



Mayor Virg Bernero

## 2011 State of the City Address

*“It’s Happening in Lansing!”*

Knapp’s Center  
January 24, 2011

Thank you Vice President Dunbar and congratulations on your re-election to Council leadership. I look forward to working with you, President A’Lynne Robinson and all of your colleagues in the year ahead.

I’d also like to recognize and thank our terrific State Representative Joan Bauer, and U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow, represented tonight by Kali Fox. Senator Stabenow has been a fierce advocate for Michigan and for Lansing in our nation’s capital, and we owe her our gratitude.

As we plunge into the unknown of the coming year, my sixth as your mayor, I’m grateful for your support and your continued confidence in my efforts to move our city forward.

I’m grateful for the love and support of my family, and I want to take a moment to introduce them: Lansing’s First Lady, the love of my life, the principal of Lewton Elementary School - Teri Bernero and our eldest daughter, Kelly.

I’m also blessed with an incredible team of professionals at City Hall who I have come to know as dear friends. Would you join me in recognizing one of America’s great municipal teams – my mayoral staff and Cabinet members.

I want to take a moment to thank our hosts here at the historic Knapp’s Center in downtown Lansing. Nick Eyde of the Eyde Company, is with us tonight. Nick, thank you for your generous hospitality, and thanks most of all for working with us to transform this grand old building into a powerful new engine of growth and opportunity for our city.

Our effort to breathe new life into this iconic structure is emblematic of the progress we continue to make as a city, even in the face of the most challenging economy in generations. It’s a testament to our vision, a hallmark of our relentless determination to build a new and even stronger foundation for jobs and prosperity.

With the help of bold entrepreneurs like the Eydes and so many others, we're turning the corner. We're on the road to recovery. In fact we are leading the way to Michigan's turnaround.

Look around and see for yourself -- It's happening in Lansing!

Even in tough times, the state of our city is good. And I can assure you it's getting better.

Our accomplishments over the last twelve months prove that with grit, persistence and innovation we can continue to find success and opportunity for all of our residents.

In fact the Lansing region added more than 2,000 manufacturing jobs last year -- the first positive year of job growth in manufacturing in 15 years.

But this isn't old-school manufacturing. It is cutting-edge, advanced manufacturing in aerospace and medical technology and defense and yes, autos. Our manufacturing base is retooling and reinventing itself to compete and win in the global economy.

Nowhere is this reinvention more evident -- and more thrilling -- than in the rebirth of our hometown car company, General Motors. My friends, there's no doubting the good news - GM is back!

After a harrowing ride through the depths of the national economic meltdown, followed by a painful restructuring and bankruptcy, the old GM is now in the rear view mirror and the new GM is hitting on all cylinders: A world record IPO and the successful launch of the next generation Chevy Volt -- Motor Trend and North American Car of the Year.

GM's comeback is especially sweet for us here in Lansing. Both of our state-of-the-art plants are going strong. 400 new workers are on the second shift at Lansing Delta. And both plants are producing some of the hottest cars on the planet, including, of course, the beautiful Cadillac CTS and Buick Enclave.

But the icing on the cake is the extraordinary announcement by GM that they will invest more than \$190 million dollars this year in a new global platform at the Lansing Grand River plant, creating more than 600 new jobs.

Joining us tonight are UAW Local 652 President Mike Green and Local 602 President Brian Fredline. Gentleman, will you please stand and be recognized for the work you and your colleagues do day-in and day-out to make Lansing a global manufacturing powerhouse and to make us proud.

We know that for every job at a modern auto assembly plant, 5 to 7 additional jobs are created outside the factory. So those 600 jobs at LGR will create a ripple effect of millions of dollars in payroll being spent at local restaurants and grocery stores and other small businesses.

But our recovery is not powered by GM alone. New investment and job growth is happening all over Lansing. Businesses large and small are expanding and hiring. Companies like Symmetry Medical and Jackson National Life, Moebius Technologies and Emergent Biosolutions, Sparrow Hospital, Niowave and Neogen.

Their success is one reason why the Lansing region finished 2010 with unemployment at its lowest point in 22 months. It's the second lowest in the state of Michigan.

In the year ahead we will continue to reap success because over the past five years we have planted the seeds for that success. Some call it economic gardening and our garden is already bearing fruit.

