

**State of the City, 2022**  
Mayor Robert E. Simison

Thank you, John, and thank you Sean and the Chamber. Good afternoon!

It is such a pleasure to stand here today before a great crowd comprised of the Meridian business community, City of Meridian employees, and our residents and leaders throughout the Treasure Valley - both in person and watching from afar - to speak about the State of Meridian.

As cities, states, and a nation, we have challenges that we are all facing. Labor and material shortages are happening, inflation is impacting nearly every sector of our economy, and some might question what the future holds.

Elections and the expansive list of issues around them are dividing us, making it challenging to find commonality among our neighbors, coworkers and families.

In Meridian - despite these challenges - we continue to move forward and create our own future.

Our companies and entrepreneurs are flourishing as our state and local business environment promotes opportunity for prosperity, bringing job growth to our community.

In Meridian, we are committed to investing in needed infrastructure to enhance our quality of life, and supporting public safety to protect our general welfare and civil liberties.

We are finding the unity that exists and building upon those things which bind us together rather than tear us apart.

That is why the State of Meridian is strong.

We remain debt free using a save before we spend approach. It starts with being conservative with our revenue estimates and making sure we don't grow at a rate faster than revenues grow.

We have a great team of employees and volunteers at the City of Meridian. From those who serve at the front counter, to those who patrol the streets or work behind the scenes, they are all making it happen for our residents and businesses.

The city services being delivered are first-in-class, with our common-sense fiscal management of valuable taxpayer dollars bringing needed infrastructure and people onboard in the most prudent manner.

Our day-to-day work is combined with our strategic plan which guides us to address the issues the community is facing related to Responsible Growth, Transportation and Infrastructure, Business and Economic Vitality, Public Health and Safety, a Vibrant and Sustainable Community, and Government Excellence. This is what we are focused on to meet our vision to be the West's premier community in which to live, work, and raise a family.

An important part of the team is our City Council. These six individuals each bring a unique skill set to weekly meetings where topics such as land use applications, policy discussions, and budget needs are considered. They are a thoughtful, deliberative body, and I want to thank them for their work and dedication. Thank you, Council.

With our population increasing, our process for electing them is also evolving. You may recall that once Meridian was officially counted over 100,000 people by the census, Idaho State Code requires Council Districts. This will take affect for the November 2023 election.

Our Districting Commission is in the process of developing the new City Council Districts and is currently conducting public hearings on their proposed map. The next public hearing is scheduled for June ninth. It is our intention to complete this process by this summer so the community is aware of the new districts one year in advance of the filing period for next year's election.

Last week, I delivered my proposed fiscal year 2023 budget to City Council. It contains the resources needed to keep up with the services expected from our residents, and the funds needed to help your public servants meet the challenges they are facing every day due to increasing economic strains across our economy. This budget request also has the opportunity to help address identified priorities for our community in areas including transportation, housing and public safety.

The budget contains over 50 new employees as we prepare to open two new fire stations and a police precinct, meet our water and sewer service delivery needs and provide the needed support staff to meet these growing demands. It is ambitious yet balanced. While there are more needs to be met from nearly every department in the City, this is a balanced approach towards achieving the City's needs while keeping to our funding ideals.

As we developed this year's budget, we have also had the ability to evaluate the use of the American Rescue Plan Act or ARPA funds. This is one-time money and investing it into capital needs makes the most sense, rather than putting the money into on-going expenses.

ARPA dollars are generational, and their impacts should be treated as such. They should be used for costs related to COVID, projects that satisfy broad community needs, and those having a long-term return on investment by lower ongoing costs to the community.

With these goals in mind, the City has identified an initial set of likely projects which help preserve the community's long-term future. Projects include improvements to the City's cybersecurity systems, addressing impacts on City healthcare costs due to COVID, and lowering operational costs in our utilities through energy efficiency projects and new technologies. Technologies that will create new bi-product resources and lower long-term operational expenses at the Treatment Plant.

Alongside ARPA, housing affordability is another topic that is very relevant today. We are exploring what the role and responsibility of local government is as it relates to our development policies. A few weeks ago, City Council heard a workshop discussion from staff and the Idaho

Housing and Finance Association on how affordable housing projects work. We don't have the answers yet, but we do know that we have some existing tools available and we are looking at others that may be able to help. What we do know is one solution alone will not solve the issue.

