

THE  
ECONOMIC  
CLUB OF  
CHICAGO

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The Club was pleased to host the Honorable Lori E. Lightfoot, Mayor of the City of Chicago, for the Second Dinner Meeting of the 2019-2020 Program Year on December 9 at the Hilton Chicago Hotel. Mayor Lightfoot provided remarks to a crowd of nearly 1,500 members and guests and participated in a Q&A moderated by Club Chair Debra A. Cafaro.

Below are excerpts from the speech and subsequent conversation.

***On aldermanic privilege...***

“This system invariably picks a small amount of winners and a significant number of losers, and the losers are invariably black and brown communities and individuals, but also small and middle market businesses and ordinary residents who just want access to basic city services without having to kiss anyone's ring or other body part. Aldermanic prerogative is not only about the exercise of unchecked unilateral power, it's a problem because of the systemic deference that is given, even in the face of a looming costly problem that taxpayers from every ward in Chicago have to bear.”

***On achieving strategic economic development...***

“Some of you know that the city of Chicago has not had a comprehensive land use plan since 1966. Yes, 1966. That means when, where, and how development happen is largely left to the vagaries of developers and local alderman, and as a consequence, we have seen over time communities south of Roosevelt Road, and west of Ashland, slowly, but decidedly wither on the vine. [...] Our neglect of communities like Rosalind, where the unemployment rate is 26 percent, compared to the city average of about 3 percent, or Austin, where 35 percent or more of the people in that community depend upon public assistance for their daily bread instead of a job on which they can build a life and a future. That neglect and disinvestment is not cost-free.”

***On the history of violence in Chicago...***

“The epidemic of violence is an epidemic of hopelessness that comes from the absence of healthy, safe, and stable communities that support the lives and aspirations of individuals and families. We literally spend billions of dollars every year on local policing alone to barely move the needle in certain communities. The reality that we must all embrace is that not only can we not police our way out of these problems, but the better, smarter play for those who are in the business community that will have the greater return on investment, is to invest in the people and communities to get them stabilized and ready for growth.”

***On her economic growth plan for Chicago...***

“As we bring 2019 to a close, I want to look forward not just to 2020 or 2021, but to an economic plan that extends to 2030, 10 years from now. This is a plan built on four central tenets [...] The first and foremost tenet of our economic growth plan is government ethics and reform. Why are we linking economic growth with government ethics and reform? The answer is simple. In order for Chicago to move forward, our residents and businesses need to trust their government's ability to be focused on

putting people first and being effective stewards of their tax dollars. That happens through further ethics reforms, oversight of city government and streamlining regulations to make it easier to do business in the City of Chicago. [...] I don't want to have to rely upon federal agents and prosecutors to set us on the right path. We have to own this moment and clean our own house.

A second plank of our strategy is, not surprisingly, inclusive economic growth. That means growing quality jobs, attracting and retaining growing middle-class families, ensuring investment is provided across neighborhoods, and driving development that will increase Chicago's population by 10%.

The third plank is public safety and health. I want Chicago to be the safest big city in the United States where everyone in every community is not only safe but feels safer. That means looking beyond our own city resources and coordinating policy that accounts for the full public safety and health landscape that exists in Chicago.

Fourth, but certainly not least, is the imperative that we tackle our city's finances. Everyone here knows last month, the City Council passed a budget that not only closes an historic \$838 million gap through structural solutions and reform-righted measures, it also, for the first time in our city's history, pays our public safety pensions, that's police and fire, at a level needed to ensure their long-term stability. “

***On the strategy to combat population loss in South and West side communities...***

“To turn this around, we have embarked on an ambitious Marshall Plan for these communities, starting with flooding these areas with improvements to their physical transit infrastructure, not to mention access to broadband and 5G, improvements to schools, libraries and other institutions. [...] We are also increasing housing equity through home ownership programs, preserving quality rental stock, repurposing vacant lots and buildings, and establishing new housing funding sources by reforming the city's Affordable Requirements Ordinance. On top of that, we are overhauling the city's historic reliance on structurally regressive policies such as economically debilitating fines and fees. We are focusing on economic corridors for near-term investment and leveraging anchor institutions. [...] Earlier this year, I joined numerous elected officials, community members and business leaders, including many in this room, to announce our city's INVEST South/West plan, which coordinates the full power of our city across government, business, philanthropic and community sectors to invest in commercial cores of 10 underinvested neighborhoods on the South and the West Sides. All told, through INVEST South/West, the city alone will channel more than \$750 million over the next three years while mobilizing a multiplier of private capital.”

