

STATE OF THE CITY – March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011

I want to begin by thanking the first lady, my wife, Kerri Pennington and my beautiful daughters, McCanless and Mary Clare. I want to thank and recognize members of our City Council: from district 1, Adlena Graham, from district 2, Bernice Wilson, from district 3, Wanda James, from district 4, Johnny Andrews, mayor pro-tem, district 5, Bob Braddock, and from district 6, William Shirley. I thank Senator Gerald Malloy and Speaker Pro-tem Jay Lucas for always finding the time to come and support their hometown. I thank Coker College for allowing us to use their beautiful facility—this is proof of a strengthening relationship, a bridge between the city and the campus. I also want to thank Sonoco, HilexPoly and Progress Energy for their continued support of our city, and, of course, my fellow Hartsville residents.

I think I should start by explaining why I felt the need to address the city. The Constitution says that from time to time a president will, “give information to Congress about the State of the Union, that he will recommend to their consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.” I think this should also be true on a local level. I am an advocate of accountability and transparency of government. I was elected to lead and that gives me a responsibility to communicate the city’s agenda, to be open about its operations. I owe the community and I have an obligation to address concerns. I think it’s necessary to take time to review where we’ve been and what we’re working towards, to remind ourselves of the things that make us great and the reasons why Hartsville endures.

In the first few weeks of 2011 we have faced incredible challenges, but those challenges revealed our strength—our faith—in each other and in our community. We have seen tragedies and disasters, both natural and unnatural, and we have rallied to provide shelter, aid and compassion for our neighbors. In the first few weeks of the New Year I have witnessed an outpouring of love, people banding together during trials, quite literally, by fire, and like gold it has only made our values stronger. Odds are that if you are here you believe in something greater and more consequential than yourself, that you have a vision for Hartsville. By attending tonight, by taking an active interest in the state of your city, you have made a commitment to help realize that vision. You recognize that only together can we move forward. With a sincere and unified effort we can forge an even better place to live, work, study and raise our families.

I dream for Hartsville to be not just a flagship for Darlington County but a model for the entire state. When people get the opportunity to move to South Carolina I want them to choose us. Our city is a remarkable one and we have so much to be proud of. We are home to international and domestic corporations, some of the finest academic institutions in the southeast, a thriving fine arts community, one of the biggest Veteran memorials in the state, and a botanical garden larger than New York's Central Park. We have the attractions, we have the resources, and we are marketable, but more important than that, we have committed people. Our town was founded by self-starters, motivated individuals who inspired and demanded action from those around them. There are those who continue that spirit, people who have volunteered countless hours of their time because they recognize Hartsville's potential and because they are not content to just leave things as they are.

I'm reminded of earlier this year, when an ice storm threatened to bring this city to a grinding halt I received a call from a young man named Scott Nelson. He said, "I know the D.O.T. won't be able to make their way here anytime soon. Would you mind if I took my truck and started scraping Green Street?" That is the kind of initiative I'm referring to. Thanks to volunteers we were able to dig out this city and provide aid to those without power and electricity. We should follow our own example. We are go-getters. Hartsville is great but we can do even better.

Improving the city is accomplished by working together to change both the social and the physical landscape. We have made beautification a priority. Our Public Service department should be commended on their hard work and how well they have begun implementing plans to make our town more attractive. A few weeks ago City Council passed a nuisance ordinance that will prevent property owners from allowing their yards to grow wild with a gross amount of weeds, bushes and undergrowth. We have over 75 condemned houses slated for demolition starting in the summer. Hartsville has also received 400 thousand dollars in grant money from the EPA for the revitalization of former industrial and commercial sites. Though we expect these measures to be met with some opposition I want to remind people that these actions will be taken to promote the general health, safety and welfare of all people of the city. Unkempt lots and abandoned buildings create fire hazards, provide venues for crime, and lessen the value of our homes. They are public eyesores and infringe on rights of others to have a safe and beautiful community. We also need to think of beautification in a broader sense, and do more to help the environment. This morning I met with Sonoco to discuss the creation of a city wide recycling initiative to keep Hartsville beautiful for our children and our children's children.