While housing has received a lot of attention recently, transportation has long been identified by our residents as the top priority in every one of our citizen surveys. That is why I remain committed to improving transportation in Meridian and the Treasure Valley.

We continue to see progress as our development and agency partners work to deliver projects in the community.

During the last year we have seen interim intersection improvements in the northwest around Owyhee High School, improvements to Eagle Road from Victory to Amity and there is work being done on Lake Hazel to create a needed safe connection to Discovery Park. Moving forward, we expect the last segment of Chinden to be expanded from Locust Grove to Meridian and Locust Grove to be widened from Overland to Victory.

Additionally, Linder Road overpass remains the top roadway need in Meridian. Local partners have identified a return on investment that will keep costs of services low as travel times are reduced. A similar ROI is found by West Ada School District and its bussing contractor through its operations. Linder Road overpass will also bring properties north of the interstate, including Peregrine Elementary School, into the 5-minute emergency response time. Without Linder overpass, this is not currently possible. And, it will also give time and gas back to all residents and businesses who wish to avoid the interchanges of Meridian Road and Ten Mile Road, which are experiencing traffic congestion. Design is underway on Linder, and now we need to press forward to fund the construction of this important road connection.

One of the largest road projects on the horizon is the construction of Highway 16. This will connect Interstate 84 to the current Highway 16 terminus at Chinden. This section of highway will provide enhanced north/south travel and better access for those living along this corridor. I want to say thank you to ITD for working with ACHD on a plan to improve the local road connections where Highway 16 will intersect the local road network. This will be a win for all members of the public who travel this corridor.

Another project currently underway is the additional lane on Eagle Road headed south from River Valley to complete the connection of a third lane all the way to the interstate. More capacity is needed and this project continues the improvements to this area through development funded efforts under the successful STARS program.

However, capacity improvements aren't the only need on Eagle Road. We also need a safer road. A road that doesn't feel like a race track as people are accessing critical health care services and local businesses. I have been working with our partners at ITD and ACHD for just that and I am hopeful that our partners will find the best solutions to make Eagle Road safer.

We know Eagle Road is a state highway. No other city in the Treasure Valley, or the State - as far as I am aware - has a State Highway running through a central business section of its community operating at 55 miles per hour.

Could you envision speeds of 55 miles per hour racing through downtown Weiser, Payette, McCall or Donnelly? Highway 55 already slows down in Marsing, Nampa, and Eagle. Why must this road be driven at 55 miles per hour in Meridian when it has the busiest intersections in the state? It doesn't need to be, nor is it possible at most times of the day.

Eagle Road will be resurfaced soon which will impact road operations. Our partners need to consider whether the speed limit or access points need to change as well. Maybe variable speeds zones, changes to signal timing or added traffic signage solutions are necessary or some other combination of changes? Regardless, now is the time to make safety improvements to the Eagle Road corridor! I am asking the business community, and our transportation partners to engage on finding meaningful, long-term solutions that will make Eagle Road easier and safer for all who travel it.

A safer transportation network helps to improve our community. As we look at our strategic goals, we also need to find ways to increase vibrancy and economic opportunity in Meridian.

Several years ago, the Meridian Chamber of Commerce assembled a group of stakeholders to explore if an Auditorium District made sense in our community. Auditorium Districts are a financing tool to bring facilities to Meridian that attract visitors and enhance our quality of life. These districts are funded by a user fee from hotel patrons and can provide great benefits to the Meridian community in the form of meeting, hospitality and entertainment spaces for our graduations, businesses, performing arts and other needs.

We are seeing more hotels being built in Meridian. As this industry continues to grow, we need to determine if an Auditorium District is the right approach for Meridian. The Chamber of Commerce plans to explore this option. I look forward to continued discussions and involvement from our community partners as we figure out a path forward for Meridian.

While work will be done over the next year on an Auditorium District, our City employees have been and continue to do a lot of work. It takes a team, and I want to thank you - Team Meridian. Here is a look at some of that hard work and the accomplishments.

[Play Video]

Congratulations to the team on these successes!

As we grow, we need to invest in our parks and recreation facilities. This will include expansion of our system, improvements to some partner facilities, and plans for future amenities.