The seeds we planted along our downtown riverfront will blossom this Spring with the grand opening of the new national headquarters of the Accident Fund Insurance Company of America. Since we launched this historic project 3 years ago, the Ottawa Power Station has undergone an amazing transformation - take a look the next time you are downtown.

Directly across the river, our new Lansing City Market bustles with activity. In fact, sales are up more than 250 percent - and there is a waiting list of vendors who want to be part of the excitement. And the next piece of our riverfront revival - Pat Gillespie's Market Place project - is back on track.

Just south along the Grand River, the new Michigan State Police headquarters is bringing 550 new employees to our downtown. Blue Cross Blue Shield will bring 250 more jobs downtown later this year. We welcome them all.

And this iconic building - the historic Knapp's Center - will get a new lease on life as a residential and commercial centerpiece in our downtown, including a new business incubator.

Our efforts to transform Lansing into one of the Great Midwestern Capital Cities continues to draw national accolades. In 2010 we joined places like Chicago and Houston on Kiplinger's list of the Top Ten American Cities for Young Professionals. IBM declared us the Next American City. And the Milken Institute said that out of the 200 largest metropolitan regions in America, Lansing, Michigan had the seventh fastest job growth in the nation.

Even in the face of the raging winds of a financial hurricane, we kept our bearings on some pretty rough seas. There is no doubt that our efforts to rebuild our local economy have protected us from the harshest impacts of the recession.

It is nothing less than incredible that in the midst of this recession, we have still managed to bring home more than \$730 million dollars in new investment and 7,000 jobs over the past 5 years.

And we're not done building a new economic foundation for Lansing's future. In 2011 we will again make strategic investments that focus on the retention and attraction of new jobs, rebuilding our infrastructure, energizing our neighborhoods, improving our quality of life and protecting our environment.

Our strategy is working, and now is no time to take our foot off the gas.

We will continue to make aggressive use of the economic tools that have directly sparked new growth and thousands of new jobs. With the help of tax incentives, entrepreneurs can transform and repurpose an aging building into a new engine of economic growth. We can take old industrial brownfield sites and clean them up, refitting them to again be job creators for our future.

We will continue to retool Lansing as a destination, a magnet for people of all ages, to draw people back into the city with new housing options, improved parks and public infrastructure.

We don't have to compete with Chicago or New York. We can have a lively downtown, the creative juices can flow in Old Town, and we can recharge REO Town into a new center of economic activity. The region's central city is once again becoming the hub of the wheel instead of the hole in the donut.

A key part of renewing our city is investing in our infrastructure, our roads, and yes, even our sidewalks. I'm proud to have helped the grassroots effort to win our new Complete Streets ordinance, and our partners in East Lansing and Lansing Township are moving in the same direction.

Improving the quality of life in Lansing means making sure our citizens can walk and bike safely, whether they are children going to - and from school, senior citizens walking to a neighborhood store, families riding their bicycles to a park, or simply an individual walking to work.

Councilmembers Jessica Yorke and Kathie Dunbar were instrumental in winning approval for Complete Streets and they continue to advocate for a more walkable and bikeable community for all of our residents. Thank you both for your leadership.

The heart of any community - and a key calling card for economic growth - is quality neighborhoods. Here, too, we must plant the seeds of renewal, and we are.

Our Planning and Neighborhood Development Department, in partnership with the Ingham County Land Bank, is delivering results for neighborhoods across our city by investing more than \$23 million dollars to attempt to reverse the damage of the foreclosure crisis.

The Land Bank has acquired more than six hundred properties in the city, keeping them out of the hands of speculators and absentee landlords. Blighted structures have been repaired and dozens more will be saved in the next two years, or demolished if they cannot be saved.

Unfortunately, even as we continue these efforts, too many of our families are still in danger of losing their homes. To those who may be in this position, I implore you: Do not suffer in silence. Do not be ashamed.

If you are about to miss a house payment, or have missed one already, please reach out for help by visiting [holdontoyourhome.org](http://holdontoyourhome.org) or call the **2-1-1** hotline. We are ready to help in any way we can.

On Lansing's East Side, citizens are planting the seeds of healthy, sustainable local food systems with a farmer's market, the Hunter Park greenhouse, and the Urbandale Farm, sprouting not only fruits and vegetables, but new entrepreneurs.

