clean water, safe streets, vibrant and affordable neighborhoods and accessible communities are goals I know we all share, regardless of where we come from, who we pray to or who we vote for. I believe that the stage is set for Troy to take a great leap forward and become one of those places in upstate that is so special that people never want to leave, instead they want to move here. I believe we are close to realizing this goal but only together will we get there.

So in closing I implore everyone - the work is not over, the journey continues, please join us and together the best Troy is yet to come.

Thank you. God Bless you, the City of Troy and the United States of America.