

State of the City

Thank you Sean and Hugh. I appreciate the Chamber hosting this event and the Village at Meridian serving as title sponsor.

Before we get started, I wanted to acknowledge a few people with us today. First, I'd like to say thank you to the Meridian City Council. I appreciate your tireless commitment as we work together for the betterment of our community. I also want to say thank you to our local government partners and the relationships we have.

Finally, I'm honored to have my wife Jenny and my kids Ethan, Natalie and Ryan all here. We have been on this journey together, and I appreciate each one of you more than you know. Thank you for allowing me to serve our community and keeping me grounded every day.

It's hard to believe that I am delivering my fourth State of the City address. The last several years have been some of the most rewarding and challenging as we have watched our country, state and community evolve. In many ways, politics have taken center stage in all areas of our lives whether we have wanted it to or not.

During this time, we have seen our businesses redefine their future, our families reprioritize what is important, and Meridian continues to thrive. We survived a global pandemic where loved ones were lost. We saw lots of people buying and selling homes at historic rates, and new people choosing to call Meridian home. We experienced ultra-low unemployment which had us all re-thinking our work environment.

Over the last three years, the City has continued to invest in the services we provide and we have remained debt free. We worked with existing companies as they grew and welcomed new ones as part of our community. And, our local and state government partners brought facilities and services closer to where people live and have improved our transportation network as well.

The State of our City has never been stronger. I can stand here today and confidently say that, yet I am also looking at what's ahead, and I believe Meridian's best days are yet to come. We have achieved some great successes, and we have more to do.

It's important that we all remember the Vision we are trying to achieve: By 2035, Meridian will be the West's premier community in which to live, work and raise a family. This is what your public servants are working towards every day in the things they do. And while we often key in on the word *premier*, as it relates to our services, I want to touch on another word which, to me, really encompasses Meridian – that is *family*.

Family makes our community stronger. Family is all about the people we have in our lives and homes. It is the values we share which are built from faith. Family is also evolving as we see our community age, with more retirees and grandparents moving to Meridian which is helping us rethink what services are needed and provided, or how our built environment looks. Family is also having jobs that pay higher wages and are closer to where people live, allowing for

employment choices in the home so that maybe both parents don't have to work. It is an evolving, yet important word, as we strive towards our vision.

There are several elements guiding us along the way: our community look and feel; the economy; mobility; and responsible growth. I'm going to cover these areas, and a few others, as they really encompass some of the major successes we have seen, and where we have more to do.

Lets' start with our community look and feel.

What do we want to feel first and foremost in Meridian? The answer, safe. And our residents feel just that according to our most recent City Survey. Safety reflects our ability to address crime, and how we integrate public safety into where we live, work and go to school. It is about putting resources where they make sense and staying focused on issues when we know *one pill can kill*. It is about prioritizing prevention and education so we all know what to do in case of a fire.

We make it a priority for our Police Department to patrol in our neighborhoods and spend time where our kids are – at schools. Last year, I talked about deploying more School Resource Officers so that we could have a dedicated presence in our elementary schools. We achieved that goal in January and those officers are spending time getting to know our kids, teachers and parents which builds trust through community policing. Please join me in thanking the City Council, our Police Chief, West Ada, and everyone who rolled up their sleeves to make this happen so quickly, and to the those in the department who stepped into these SRO positions.

We also added an additional resource to focus on substance abuse prevention programs. It's easy for me to stand here today and tell you that I'm opposed to the legalization of marijuana in Idaho, but Kendall and Hailey are leading the efforts of the Meridian Anti-Drug Coalition and are out there every day working to help make Meridian a drug-free community. By educating our youth we can fight the impacts of drug abuse, and with the team focused on working with our prevention partners, it will ultimately help our state as we stand strong in the fight against substance use and abuse.

What we know is that substance abuse and mental health are often linked, which is why when the Chief put the Crisis Intervention Team in place in 2022 and asked for a mental health professional to be part of this group, it was a no brainer. This was a pragmatic, common-sense, and fiscally responsible solution to meet this rising need.

Getting the right resource at the right time to the person in need, frees up officers for patrol and is just plain smart. We want our residents to feel safe and cared for especially when they are in a time of need. They want a person who can help them or their family member in the right way, and that is what the CIT team does.

