



## Statement from Parish President Mike Yenni

August 8, 2019

Since taking office in January of 2016, progress throughout Jefferson Parish has been undeniable. My administrative team and I have approved three balanced \$650 million plus budgets without controversy, and we restructured government departments to maximize efficiency.

Flood protection was among my top priorities. We put six new pump stations online, modernized aging pumps at 11 stations, funded upgrades to levee protection throughout Jefferson, deployed units and manpower to clean out more than 20,000 storm drains annually, added funding to properly operate the Corp of Engineers pump station at the 17<sup>th</sup> Street Canal, lobbied Washington and Louisiana officials aggressively for major funding that led to widespread drainage and flood protection, and redrafted the agreement between the city of New Orleans and parish of Jefferson to allow us to put a trained pump station operator in the 17<sup>th</sup> Street Canal pump station.

I believe a 'high quality of life parish' must have first class streets. So, along with my administrative team, I ushered in more than \$435 million in street upgrades, replacements and repairs. That accounted for 5,000 new streets panels, 21,000 pothole repairs, 20 miles of newly paved roadway, and 137 completed roadway and sewer projects. We widened Lapalco Boulevard to ease traffic and we

approved Phase One of a \$129 million project to enhance the 5-mile long east-west corridor known as the Earhart Expressway.

Our work to ensure that our parish's sewerage system was always in peak condition led us to replace 55 lift station pumps, install 27,000 linear feet of new force main, and install a new sewer force main from the Lamore lift station to the Galleria lift station.

We maintained and manicured hundreds of feet of neutral grounds, parks, playgrounds and parkways to ensure that the beauty of our parish was evident to commuters, and visitors and citizens alike. We conducted more than 70 code sweeps throughout the parish to protect the integrity of our neighborhoods and protect our property values.

We restructured management at the Animal Shelter, updated the PetPoint system, drafted new guidelines for the care of animals, and formed a partnership with one of the nation's leading animal rescue organizations. In fact, earlier this year we rescued over 160 animals from one site and all have gone to a family or home either here or out of state.

As chairman of the Regional Planning Commission, I was gratified to secure over \$250 million for capital improvement projects that did not cost our Jefferson Parish taxpayers a single dime.

I am proud that we have ignited an economic resurgence in Jefferson that surpasses the expectations of business leaders and groups throughout the region. Our quest for economic stability and growth led to an aggressive and collaborative push between this administration, JEDCO, the Jefferson Chamber, GNO, Inc. and others. The results are evident; a \$360 million expansion at Ochsner, a \$70 million processing facility at Fuji Vegetable Oil, a \$50 million distribution center at U.S. Foods, a 200+ job sales and customer support center at Select Comfort, an \$850 million expansion at Dyno Noble, a \$30 million new Carmax facility, the transformation of Elmwood Center from a linear strip mall to a 100-acre mixed-use town center, and the list continues with several thousand new businesses and corporations finding a home in Jefferson in the last three years.

And while former administrations struggled to resurrect the chained and rusting Avondale Shipyards, we found success in a partnership with the Port of New Orleans and Louisiana Economic Development as we together landed T. Parker Host and Hilco Global to buy the facility. The new Avondale Marine is expected to become a 254-acre economic powerhouse for Jefferson Parish creating as many as 2,000 jobs. The site will be a global hub for business, trade and commerce as a logistics and manufacturing multi-modal site on the Mississippi River.

I want our parish's residents to have access to the best healthcare available, and that meant reassessing our position in healthcare and our ability to properly operate and manage a medical facility. We completed the lease of West Jefferson Medical Center to Louisiana Children's Medical Center and saved \$20 million in doing so, and now we are entertaining a possible healthcare management company

for East Jefferson General Hospital. There's no good reason for a parish of our size to be in the business of medicine. It is a highly regulated, warp speed advancing, technology driven business that requires expertise only medical professionals can provide. Furthermore, the unrealistic and unfair Medicare compensation to a parish-owned healthcare facility only exacerbates the challenges to properly operate a hospital. We will strongly pursue finding a partner or manager to keep East Jefferson General Hospital strong.

I personally fought hard to have FEMA revisit and reassess flood risk for homes and businesses in Jefferson Parish. We were successful in having FEMA redraft flood insurance rate maps for the first time in more than 20 years. The base flood elevations and flood zones have been changed for 52,000 structures that are now eligible for lower insurance rates. We also constructed three new hurricane-grade fire stations that also helped improve insurance rates in those areas.

We are anxiously awaiting the opening of the new Louis Armstrong International Airport, but the development has not been without its complications. A major one was the amount of traffic that the facility would pour onto Jefferson Parish streets had we not intervened. But we did, and we secured a \$90 million bond from the state to immediately begin construction of a fly-over ramp that will ease traffic congestion on one of Kenner's most vital thoroughways.

Our financial position is stronger than ever. Our bond rating continues as a stronger double A rating. Unemployment is among the lowest levels in parish history. Voters overwhelmingly supported a 7/8 cents sales tax renewal that led to the largest capital improvements plan in parish history.

Those are just a snapshot of the successes that give me reason to rejoice in the fact that Jefferson Parish is stronger today and more poised for advancement in every aspect than it was when I assumed the role of Parish President.

I share these facts knowing many of you who are reading this believe I should have stepped down from office. I did not because I believed it was my obligation to this parish to do the job I said I would do, and the progress over the past year has reaffirmed the ability of our government to serve Jeffersonians. I am grateful for the leadership team and Jefferson Parish public employees who I have worked alongside and who have admirably carried out the business of this parish. I am grateful to this council for its leadership and continued collaboration. And no words can describe the deep gratitude I have for those of you who gave me inspiration, hope, and confidence along the way.

While I treasure public service, there are still parts of the political process that come with the job that I don't like. I recognize that running for a second term would result in me having to spend the entire campaign talking about issues other than the great strides and forward movement Jefferson Parish has made under my administration. I can't submit my family, friends, and this parish to months of that kind of campaign. Michelle and I have two children and a third on the way, and as we prepare our growing family for the future I must focus on family and step away from politics. Therefore, I will not qualify for re-election.

I also want the people of Jefferson to know that I recognize the disappointment caused by my personal actions. I apologized then and I am just as contrite today. However, that never, ever impacted my ability to deliberate, act or govern.

Stepping away from the office that I love is difficult. I walk away knowing that our second term would have continued the accelerating progress that we are making in dozens of critical areas. But while our government is operating more efficiently, more transparently, and more effectively than any other time in the parish's history, and polls show nearly 80% of our citizens have confidence in government approaching unparalleled levels, my decision not to seek re-election will allow the candidates to debate the real challenges ahead without the disruption of political theater.

For two decades, I have worked to put into practice the values of honesty and people-first government instilled in me by a family who believed public service was amongst the most noble of professions. As someone who has devoted a career to public service, both in government and the United States Navy, I can only hope that my life's aspiration to serve my community will one day allow me to be viewed in that context. Each time I was tired or frustrated, I would think about the real reason I wanted to be in public service, and I would be strengthened and the pep in my political step was re-energized.

There is a big part of me that will always regret having to walk away from this job with so much work left to be done. But you have my word that I will finish this term with vigor. My administration will continue to sprint to the finish. At the close of the election, I will immediately begin a smooth transition with my successor. The parish of Jefferson deserves nothing less.

My wife Michelle and I thank each of you for the awesome trust you placed in me.  
It has been the honor of my life to serve you.