Betterment also involves embracing new technologies and investing in the future. In the past year we have explored bold new solutions and the creation of a Hartsville fiber optic network. We have sought government grants to fund the implementation of an infrastructure that would allow the city to provide the fastest internet access, the highest definition cable, and dependable phone service to our own citizens. In 2011 we will continue to pursue a vision of Hartsville that is fully equipped to compete in the twenty-first century. We have employed new technologies to upgrade the basic services of our city and improve our standard of living. Our Finance Department has implemented online bill pay which provides a faster, easier, way for us to pay our utilities. We received a 1.5 million dollar grant for digital water meters that can be checked wirelessly, increasing our efficiency and saving the city money. We have begun using Nixle, an online public safety system that allows citizens to receive emergency notices from the city via email or text message. Also, through the city website, the police department can share current neighborhood crime data with the CrimeReports system. These tech-initiatives strengthen education, encourage economic development, and enhance information services and public safety.

While on the issue of public safety I want to thank Chief Deputy Jerry Thompson who has done an excellent job serving as interim police chief. Under his direction we have seen a greater police presence: regular door-to-door patrols downtown, increased patrols around the city and checkpoints throughout. Our police department is working tirelessly to ensure that Hartsville is made safe. But our officers are most effective when working with the citizens they protect and serve. Earlier this year I was approached by Emory Waters who has moved back to Hartsville after 40 years of working with the FBI. He asked if he could volunteer his knowledge and experience to the city's police force. A few months ago I received a call from a man with a wife

and a newborn. He told me that drugs were being sold on his street and asked my advice about starting a community watch group. It is up to all of us, not just law enforcement, to lower the crime rate. We all need to work harder to take a proactive stance against crime. We are all members of this community; we need to look out for one another. A crime anywhere in Hartsville is a crime everywhere in Hartsville and just because you are not the victim does not make you any less responsible for doing the right thing.

Many out of work often feel the pressure to turn towards a life of crime, and though it makes their actions no less condemnable we need to understand the correlation between increases in criminal behavior and increases in unemployment. In 2010 we saw the number of jobs in Darlington County shrink considerably and the competition for work in this area has become fierce. The destruction of the Agrium Plant, the loss of sixty jobs, was another blow. However, we should never lose hope. We should accept it as a challenge to find new ways to expand the job market for our citizens. I believe with uncompromising faith that our local economy will get better because of its entrepreneurial spirit. It starts with the small business owners. We are a city filled with passionate people, and by following that passion and capitalizing on their dreams, we create jobs right here in Hartsville. Our small businesses provide the city a selling point to bigger business and change the perceptions of what one can expect from a small southern town. Large companies will continue to invest in Hartsville after seeing what we have to offer—dozens of community owned and operated businesses that prove we are capable of sustainability.

However, with the realities of the current economy, I see no reason to make apologies for pursuing private dollars or state and federal money for the benefit of our city. Last year we were able to secure funds for over 400 thousand dollars worth of water improvement in south-

Hartsville. Just last week we were notified that the fire department has received a grant of 95 thousand dollars which will be used to purchase better equipment and improve their exemplary level of service. In February, Sonoco announced that, as a part of their PULSE initiative, they would invest 5 million dollars in Hartsville area schools. Along with a cooperative effort between Coker College, the Governor's School of Science and Mathematics and Yale University's Comer Project, this could put our education system in competition with the best in the state and give our children a better future. This year we've made a commitment to more actively seek outside funding for our city. We will be meeting with department heads to see what they need to do their job more effectively and develop grant making strategies. We also want to better publicize the recipients of those grants, their general approach and the reasons for applying. By doing this we hope to inspire others in Hartsville who have ideas for a program or initiative. If you believe that you might be able to address some area in our community which is lacking, seek every opportunity to fund your vision. Be more than a human being, be a human doing. Bring about the change you want to see.

We're strengthening our staff with people who embody that drive. At the start of this year we hired a new City Manager, Natalie Zeigler, and she has already done an amazing job getting us refocused. We will of course appoint a new Chief of Police and continue the work being done to clean up our streets. We will be announcing a Special Projects Manager and create a Public Information Officer position to help better communicate our agenda to the people. The city is growing and we need the right kind of people to help facilitate that growth.

The state of the city is progressing for the better, and though we have a lot of needs, we have an amazing amount of resources. We should never get discouraged. Margret Mead told us to,

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” And that is true of us. We are small but we are committed to building a better Hartsville. Despite any and all of our differences we agree that Hartsville can be improved—we don’t give up on this city. By moving forward, together, towards that collective vision of a better Hartsville we can exceed the limits of our own expectations. I know that realizing that vision will at times be very difficult but I believe our faith and our passion will be rewarded.

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