We also expanded our community risk reduction team in the Fire Department. Work is being done to help determine what some of our biggest risks in Meridian are so we can prioritize our prevention efforts. This will help change behaviors which benefits us all.

While we have put these resources into the field already, we also have some great projects moving forward that will help us meet our safety expectations. Two new fire stations will be ready to open later this year and staffed with Meridian firefighters. Adding these stations provides more support to the system as a whole and is a win for our growing community. Resources will be where they are needed and provide additional assistance to calls when necessary. Please join me again to say thank you to the Meridian Rural Fire Protection District, and the Chief and Department for helping to make this happen.

As part of these stations coming online, we have worked with the Ada County Paramedics who will be co-locating two ambulances at our fire stations to allow faster paramedic response in Meridian. It should also reduce the need for the construction of new separate EMS buildings. This is a tax savings for everyone in Ada County and common-sense public policy which is a win for all involved.

With the new Police precinct set to open as well, our officers will have more time to spend in neighborhoods as they operate out of the new facility and spend less time driving back to the main headquarters. It also provides more space for our growing department so they can spread out a little more and have a better environment to work in.

And, yes, you did hear correctly, we are growing as a department. Police Officers want to work in Meridian thanks to great leadership, amazing culture, and top-notch facilities. It's no mistake that Meridian stands behind its officers and public safety responders, and our community is a better place for it.

As we grow, we do need to keep up with public safety personnel. The budget that I delivered to City Council last week has funding for six additional patrol officers. These officers are necessary to keep our growing community safe.

Switching gears, I know this is going to come as a shock, but did you know technology has changed in the last 50 years? What hasn't changed is our Opticom system that manages traffic at intersections for first responders. This system controls and changes lights at intersections to help police and fire vehicles get to calls faster.

Soon, we will be utilizing the newest version of Opticom which is no longer based upon the distance our vehicles are to an intersection. Rather, it will open up lights in advance to keep our vehicles moving quickly to their calls. According to Global Traffic Technologies this will reduce travel time by 15% alone. When this is combined with updating our pre-alerting system in our fire stations, we are talking about saving minutes, not just seconds in response times.

Additionally, we have heard from the Charter Schools in Meridian that they too would like to have SROs as part of their facilities. We support this effort and will work with them to find a way that makes sense from a time, cost, and resource model in order to partner with them to provide this enhanced service.

While these items are being worked on, we need to be looking further into the future about what safety in Meridian looks like. This means we need to continue to invest in positions, practices

and policies that support community policing. We need to be advocating for a drug-free environment at the State level because we know that is where the threat will come from. We need to be evaluating what the future of EMS services are for the Meridian Fire Department and how they will be deployed without compromising fire response. These are big, important discussions for our City.

Community gathering spots are also an important part of the look and feel of Meridian. Last month, we were able to help celebrate the opening of the Meridian Library District's new Orchard Park branch. This beautiful new facility is helping fulfill the need for our residents to have places that allow for the sharing of ideas, provide access to resources, and space that is safe.

Public spaces are necessary as they are a shared resource for us all. I appreciate that the Meridian Library is delivering on their commitment of offering these and additional services throughout the entire community.

We are also seeing one of our gathering spots continue to evolve with the expansion of Discovery Park in south Meridian. Phase two is under construction. This \$14 and a half million-dollar project is 100% funded by impact fees from development. It will provide places for all generations to gather and recreate as we add 37 acres of new amenities including three softball fields, additional tennis and pickleball courts, a three-acre bike park, ample parking and more.

My son Ryan has been taking up skateboarding recently, and I expect we will be spending time at the new skate park there which promises to be one of the coolest in the Treasure Valley. All of this is planned to open, along with the rest of phase two next spring.

Working in collaboration with the Western Ada Recreation District, we have also seen significant investment and improvements at the municipal Lakeview Golf Club over the last few years, specifically with the irrigation system and new cart paths. Soon we will get some shade on the back patio so this space can be used by those who want to enjoy the wonderful summer weather in Meridian – where right now, sometimes the sun is beating down just a little bit too much, right Sean?

And we aren't done with the golf course, Discovery Park or the libraries. Discovery Park has a phase III in the future, and there are additional improvements which are needed for Lakeview from restrooms located on the course to updates in the clubhouse. These investments will help elevate these assets to the standards we have for our parks and recreation facilities.