Much of it is happening because of the terrific work of Joan Nelson and her team at the Allen Neighborhood Center. Joan is with us tonight and I'd like to ask her to please stand and be recognized for her outstanding efforts over the years.

Joan tells me there is now more food being grown in Lansing than any time since World War II. Community gardens in Lansing have more than doubled in just the last two years, thanks to the great work of groups like the Garden Project, Ingham Family Center and the Land Bank.

On the North Side, our new Neighborhood Empowerment Center has opened its doors. The new center is yet another vision turned into reality – a one-stop shop for neighborhood services and activities on the campus of the former School for the Blind.

Great neighborhoods are safe neighborhoods, and we have continued to make strategic investments in making Lansing safer. Despite our budget challenges, we have managed to keep more officers on patrol than when I first became mayor. We've strengthened community policing and added Neighborhood Watch groups across the city.

And we've taken aggressive action to reduce youth violence through Operation PEACE - Police Enforcement and Community Engagement. PEACE takes a carrot and stick approach that is tough on young offenders, but also uses street-smart intervention and mentoring strategies to help get them back on track.

Operation PEACE was designed and continues to operate under the direction of Captain Ray Hall of the Lansing Police Department. With mentoring support from the Boys and Girls Club of Lansing, and technical support from the MSU School of Criminal Justice, Operation PEACE is getting results.

We have a tremendous depth of talent in our police and fire departments and I am grateful for their professionalism and sacrifice on display daily.

In the year ahead we will continue to make strategic investments in our youth, planting the seeds for their future success.

Our HOPE Scholarship and HOPE Connections programs are going strong and reached a landmark fundraising goal at the end of 2010.

To celebrate that success, I'd like to ask Superintendent Dr. T.C. Wallace, School Board President Shirley Rodgers and LCC President Brent Knight to join me at the podium.

Please welcome the founding father of the HOPE program, our former Police Chief Mark Alley, our new Police Chief Teresa Szymanski, and several of our HOPE Scholars.

The HOPE Connections program supports the aspirations of our HOPE Scholars as they pursue a college education at Lansing Community College. Last year, through the generosity of the Joe D. Pentecost Foundation, HOPE Connections reached its goal of raising \$400 thousand dollars to endow the program in perpetuity. Since 2005, the Pentecost Foundation has contributed more than \$150 thousand dollars to Hope Scholarships and HOPE Connections. Thank you so much for your commitment to our children's future.

In 2011 we will continue making strategic investments in a cleaner, greener Lansing, led by the construction of a new, \$182 million dollar natural gas power plant in REO Town. The new BWL plant will help the Lansing region take another giant leap forward in reducing our dependence on coal and increasing our utilization of alternative, renewable sources of energy.

And we have great things in store for the Michigan Avenue Corridor near Frandor. I'm proud that my brother mayor, Vic Loomis of East Lansing, is with us tonight. We're going to work shoulder-to-shoulder to make it happen.

My friends, there is no doubt that great things are happening in Lansing. The green shoots of progress can be seen all around us, but we're not out of the woods yet. In these challenging times we must continue to extend a lifeline to our most vulnerable citizens.

Our human service efforts, led by Dr. Joan Jackson Johnson, last year helped more than 500 people at imminent risk of homelessness, quickly providing them with housing options and supportive services to help them get back on their feet.

In partnership with Lansing's faith community, our One Church, One Family initiative is helping chronically homeless families find permanent housing.

Our Mobile Food Pantry distributed more than 100 tons of nutritious food to nearly 20,000 families, seniors and children across the Lansing region.

And for the third year in a row, our Office of Community and Faith-based Initiatives is partnering with more than 35 churches across the Lansing region to provide nutritious food to a record 2,700 families. This effort is led by Bishop David Maxwell and Pastor Phil Posthuma of Trinity Church. Will you please stand and be recognized.

My friends, these are the efforts that mark our character as a compassionate and caring community. Thank you for working so hard to ensure that no one is left behind.

Even as recovery starts, city budgets across Michigan are on life support. The loss of property values means less property tax revenue. High unemployment means less income tax revenue. And the continued failure of state government to manage its own budget problems has cost us tens of millions in state shared revenues.