First, we continue to build out Discovery Park in south Meridian. Phase two, currently under construction will add 40 acres to the already operational 27 acres of this regional park. This second phase will take about 18-24 months to complete including great amenities such as tennis,

pickleball, a pump track and lighted softball fields. These additions will add to the variety at Discovery Park to meet the expectations of our residents.

Additionally, our pathways continue to expand as we have about one-third of our master system developed. Whether expansion occurs by the City or via developments that get built, our residents greatly value this amenity. Looking ahead and working with our development partners, we will continue to connect our community gathering spots using our pathway network.

Last year, I spoke about the partnership with the Western Ada Recreation District for Lakeview Golf Club. I'm happy to say that work is underway making general improvements to the course core features like tee boxes and soon necessary irrigation improvements. Updating these fundamental elements will allow more time and energy to be placed on other operational needs. There will be some interruption to play on the course this summer, but I think the minor inconvenience for a few rounds will be well worth it in the end.

Working with WARD, we are also transitioning the operation of the Story Park pool to the City. We have been addressing some needed safety and mechanical improvements to the pool.

While unfortunately, this means one of the diving boards is out of commission for the season due to supply chain issues, there have been upgrades to the filtration and cleaning systems, ADA improvements and some general TLC.

Through our partnership with WARD, we are focused on reducing the property tax burden on Meridian residents by eliminating this separate taxing district. This is a multi-year plan to allow the transfer to occur in collaboration so as to not impact either of our existing services. I want to thank board chair Shaun Wardle and the other members of WARD for working together to make this happen.

As if these projects weren't enough, our Parks and Recreation team is also focused on plans for a new community center. While our current facility is going away, we have also heard from residents about what they would like to see in a new facility. Whether for classes, meetings, or a variety of activities, we will need space that allows us to deliver the premier services people are looking for. We are wrapping up our space study to help evaluate what makes sense so that we can begin design in 2023 and plan for construction the following year.

It is my hope that the community center will continue to exist in downtown. If that is the case, once completed, it will join the Story Park pool as an amenity and gathering space for our residents. This will enhance our services in our downtown in a similar way to what exists in south Meridian at the Hill.

With investments in facilities downtown, and the Hill in South Meridian bolstering services in those areas, we need to be planning what the future looks like in north Meridian too. In talking with our partners, we can determine how to meet the need for similar facilities that can serve this area as well. I look forward to working with our team and talking with our community partners about how to create a place for people to gather in north Meridian.

And while we are moving forward with these efforts, I also continue to be thankful for our partnerships we have with the private sector. They are bringing some great amenities to the community! I'm sure you all saw the area under construction as you drove in where Roaring Springs is in phase 1 of its waterpark expansion. This will include an action river, a new activity pool, a play structure for young kids with a surrounding pool, and lots of new seating areas. I appreciate the investment by owners who are committed to the success of this facility and our community. They are focused on providing safe, clean fun - and jobs. Tom, Pat, thank you for your efforts and continued investment in Meridian.

Joining them this year we expect to see Top Golf open their doors as well. I know many have already started to work on their swing for when they open. And not to be outdone, we are seeing Scheels move forward with their Meridian facility out at Ten Mile. This retail and entertainment facility will redefine sports shopping for many.

And, maybe you have heard about In-N-Out coming to the Village? Many have been waiting for this establishment to enter our market for as long as I have been with the City. Well, it looks like the time has come. Additionally, you may have seen that the Village is looking at residential living with the Bridge, along with more entertainment and shopping options at this destination location.

All of these additions and improvements cement that Meridian is the entertainment center for the Treasure Valley. Whether it is food, shopping, or entertainment - businesses know that Meridian is where you want to be for your family friendly operations. The community is growing, and people are asking for more opportunities to shop, dine and play. These are all major investments in our community and I know we will happily welcome them as they open their doors in Meridian. And, you never know who may be next.

Now, I've just been talking about the family fun in Meridian. With this and other investment comes jobs. We are seeing better paying, family wage jobs coming to and, expanding and staying in Meridian. In 2021 we had over 4,900 jobs created, with over 1,000 in our targeted business sectors of advanced manufacturing, IT, professional services and healthcare. The average wage of jobs in Meridian is also increasing.

We have seen new companies call Meridian home in the last year such as JST Manufacturing, and Americor; we have seen companies expand like Scentsy, In-Time Tec and Keller Engineers; and we have seen companies decide to stay in Meridian such as ESI and Power Engineers as they move and consolidate their operations into new facilities to meet their growing needs.