And, in case you haven't heard, the library is moving forward on the southern branch thanks to a public/private partnership with Brighton Corporation as part of their Pinnacle planned community. (Try saying that ten times fast...) We look forward to seeing this project come to fruition as services are expanded in south Meridian.

Continuing with gathering spots, the need for a community center in Meridian has to be addressed. As a City, we must determine where the community center should be built and what amenities it will include. Work is underway, but big questions remain.

Additionally, we need to collaborate with the YMCA to bring a facility to north Meridian. They are an important community partner and are invested in our success.

Part of our vision is to create a vibrant community through the arts as well. This has included traffic box art wraps over the past three years and several new murals – the most recent at the Meridian Pool and Tully Park. However, we also need to determine what the future of *performing* arts looks like in Meridian.

If performing arts are what the community wants, we need to devise a plan for facilities. These are conversations that we need to be having with our businesses, philanthropic partners and local government to see what makes sense.

Finally, what would the community look and feel be like without talking about the look? What we are seeing and moving towards in Meridian is a more vertical City in certain areas. Over the last few years, we have seen variances provided allowing buildings to be taller than the current zones allow for. In downtown, we put a *minimum* height standard in place for buildings other than single family residential to help create the opportunity for vibrancy.

There are certain parts of Meridian where additional height standards should apply – like in downtown, at the Village, and along the interstate. These are the areas that make sense. Now we need to update our codes and align building heights to our building requirements which connects construction types to height standards. This is common sense and is good policy. Growing vertically in strategic areas is how we can foster vibrancy in downtown, and allow for more employment opportunities in targeted areas.

We have made real progress in our community look and feel, have some good things in the works, and there is more to do.

Moving on to Mobility – see what I did there?

It's no surprise that mobility and transportation remain the biggest issue according to our residents. They want to see roads widened and intersections improved to alleviate congestion. We have seen great strides over the last three years thanks to collaboration, and have projects in the pipeline that will deliver on this expectation. The road improvements have been the result of working with our development partners to address needs such as Eagle Road and Chinden Boulevard.

The Ada County Highway District has also completed projects throughout the City and is committed to additional improvements along Ustick, Eagle, Fairview and Lake Hazel in the coming years. Not to be outdone, the Idaho Transportation Department is actively building Highway 16 in western Meridian. Once completed it will change how we move about our community and the Treasure Valley.

Our efforts to engage our partners to address these major needs have shown results, and we continue to work with them and appreciate their willingness to step-up when challenges exist.

We have seen pathway investment from the City, ACHD and the development community with approximately 14 miles of new pathways built in the last three years. Many of these pathways have been done in partnership with new development projects and the widening of roadways. As part of this, the City has completed sections along the Creason lateral and the trailhead at Ten Mile Road.

We have also made investment in transit solutions. In 2021, we were able to add our Veterans shuttle to our on-demand transit options. This dedicated service is available to veterans for transport from Meridian down to the VA facility. And last year, Valley Regional Transit was finally able to launch the Route 30 bus service funded by the City that connects Ten Mile, our downtown, and the Village together. Our residents who live in these areas now have a transportation choice for their commute or pleasure.

This fall, we will finish the design of Linder Road overpass which means this project can move forward once funding is secured. I understand appraisals will begin soon for the necessary right-of-way. I want to say thank you to the ACHD Board and Commission President Pickering for including funding for the purchase of that right-of-way in the coming budget. ACHD will consider their budget this August, so I need everyone listening to let the Commission know this project has your support, and how important it is to our community.

We will also see additional road, sidewalk and pathway improvements along Chinden and Lake Hazel roads. These will be completed soon thanks to our development partners. In fact, I was driving down Chinden last week and know the asphalt is down, and I heard last night that the striping is nearly done, if not already! These public-private partnerships help further our goal of protecting travelers, particularly with Lake Hazel completing a safe connection to a destination location at Discovery Park.

Even still, there is more to do. We need to secure funding for the construction of the Linder Road overpass. And yet, there are several other priorities we need to lock down funding for as it pertains to building out our transportation network. We have also engaged our partners to convert one of the last stop-sign controlled rail crossings at Black Cat, and we need to be focused further down the road – or the rail corridor as the case may be – if we are going to find long-term success.