***On the childhood that led her to her professional path...***

“I credit a lot of who I am to my mother. She's tough. Way tougher than me. She made a lot of sacrifices to make sure that all of the kids had the opportunity to really succeed and thrive in a way that she and my father were not able to because of their race, because of the time in which they grew up in, the challenging financial circumstances that we always found ourselves in. But the thing that my mother always told me is that nothing could hold me back; not my race, not our financial status, not our gender. That I have the ability to shape my own destiny. Now, when you're a kid and a parent says that to you, you really don't pay that much attention, but this was kind of a daily mantra in my household, and her expectations for me were really, really high. And so, I took to it, even against some difficult circumstances, because I'm old enough that I grew up in a time when racial discrimination was still very much on the table. There's no question that I was denied opportunities solely on the basis of my race. But my mother's force of will really propelled me forward.”

***On the balance of focusing on downtown versus Chicago's neighborhoods...***

“The reality is we can walk and chew gum at the same time. Everyone on my team recognizes the importance of making sure that our downtown area remains vibrant and thriving. That's what people outside of Chicago recognize us for. It's an asset that a lot of cities across the country – and I know this now from talking to a lot of mayors – our downtown area is the envy of most other places in the country. So, we can't lose focus on that and making sure that we're doing everything to keep making those investments. [...] But if we keep losing population, we keep losing people from core neighborhoods on the South and the West side, we cannot be a great global city. We're losing customers. We're losing businesses. We're losing talent that we should have, that are populating the businesses all over our city. We have to spend more on public safety and re-stitching the safety net for people that are struggling in neighborhoods. That's money that could be diverted elsewhere. That's why I say, I think there is a moral imperative, but there's a pure fiscal reality that's staring us in the face that if we don't take care of what's happening in our neighborhoods now more than ever.”

***On the Chicago Teachers Union and the strike in October...***

“I want to distinguish the relationship with the union leadership from the relationship with teachers. We felt like it was really important for us to speak our values and articulate to the teachers that we value them, that we knew that they were an important part of creating a safe and nurturing environment for students, as well as the support staff. [...] We still worked hard to try to avoid it, but by the time that the strike actually happened, there were 20 plus open items where we had given substance and proposals, and CTU hadn't gotten back to us on at all. That's why if you paid attention to the strike, we spent a significant amount of time talking about how we need a comprehensive plan and we're really trying to build a public narrative around that. I credit Dr. Jackson, chief education officer, Dr. McDade and the team. They were at the table, on the front lines and while I was getting multiple updates a day particularly as the strike wore on, it was really them that bore the brunt of it. I'm glad that we had five years. I think that's important, but I really feel like we've got a lot of work to do to restore faith in CPS amongst our families, and our young people.”

***On Chicago Police Superintendent Eddie Johnson's exit from office...***

“It should be clear by now. I have an expectation of the people that work for me and the people that have the honor of serving as public servants are going to do so with integrity. Full stop. When you don't do that, and not only when you fail as we all do, we all make mistakes, we're all humans, but when you do it, you have to own responsibility for it. What you cannot do is lie about it – you cannot lie to the public, and you cannot lie to me. That's something that I'm just never going to tolerate or countenance [...] the bottom line is, you must serve with integrity and if you can't do that, you gotta go.”

***On how she de-stresses outside of work...***

“I'm an incredible sports fanatic, and so my guilty pleasure is reading a bunch of sports blogs that I look at every single day, dreaming that the Bears will actually get a consistent offense and kicker.”

*Please note that the content of this program was edited and condensed for clarity.*