These businesses are here for a reason and they are choosing to stay here. With a favorable business environment and a central location, Meridian is, and will continue to be, the destination location for businesses to call home.

That favorable environment is no accident. At the City, we continue the Meridian Way and practice our CARE values. I want to acknowledge the work of those in our development sector and their partners in our Community Development department. They are working hand-in-hand

as we see larger, more complex structures built in our community where companies are investing and jobs are being created.

Are we perfect, no; are we committed to doing our part to meet the needs of those investing, yes. We will continue to provide premier service to our customers, and are always open to ideas and looking for ways to improve and streamline while ensuring safety for all.

We are seeing commercial projects continue to develop at an amazing pace. Eagle View Landing, El Dorado, Silverstone and Ten Mile Crossing all have active projects which will allow companies to grow and locate in Meridian.

Another area we are seeing progress in is our downtown with the projects under development beginning to shape the future of this area.

Last fall, the first ever State of Downtown was held and included over 100 business reps and stakeholders to share information about the current state and future of our downtown. Since that meeting, there has been a large focus on plans for the Civic Block which will transform much of the block between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, and Broadway and Idaho with residential and commercial uses.

In addition to the redevelopment, this project will also include the creation of a festival street along 2<sup>nd</sup> which will help bring new opportunities to our downtown. While there are still details to be discussed and finalized, this project keeps the momentum we have seen with the Keller building completed, Old Town Lofts making great progress with plans to open in the coming months, and Union 93 taking shape.

As we grow, we are continuing the work of our current Comprehensive Plan which includes the creation of the Fields District Sub Area Plan and updates to the open space and amenities standards. The Linder, Union District and Northern Gateway urban renewal areas were also established that will help bring transportation improvements and other infrastructure needs to these areas with desired capital investment resulting in family wage jobs.

One of the questions I often get asked is about infrastructure; how are we doing at keeping up and providing the needs to our community? Well, infrastructure comes in many forms. Some think about roads and power. Some think about water, sewer and fiber. Truth is, it is all of that and more.

We provide some of those services and some are provided by our partners. When it comes to water and sewer, we continue to deliver the service people expect and at an amazing rate. That said, due to the increased costs we are seeing for construction projects, we are proposing our first rate increase in eight years for the amount our customers pay for water and sewer.

This is necessary so we can continue to meet regulatory requirements imposed upon us, and the service level expectations of our customers. Projects such as water treatment facilities and odor reduction technologies help provide the high-quality resources the community expects. With large costs associated with water and sewer facilities, the increases will also help continue our

debt free spending practice for future capital needs. And while these rate increases are needed, they are small in nature and our rates would remain one of the lowest in the Valley.

Our other infrastructure need is how best to deploy our police and fire services. Last year, I talked about the need to advance one of our fire stations ahead two years in order to deploy needed services to our community. After a lot of work between the City and our construction partner, we just held a ground-breaking ceremony for station seven last week!

One thing we know is that things are costing more and taking longer to build. Whether because of the pandemic, the global supply chain issues, or our historic labor market everything is costing more and taking longer. A bid package for two fire stations that was fourteen percent above estimates is a remarkable accomplishment in this market and economic climate. I call this a win for the design team and everyone involved. In fact, we've heard of some projects for other agencies coming in nearly sixty percent over estimates.

Also moving forward is our police precinct in north Meridian. The Meridian Police Department is growing - just like our city - and having a second location will provide a more convenience for residents, additional space for our teams, and reduced windshield time for our officers which keeps our people deployed in this section of Meridian.

Less time driving back to headquarters means we can spend more time in the neighborhoods doing what the men and women in the department do best, community policing. Our residents want to see our officers in their neighborhood, and our officers want to create relationships with them. Bringing this resource online will help meet that goal.

The most important part of the infrastructure for these public safety needs is the human aspect. None of these stations and precincts can benefit the community without people to serve them. Growing our number of fire stations by 33% in one year is not an easy task - but it is a necessary one. I want to say thank you to our Fire Chief, his team and the Union President Derek Nelson who are all coming alongside one another and putting together a plan to onboard the firefighters.