We've cut more than \$40 million dollars in deficits, not by raising taxes, but by making tough choices. We have 200 fewer employees, and those remaining have sacrificed wages and benefits, as have I, my staff and cabinet.

But it still isn't enough. The cost of health care and retirement benefits continues to grow while revenues are declining, and that adds up to more tough choices this year. Doing the same things the same way is no longer an option.

A few nights ago our new governor called on us to join him in reinventing government and getting more value for our tax dollars. I wholeheartedly agree.

We know a thing or two about reinventing government here in Lansing – we've been doing just that for five years straight. We're tracking and measuring and improving the performance of government services with our innovative LansingStat program - and we are getting results.

But we will do even more with the help of our regional partners. I will soon unveil a Blue Ribbon panel of regional leaders from the public and private sectors who will be our key advisers in the task of reinventing local government and regional shared services.

I am pleased to report that Michigan State University and Public Sector Consultants, Michigan's leading public policy firm, will help lead this effort. Please join me in welcoming MSU Vice President Steve Webster and Mark Coscarelli, Vice President of Public Sector Consultants.

Thank you for your partnership as we continue the important work of retooling government.

But reinventing government cannot be done in isolation. Lansing is not an island. And when we or our neighbors think of ourselves as a separate entity, we are weaker, not stronger.

The path to a stronger future must be paved not just with good intentions, but with a genuine willingness to set aside turf and political fiefdoms, to embrace new ideas and new ways of collaborating, and then to take action.

We're doing just that.

Last Friday I joined DeWitt Township Supervisor Rick Galardi to announce that we have reached a landmark regional agreement with Dewitt Township to spark new growth around the Capital Region International Airport. This agreement will pay economic dividends to both communities and to the region. It will help us lift ourselves up, together, out of the mire of this recession.

Max Calder, DeWitt Township Trustee, is with us tonight. Max, thank you and your colleagues for your partnership as we power the Lansing region's progress together.

Another regional leader that I'm proud to have on stage tonight is Lansing Township Supervisor John Daher. John and I talked recently, and we agreed that in the year ahead we will work together to redevelop our closed GM sites along the Saginaw Corridor.

We will have one plan to redevelop these sites, rather than two competing plans. John, thank you for your partnership as we work together to clean up these sites and put them back into productive use.

Last year my Mayors Automotive Coalition was instrumental in securing \$15 million dollars to clean up these sites through the new federal automotive trust fund. Now we will work together to bring them back to life.

In the five years since you chose me to lead Lansing, we have traveled far together. We have been through good times and bad. We have overcome obstacles and we are stronger for having faced these challenging times together.

Having covered the state, examining issues affecting communities from Monroe to Menominee, from Adrian to Alpena, from Portage to Pontiac, I am here to tell you, Dorothy was right, there's no place like home!

Around the state, I saw challenges and I saw success. I saw nagging problems and unrelenting passion in people who refuse to accept a destiny of despair. My friends, Michigan is filled with people who do not quit. Nowhere is that more true than right here in Lansing.

There is a spirit of innovation here that no economic downturn can dampen. There is an energy, an excitement, a belief in who we are and what we can become that I believe is going to make 2011 a great year.

I feel Lansing's success in my heart. And objective analysis says it's true. We are not completely out of the woods, but I can tell you Lansing is leading the way. It's happening in Lansing!

We are going to be challenged. Our comfort zone is about to be encroached upon. Old axioms will no longer hold true. But the good news is that Lansing is better positioned than most regions in the state and nation to compete -- and to win. I have seen the competition. I am here to tell you -- we can do it!

I know it's true because this community has never failed to deliver. Whether in charity or education or skilled trades or high-tech or manufacturing prowess or innovative business development, or respect for diversity, Lansing has led the pack year after year. It's happening in Lansing because of you.

Lansing is a special place; a place where innovation is in our DNA. We don't accept defeat. We won't let anyone write Lansing's epitaph. We will not throw in the towel. Our roots are too deep, our history too rich. Our belief is too strong. Guided by our faith, we know what we are capable of.

My friends, it's happening in Lansing, and it's going to keep happening because we still believe in Lansing. And because of the hard work we have done together, we are leading the way to an economic recovery that leaves no one behind.

Thank you so much. Good night. God bless you, and God bless the City of Lansing.

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