It is essential that the rail corridor that runs through downtown Meridian become a priority for the Governor, the Idaho Transportation Department and the Legislature. By itself, it is too big for any one city or two counties to address. Rather, it needs the full weight and support of our State to secure the long-term opportunity this corridor has for the Treasure Valley. I am dedicated to working with our partners in government and in industry. By doing so, we can meet the needs of existing businesses and transport people to the many employment and educational centers in Meridian and throughout the valley along this asset.

We also need to activate our Federal delegation to help address existing challenges along Interstate 84. We know we have congestion at Eagle and Meridian road interchanges today, partially due to the proximity of Overland Road and the lights at St. Luke's which are impacted by ambulances and other emergency vehicles.

This means we must explore better ways to move people through these areas. We need slip ramps to help people avoid the intersections, or flyover ramps to help vehicles avoid contributing to the congested areas in the first place. These are meaningful, long-term solutions that are good for our citizens, businesses, health care providers, and our transportation network.

And when it comes to helping move people around our community, I believe our transit challenges can be addressed in ways other than just fixed-route buses. We need to be looking towards autonomous, on-demand transit services. These can be smaller vehicles that can enter our neighborhoods, that don't require bus drivers which, due to cost, can impact hours of operation for fixed route services.

We have well-maintained roads in a grid network with lots of sunshine that makes us an ideal area for autonomous vehicles to operate. This is why we are looking at opportunities to collaborate with national automakers as we look for future transit opportunities for Meridian.

Having a transportation network that can efficiently move people in, to, and through Meridian is essential. And so is being safe. This last year, we established an Intersection and Pedestrian Safety Task Force to evaluate every intersection in Meridian with a traffic light. We are looking for areas where improvements can be made to help our drivers, cyclists and pedestrians safely navigate around town.

The work is ongoing, but it is already spurring change as we prioritize locations for more lighting as well as lighting conversions to LED to help make the intersections brighter. We are also finding simple updates like ensuring fresh paint or removing overgrown vegetation. Having this group do the work has been invaluable as we look for ways to make the transportation network safer.

While improvements are important, we also need to make sure we are doing what we can to change driving habits such as reducing red-light running, texting, speeding, and other dangerous driving behaviors. Our Police Department has been investing more time to address these behaviors and is partnering with other agencies in the process.

This group provides a coordinated effort that will patrol traffic hot spots with focused attention. We have also been talking with the community looking for solutions. Our recent survey highlighted traffic enforcement as one specific area to look at, and we have been talking with businesses and residents who are willing to be part of the discussion as we look for additional improvements. I look forward to more thoughtful decisions from our drivers so we can stay safe, keep our traffic moving, and not see delays from crashes which could be avoided by driving more cautiously.

I want to thank ITD for the work they are doing to re-pave Eagle Road. This effort, combined with the third lane added by CenterCal is improving travel along this busy corridor. But now, while the work is occurring, is the time to act and make changes to address the speed of travel.

While I recognize this is a state highway that has had a city grow up around it, the fact is that everything evolves and the state highway has to evolve as well and reflect the standards of the community. Engineered solutions are not always the best. I'm concerned that people will continue to try and travel at unreasonable speeds on the freshly paved road this summer due to a posted speed limit that isn't achievable during many times of the day. I look forward to continuing to work with ITD on a reasonable solution, and expect we will hear back from them soon on speed reductions. Together we can ensure safety in the changing environment.

Working with our partners, we have seen real success in the last three years. I'm committed to achieving goals that are underway, and for our long-term success. When it comes to mobility, we have more to do.

As you can see, we have a lot going on. Our built environment is helping us shape our community look and feel, and that is helping improve our transportation needs. Before I move on to talk about our economy, I want to talk about the key that makes it all happen. Our people.

As you are all aware, it takes people to get the job done and the City is no different. We are blessed to have top-talented employees who bring our CARE values to you, the community, day-in and day-out. And while many of you see our firefighters and police officers in action, there is so much more that our various teams do. I want to take a moment and share just one small highlight by watching this day-in-the-life video from Deana over at the Wastewater Division.