And, this all would not be possible without the Rural Fire District continuing their tradition of partnering with the City of Meridian. With the Rural Fire's help with funding for additional personnel, we were able to advance one of the stations by two years. We greatly appreciate their collaboration so please join me in saying thank you to them!

Our ability to leverage building all of these facilities together is a cost savings for the City and the most prudent approach towards bringing these services to the community. More important than the cost savings however, is that once these projects are completed, we can more adequately provide the life safety services this community expects and pays for with their property tax. Additionally, it will help us reduce our ISRB rating which will be a financial benefit to all those who own property in Meridian.

While these public safety needs are moving forward at the City, our local government partners are also bringing forward projects in Meridian.

This past year we celebrated the opening of the newest driver's license office on Progress Avenue making it easier for those in western Ada County, including Meridian, to access this service. Ada County also started construction on a new coroner facility.

We are also having conversations with the Ada County Paramedics about how we can reduce the response time in Meridian for medical transport of residents in need. Co-locating paramedics in one or more of our fire stations is a great way to reduce the response time and save building costs, and we look forward to ongoing conversations with them.

Another one of our important community partners, Ada County Highway District, plans to construct a new operations yard on Ustick which will bring quicker snowplow and street maintenance deployment to Meridian.

So, how do we pay for these infrastructure needs? In Meridian, we have long utilized impact fees to help pay for police, fire and park facilities. ACHD also uses impact fees. However, this is not something the County has utilized and they are now exploring that option and asking the cities to be their partners in this process.

As a City, we and our residents have said growth should pay for growth. If that is true for our services, we need to support our local government partners who also have that tool when they bring it forward. We know an expansion of the Ada County Jail - a facility all cities use - is needed, and the County is proposing to charge impact fees for these types of facilities. The City of Meridian needs to support this approach if the increase in services demanded by growth is going to get built.

Now, not every local government entity has access to impact fees. Libraries and schools are excluded from using impact fees and they rely upon bonds and levies for their capital needs.

In 2019, voters approved a levy for the Meridian Library District to make improvements to existing facilities and build two new libraries in Meridian. Those projects continue to move forward. The Orchard Park branch has been under construction over the last several months and we are hoping to see the project completed this December so they can increase space and provide another location for the community to access their services.

In south Meridian, work continues to find a way to get this project moving forward. Due, in part, to the challenges that have come during the recent years with increased costs, the Meridian Library District is working in partnership with the development community to find a better alternative. I am confident they will find a way to deliver on their commitment to their patrons.

These projects come after they were able to re-launch Unbound to the community in our downtown, showcasing that a library is so much more than books. This Makers' Space is where innovation meets imagination. If you have an idea, they have a way to help you turn that idea into something real. With 3D printers, laser cutters, and a sound studio, there is so much to explore. In fact, later this year I will be launching the #MyMeridian podcast using this amazing facility. You can look for that to hit all your favorite podcasts sites this fall.

Over the last decade we have seen the Meridian Library District grow, innovate, and be more than we ever knew it could be. I know it takes a team and it has. Teams have leaders and there was one person who I think has been the catalyst to this team, their past executive director, Gretchen Caserotti.

Every interaction I had with her over the years was a joy. I know she loved her time in Meridian and I think we all benefitted from her knowledge, experience, friendship and passion. I was sad when I heard the news she had accepted a position out of the area and, as I told her when we sat down together the last time, I felt we got five more years with her than I thought we ever would because she is a Rockstar! While she isn't here today, please join me in saying thank you to Gretchen for her dedication to our community. [APPLAUSE]

I am choosing to believe that Gretchen accepted that offer outside the area to grow her career and help improve life for her and her family. But I wouldn't blame her if she chose to leave because of the views expressed by some in our community, views which were further flamed by some members of the Idaho Legislature, during this last year towards librarians.

Now, I understand having disagreements with people and advocating for change if you don't like the way things are being run or decisions are being made. I don't understand the approach the House took on this issue, though. What they did is disappointing and is not the Idaho I grew up in. We used to find ways to work together; to welcome new ideas, to discuss and vet the merits of them. Republicans and Democrats could talk together on the fence line or in the coffee shop and pray together on Sunday. Disagreements happened, and we understood we would work it out.

I want to encourage people coming to Idaho to get to know what has made us special. The rugged individualism balanced with the expectation that we help one another in times of need, that we are courteous and nice. You chose Idaho for a reason; it is not what you left. It has taken generations and decades for Idaho to become this special place. Let's be sure we are not destroying what has made us who we are, or letting the last two years define us.

