

Mayor's Video Remarks – May 18, 2021

Hello. I'm Springfield Mayor Ken McClure.

Last night, City Council decided to repeal COVID-19 regulations put in place originally last year, that have changed over time to protect our community. This follows a series of courageous and difficult actions as part of the community's response to COVID-19. It has been 432 days since we saw our community's first case of the virus. The ordinances and associated mitigation strategies put in place over the course of those challenging days to protect our citizens, have served an important purpose and as a result have saved numerous lives. We took the correct actions at the right times and stood firm. Our community is better because of it.

Reflecting upon the past 14 months brings me both comfort and grief. Never in my lifetime did I expect to see such valiant sacrifices. To those who have lost loved ones forever due to this pandemic, I share your pain. We will never be able to replace those we have lost. But we certainly can continue to take measures to make sure their deaths were not in vain.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has become the most significant global public health emergency to human society in the 21st century. Back in March of 2020, in the face of the rapidly expanding new virus about which little was known, swift and decisive action was needed.

When we asked you to stay at home and for businesses to shut down, you listened. Research published in the Journal of the American Medical Association on the impact of COVID-19 now suggests that, in the complete absence of stay-at-home orders, the United States could have seen 220 percent higher rates of infection and a 22 percent higher fatality rate. It's simple: those of you who stayed home saved lives.

When we asked businesses, churches, not-for-profits, the arts community, and educators to reduce capacity, employ public health safety measures, and assist with mitigation strategies such as testing, quarantining and isolating, you listened.

You promoted behaviors that prevent spread, such as maintaining healthy environments and operations, and you prepared for when people got sick. Those

actions resulted in reduced exposure of the virus among individuals, reduced transmission and reduced burden on our health care systems.

When we learned that the simple act of wearing a mask helped prevent us from spreading the disease to one another, we asked you to wear one in public and once again...you listened. Collectively, we achieved a long-term goal of minimizing the severity of COVID-19 in those who contracted the illness, and also prevented additional deaths.

I would be remiss if I didn't also thank the communicators – the news media and the City and Health Department public information specialists, who played the crucial role of keeping our citizens informed and educated – in a time that is not easy and in an arena that is too often filled with misinformation. We are all blessed, thanks to your professionalism, ethics, conscientiousness, and dedication.

I am proud of my colleagues, City and Health Department staff and the City's many partners for making difficult, but taking necessary action, and for persevering. In spite of the contentious nature of many of the actions which

needed to be taken, we have seen Springfield at its best. And it is a very special place – Springfield – a very special place we call home.

We have faced a number of additional challenges which have confronted our community in numerous ways: the killing of Officer Christopher Walsh, the George Floyd tragedy and the corresponding community discussion, the attack on Officer Mark Priebe, the very contentious and controversial election in November, and the attack on the United States Capitol. These are indeed difficult times. And difficult times call for a healing process and positive action. We cannot expect that healing to take place overnight. I am lifted up with the knowledge that this community can, and does, work together to find common ground, take ownership of our community and has the ability to see through one another's eyes, no matter how different we may seem.

I want to thank our excellent health care providers and especially our health care workers, law enforcement, firefighters, and first responders. You continue to serve the needs of our people in the most trying of circumstances, with the most dedication to the highest level of service. Thank you.

The faith community has played an important role throughout all of this and has specifically tended to the spiritual and emotional needs of the community, as they always do, despite their specific challenges related to being separated from their congregations. Thank you.

I want to specifically thank former Springfield-Greene County Health Director Clay Goddard and Acting Director Katie Towns for their tireless support and incredible leadership during these unprecedented times. Again and again, they stepped up to the plate, assisting with decision making using a data-driven approach, based on sound medical science. I know that they, too, are thankful to our hospital and other health care partners who sacrificed immensely, working in environments that were similar to war zones – seeing and experiencing deaths at a rate no human beings should ever have to witness.

I am pleased that we are nearing the end zone, as our citizens have had ample opportunity to get vaccinated - as the vaccine is certainly the game changer in our fight against COVID-19. The Health Department detailed in a memo to City Council a few days ago that there is currently significant community protection from the virus, gained through a temporary immunity from recently recovering

from COVID-19 and the growth of people who are vaccinated. COVID-19 is becoming an endemic disease for communities across the world – it is and will be a regular part of the community and will continue to affect individuals, particularly those who are unvaccinated. In these scenarios, both the healthcare and public health systems have ongoing capacity to respond in these situations.

With the vote last night to repeal the ordinance requiring masking and other restrictions, we have done all we can from a public policy standpoint and now it is the community's responsibility to continue to act prudently. The virus is still here—do not take any unnecessary risks, wash your hands, watch the crowds, and above all get vaccinated.

I want to thank City Council, City Manager Jason Gage and City staff for the steadfast support and encouragement, undergirding my role and actions as Mayor, and for the leadership and courage displayed by each Council member, in spite of strong criticism from some quarters.

Finally, and most important, I want to thank the community. We have endured an unprecedented health care crisis and have emerged strong. Springfield is

resilient and, in my opinion, a model city for dealing with the pandemic. We collaborated, we trusted data and science and we talked to the business and faith communities, as well as our not-for-profits and our schools and universities. Our partnerships are so tightly woven that we are able to do things quicker and more efficiently than most cities.

It is time to move forward on many fronts. Let's do that together.

God bless you and God bless Springfield.