Thank you, Deana for sharing your story! All of the success of the City as we work toward being the premier City in the West, goes to the extraordinary Team Meridian.

Moving on to an aspect that impacts us all. The economy.

Meridian has seen great economic success because we have an atmosphere and opportunities for our businesses to thrive. We have utilized the tools available to us – such as urban renewal districts – in order to help prioritize development and investment in Meridian.

We stayed open for business during hard times. We have kept policies consistent, and avoided unnecessary regulations to reduce the burden on businesses and homeowners. We have invested in resources to help navigate the development process. And, we are proud partners with our Chambers of Commerce as we understand their success is all of our success.

Our business parks and industrial areas have thrived over the last three years. Ten Mile Crossing, Eagle View Landing, Silverstone, and El Dorado have all expanded with new companies becoming part of their growing success. Here you will find new businesses including Kiln, Buckner, PillPack, and Top Golf. You will also find growing businesses such as Limetree Labs, Capital Eleven, and Saltzer Health.

Success is not only in our business parks. We have seen new businesses and expansions pop-up all throughout Meridian. Just go take a drive down Overland, Franklin, Eagle, or any other road and see the investment. Here you will now see Costco, Vertical View Gym, and FedEx to name a

few. And just in the last few weeks Terry Reiley opened their new clinic and Roaring Springs opened their expansion.

Whether in targeted industries, the service sector or any other host of businesses, jobs are coming to Meridian. In fact, since 2020 over 8,500 jobs have been created with average wages increasing more than fifteen percent. That's phenomenal!

We have also seen success in our downtown, with Keller and Associates, Mountain America and the Old Town Lofts completed. Vintage '61 Wine Bar & Kitchen and the 127 Saloon have been renovated providing new food and entertainment options. Downtown has definitely seen its share of investment and success. Unfortunately, the economy has impacted two downtown projects – Union 93 and the Civic Block.

While we understand they are still working to move forward, they have met impacts of the financial markets that many large development projects throughout the Country have faced. We know both of the groups involved in these projects are doing what they can to advance them.

Nonetheless, there are still great projects currently moving forward. Red Aspen is under construction on their new home, Scheels continues to build out their impressive facility. And of course, who can't wait for In-N-Out?

Additionally, the Village at Meridian will be expanding with their next phase which will include more shopping options and a new residential space known as the Bridge, completing the original vision and full build-out along the west edge of their property.

And, we will soon see Loose Screw Brewing renovate a long vacant building as they expand into downtown. This space will include a taproom, a brewery production facility and private event space.

And, not to be outdone, we are excited to hear that healthcare services will be expanding too. Saint Alphonsus is excited to announce the purchase of 18 acres located at Highway 16 and Chinden. This is in preparation to develop a new 60,000 square foot outpatient center. This location will support the needs of our growing population in north Meridian and is anticipated to offer primary care, specialty services and urgent care closer to home.

My point is, there is a lot of commercial activity and services in Meridian that we should all be proud of. And yet, we need to be looking at the larger picture if we are going to remain thriving for years to come.

As we continue to grow, we need to do it in a way which brings jobs closer to where people live. We have seen success in Meridian with our business parks off of the interstate. It started with the Central Valley business park off of Meridian Road, and has continued at Eagle, Ten Mile and throughout Meridian. These have all been a success for the first half of our city's development. As we continue to grow, we need to make sure we are planning for future employment areas in our community.

Highway 16 is planned to connect with other state facilities such as Chinden and Interstate 84. But if we stop there, we are likely going to miss opportunities for south Meridian. I am encouraging our partners to plan for an extension of Highway 16 further south – perhaps all the way to Kuna-Mora. This means we, as a city, need to take a critical look at the area of Amity and McDermott as a future employment zone.

And as we look and plan for employment areas, we also continue to focus in on our target industries. Professional services, technology, advanced manufacturing and other services are all growing areas. And, in case you haven't noticed, much of our current, and I believe future, economy is also based around health care. We are seeing the healthcare industry become a larger driving force in our economy every day.

My vision for Meridian includes becoming the health care epicenter for the State of Idaho for those who need care, are focused on finding the next medical breakthrough, and for the necessary education opportunities of our future providers.