Yes, things change, people change and it isn't going to stay the same forever. That doesn't mean that the Idaho I grew up in can no longer exist. Idaho is growing, and it is our responsibility to grow in a way that protects the tenants of our State and communities.

To make that happen, we need to have people in positions of leadership who are doing what they can to preserve the Idaho way of living, doing business and our values. Leaders who are focused on the people; that use common sense in their approach to challenges; that don't have to put down others to make a point and understand the value of lending a hand-up.

During the primary last month, I was pleased to see results in races where Senator Chuck Winder and Councilman Treg Bernt were selected to move onto the general election. I have had my disagreements with both of them - sometime a little spirited. Regardless, what I know is that with people like them in leadership positions in our community and state, I am optimistic we can return to the Idaho Way.

Speaking of candidates, the legislature and our partners, I want to talk about schools. Last year, I felt like we put together a great way for the Governor and Legislature to provide property tax relief while placing the responsibility of funding 100% of education - including schools - where it belongs, with the State of Idaho.

It is vital that our State take up its constitutional responsibility to fully fund education. They didn't follow my advice last year, yet I think they can still accomplish this goal. In fact, just last month the State projected a 1.3-billion-dollar surplus for the current fiscal year. The funds are there.

I am once again calling on them to use some of the historic surplus to pay down school bond debt which would remove significant property tax burdens on the majority of Idahoans. Develop sideboards if you need, provide some of the revenue to districts that have no bond debt if necessary.

Additionally, establish a building fund for school districts to access for future schools. We can avoid future debt by establishing such a fund. Ultimately, the state needs to act now and fund educational responsibilities while providing property tax relief to Idahoans!

If the governor and legislature aren't interested in this approach, then we need to ask them to share their ideas and bring forward a proposal. As citizens of Idaho, we need to advocate for solutions and find ways for revenue from growth to fund school facilities.

Impact fees may be part of the solution, but they only work in areas of our state with high growth. The state needs to invest growth revenue in new schools and give local control to communities in a way to meet their needs without passing bonds on property taxes. I remain committed to working with our local legislators, the governor, and others to find realistic solutions to these issues.

And why does this matter? Well, over the next decade or so, West Ada is currently projecting the need for eight new schools in their district. I am confident that the Board of Trustees and Superintendent Bub will put together a plan that will maximize space, work with partners, and focus on the needs of our community. To do this, they need tools to address the challenges they are facing. Ultimately, I would rather have them focused on educating our kids versus running bond elections and waiting for the outcome of those elections before they can even plan to meet their needs.

This last year, we did see some great new facilities open in the district which included the last piece of Meridian High School's renovation with the auditorium, and the opening of the Idaho Fine Arts Academy. This, combined with the charter schools and private school activity in Meridian is a great start, and we know there is much more to do if we are to meet the needs of our students and expectations of our businesses and community.

Speaking of students, the events of last week in Texas were horrific and my heart goes out to the grieving families. As a parent, the thought of this is unimaginable. We send our children to school each day to learn and grow but, more and more, they are being put in a position to be

aware of the violence that can exist. Safety is our number one priority in Meridian, and work is being done with our law enforcement and the school district to help stem potential acts of violence, but we need to do more now.

In order to keep all of our students as safe as possible I am proposing we hire an additional six School Resource Officers for assignment to West Ada elementary schools in Meridian, as we implement a dedicated SRO program for elementary schools. These additional officers will allow our current SRO's to stay focused on their efforts in High Schools and Middle Schools, while bringing needed resources for our most vulnerable youth.

And, while we work to provide the best for our students, Meridian students are showing us their best. This year we had the pleasure of acknowledging some state championship teams from Owyhee and Meridian High Schools and soon Rocky Mountain too! Also, our MYACers were able to meet in person again and have their impact felt whether volunteering or holding a candidate forum during the fall elections. Our Police Department conducted the Youth Safety Academy furthering my goals of youth community leadership and career development.

Career and community leadership development in youth is important to me. That is why I am excited to also push expansion of the City's intern programs over the next 18 months. A strong workforce is so important and if young people are interested in working in local government I am committed to giving them opportunities and leveraging those opportunities into future public servants.

One of the things that has been occurring as long as I have been at the City is using donated funds from this State of the City event to support our youth through scholarships. Volunteerism in the community is a primary factor with these scholarships, and as always, we have four amazing recipients, let's take a look:

[Play Video]

Congratulations to Emma, Chloe, Audrey and Miles. I look forward to following your lives to see the amazing things you will do.

Folks, let's be thankful. Thankful for the cool, wet spring weather we have had. This past spring reminded me the beauty, power and importance of water in the west. I have said it before and I will say it again, water is our most precious natural resource.

As a skier, I am always excited to see snow in the mountains. As an Idahoan, I also know that snow is the lifeblood for our ability to live and thrive in a high dessert summer thanks to the intricate system of dams and irrigation, and a healthy aquifer.

As winter progressed with excitement in December, each week from January through April seemed to come a report of the lacking snow in the mountains for the reservoirs. Yet with many of those weeks also came cool weather and rain showers, even snow at the higher elevations. The extra moisture was certainly a welcome relief.

Despite the storms we experienced, we remain in a short water year. Is it as bad as it was predicted? No. Would we have liked it to be better? Yes. I can look out today and see our Public Works engineering group, and I smile because “water” is no simple topic in Idaho. Are we talking ground water supply where we get our drinking water? Are we talking surface water supply for irrigation? Does it really matter what type of water? No, it doesn't. We use it to grow crops, we use it to fight fires, we use it to supply industry, we expect it to come out of our kitchen sinks, and we certainly expect it to leave our house when we flush!

While I can stand here confidently today and tell you that the ground water supply that Meridian uses to provide drinking water is healthy for the long-term future, I cannot tell you the same for this year's surface water supply many uses for our farmland or for irrigating our lawns and landscapes. To be healthy in the Treasure Valley for generations to come, we need to be prudent with our water no matter where it comes from and what its purpose is.

Being water-wise starts with following guidance from our water suppliers, whether the irrigation district, canal company, City or homeowners' association. I encourage you to follow watering schedules and rotations that your subdivisions have implemented. If you don't know what I am talking about, reach out to your HOA and ask. If your HOA doesn't have one, work with them to set one up.

Inside your home, make sure you are taking simple steps to conserve such as putting in low-flow devices and not leaving the water running when not in use. If we all use a little less water and spread out when we use it, the more we can thrive this year and leave a legacy of smart use for future years and generations.

Speaking of legacy and impacts on generations, it just seems to make sense to talk about the Mayor's Legacy Award winner right here. This year's recipient has deep roots in our community where he relied upon water to grow crops on his farm in our community. But it was the role he played for 50 years as a different kind of farmer - and user of water - where he has developed a Legacy in Meridian that will continue to be felt for generations.

As a pastor he made his mark in our community never seeking the spotlight, but advocating for what was right. All you have to do is look at the programs offered through Ten Mile Christian Church under his leadership. Whether it was implementing celebrate recovery programs before they were cool or being the leader in providing prison ministries to help those looking for a new path. Whether building a facility that is a beacon to the community where they have space for those who have special needs, have hosted their fall festival, the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast, and TMC sports, or whether advocating for the building of the Ten Mile Interchange - you can feel his impact.

I could go on about how he has personally impacted my life, but suffice it say, there are thousands of stories out there to be shared about how he has touched the lives of so many.

It is my honor to present this year's Mayor's Legacy Award to the now retired Pastor Steve Moore in honor of his hard work and selfless dedication that has been given to help the City of

Meridian become a vibrant community and a premier city to live, work and raise a family.  
Congratulations Pastor Moore. Come on up!

[Pastor Moore Speaks]

Congratulations once again Pastor Moore.

We are fortunate to call Meridian home.

We are growing, evolving and thriving.

We are working with our partners to align our collective resources and grow responsibly.

We are seeing private investment which is bringing infrastructure, housing, jobs, and entertainment to our community.

As your Mayor, I am committed to addressing the challenges we face, encouraging innovation within the City, and will stay focused on the fundamental services we provide.

As a leader in the community, I will continue advocating for our infrastructure and policy needs to get us closer to being the premier community in which to live, work and raise a family.

As an Idahoan, I will do my part and encourage others to do our part and find commonality with one another so we can keep Meridian and Idaho what we all know and love.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve this community and God bless!