You may have heard that ISU has purchased land to the north of ICOM, adjacent to the Idaho State Police POST facility. They have plans to expand their programs and develop a health care campus. In fact, ISU announced they will invest 5.3 million dollars of newly appropriated state funds to move forward with their first steps.

This initial property development includes funding for site work, testing and underground infrastructure. Through future funding requests, it is anticipated to bring nearly one million square feet of building space for expanded education and research facilities, and support environments.

As a city, we need to review land use designations to plan accordingly for what this area will become with this investment. When we last updated the Comprehensive Plan, the area between St. Lukes on Eagle Road, and ICOM and ISU on Locust Grove was designated as Mixed-Use Neighborhood. We need to lay out a clear framework for a medical corridor in this area with land use and a road network that aligns with this vision. This is good public policy.

And considering our vision for 2035, another area to look at is tourism. By further embracing tourism, we can see the economic development that will help our hotels, restaurants, retailers and more.

We have some pretty great draws currently, whether it is places like the Village including their future restaurants and retail, or the Children's Museum which broke ground on a new expansion funded by a one-million-dollar donation from CapEd. You can spend a day at the largest waterpark in the northwest that just opened a new expansion with the first Tippin' Tater, or an evening at the Meridian Speedway which we are working toward listing on the National Historic Registry. But there is more we should be looking at. We can establish an event that has a regional draw and look at opportunities that come with a facility funded by an Auditorium District that would bring people into our community. This is part of our economic future.

So, how do we get there? Much of it starts with updating our plans to reflect what we want and expect to see. I am looking for your support as we engage with our state leaders to advance ISU's plans and ensure the highest and best use for land in the area. We need to see what type of events we can handle based upon the facilities we have, and then find the right events, activities, and spaces that will draw people to Meridian.

Last year, I spoke about the importance of moving an auditorium district effort forward. Please join me in saying thank you to Sean, the Meridian Chamber Board, the working committee and those who provided funding for the feasibility study to do just that.

While work continues, a facility is an important part of creating a gathering spot for Meridian, and can help generate economic success.

We have a strong economy and we want to keep it that way. So, we have to make sure we have the right environment for others to invest, and growing responsibly is key to that effort.

What have we been able to accomplish over the last three years in responsible growth? First and foremost, our community has stated they want growth to pay for growth. We have continued to utilize impact fees to achieve that outcome. In 2022, the city updated and approved those fees to better reflect the cost of development. We have also been clear with our development partners about where we would like to see growth occur by creating three new urban renewal districts and identifying growth priority areas. This is good policy which is fiscally responsible.

Infill in our downtown is always a number one priority, and we work to keep growth in areas where we and our local government partners have, or are planning to deploy resources. And you heard earlier about the efforts of our development community to get road improvements completed ahead of any planning schedule. This is responsible growth.

We continue to use tools such as urban renewal to get additional road and infrastructure improvements online through new projects. Now we are exploring tools like Community Infrastructure or Local Improvement Districts to continue our practice of having growth pay for growth.

Ultimately, responsible growth is working with our stakeholders and communicating our plans for growth. This also helps our partners like ACHD, the Library and School Districts and others plan for the future.

With investment planned by the City for the construction of Can-Ada lift station in 2025, this will open up the Fields District area for development – continuing to extend the growth priority area further north and west.

Starting in 2027, we will begin extending the McDermott Sewer Trunk Line until it reaches the south side of the interstate in 2031. Once extended and the lift station is built, then it will be up to the development community to pull the line further.

With these investments from the City, we are encouraging development in our northwest priority growth area for the next 10 years. Once the McDermott Trunk line starts heading south, it will begin to open up additional opportunities towards a completed Highway 16 and the county line. With the sewer line on the south side of the interstate, southwest Meridian will then be able to develop further.

These are targets and many things can impact the timeline and plans for each of these next phases. But, it is a start and important for our residents to know, as well as our development partners so they can plan accordingly. By doing this we can be using tools to help deliver needed infrastructure improvements. One thing I can guarantee you is that there is more to do when it comes to growing responsibly in Meridian.

That is why this year's budget request makes purposeful requests that will continue to meet the service level expectations from the public, and our forward-facing departments, as we grow. The budget includes meaningful resources for our support departments of information technology, human resources and finance.

It increases pathway connectivity and invests in more streetlights which will improve the look and feel, and make better mobility connections. The budget continues our deployment of wi-fi to parks, supports our needs for improving the quality of our water and meeting our permit requirements for wastewater, and takes care of our people.

We are able to do this while keeping any property tax increase request as minimal as possible in order to provide the necessary police officers needed for public safety.

Folks, we all need to be engaged about our look and feel; the economy; our mobility; and responsible growth to have a thriving Meridian. And really, it is our people, our employees, our families and our businesses that make us special. And it all starts with our youth.

I want to thank the Chamber for stepping up and providing a fifth youth scholarship to accommodate our outstanding students who are being recognized this year. Unlike other scholarships, this one is about giving back as much as anything else. The funds are awarded to youth who demonstrate evidence of leadership potential through their community involvement, as well as volunteerism, school activities, or work experience. Please join me in congratulating Hannah, Addilyn, Nathan, Grace and Mylie who are this year's recipients.

Thank you and best of luck to these now graduates as they go on to pursue their educational dreams, and more importantly as they continue to influence the world.

As the youth grow into the world, they didn't get there on their own. In fact, it likely took parents, teachers, youth group leaders, coaches, friends and family. It takes dedicated and engaged mentors who invest their time and talents to help our kids mature into future leaders which brings us to this year's Mayor's Legacy Award winners.

Together, these two individuals have more than 35 years of combined experience of leading an organization where many kids first get their start in sports. They have been instrumental in

helping Meridian PAL run programs like soccer, flag football and baseball that have benefited our kids – mine included. They have brought programming to our coaches, encouraged drug-free decisions, and been major partners with the City of Meridian in the development of Heroes Park. They have built an organization that has made a difference for generations of families. Please join me in congratulating Brian Simer and Mark Lightner as this year's Mayor's Legacy Award winners.

Thank you for all you have given.

Since I'm in a thanking mood, I want to say thank you to our legislature. You heard that right! This past year they took real and meaningful steps towards meeting the state's constitutional obligation to fund education – including school buildings. This helps reduce the need for local bonds and levies for facilities.

House Bill 292 was a good first step. However, it is clear from the results of last month's failed levy that additional property taxes should not be the *only* way to support school facility needs in Meridian. We have tremendous schools thanks to the tireless work of all of the West Ada District team. And yet, a larger partnership is needed from the state to fund facilities in West Ada and in other communities around Idaho. I am grateful for the start of much-needed change, and implore our legislators to keep up the good work started this year by continuing to reduce the property tax burden caused by funding schools with bonds and levies.

We need the legislature more focused on these Main Street issues such as education, as well as transportation, and our local business needs. Let's discuss pragmatic policy solutions on healthcare needs and spend time working together so we have local control instead of more big government oversight. It is clear there is more to do in this area, and I am here to support you in this effort.

That being said, I am frustrated with the vocal minority who are manufacturing social issues to create fear and division in our state and communities in an attempt to achieve political gain. This is eroding our society and detracts common sense people from serving in our communities and needs to stop. What this is leading to is elections where people don't talk about ideas and goals, but rather party identifiers and buzzwords.

We don't always have to agree, but we do need to be able to listen and be courteous to one another. This is how we have done it in Idaho and, I will not let that behavior change the values of the State and City I love.

Meridian and Idaho are a welcoming place for people and families. Those who have put down roots here did so because we have the quality of life and great services that people have asked for in a premier community. If we stay focused on what brought us here in the first place, then together we will continue to build a peaceful, just and thriving Meridian, securing the future and legacy for every generation that follows us.

Over the last three years we have advanced construction of projects saving money and deploying services sooner. We have continued our practice of saving before we spend which means we are

debt free. We have brought police and fire personnel on by investing in the right positions when and where they make sense. We have collaborated with our development community and public agencies partners advancing transportation needs and meeting service expectations. We have used our tools implementing a responsible growth strategy. These are common sense, fiscally responsible, pragmatic solutions which are improving our quality of life in Meridian.

I am proud of the accomplishments we have achieved. As I look around me, I'm excited for the plans we have in place. As I look ahead, I'm prepared for the work that needs to be done to meet our vision.

There is more to do in Meridian, and I remain up for the challenge of leading our amazing employees and serving as your Mayor.

Thank you and God bless.