



The Hon. Annise D. Parker

EDITORS' NOTE Mayor Annise Parker attended Rice University, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts Degree. In the private sector, Parker spent 20 years working in the oil and gas industry, including 18 years with Mosbacher Energy Company. She also co-owned a retail bookstore for 10 years. Parker has spent many years in service to the people of Houston, with six years as a City Council member and six years as City Controller. She is the only person in Houston's history to hold the offices of council member, controller, and mayor. Mayor Parker has been the recipient of numerous awards during her career, including the 2011 Guardian of the Bay Award from the Galveston Bay Foundation, Scenic Houston's 2010 Scenic Visionary Award, and the 2010 Guardian of the Human Spirit Award from the Holocaust Museum Houston. She currently serves on the boards of the Texas Environmental Research Consortium and Houston-Galveston Area Council, and as an advisory board member of the Holocaust Museum, Center for Houston's Future, and Montrose Counseling Center.

Your first priority in Houston was to emphasize fiscal responsibility. What kind of impact have you had in that regard?

I organized my administration around five primary areas: jobs and sustainable development; public safety; infrastructure; and quality of life, with fiscal responsibility undergirding all those areas.

I came into the mayor's office in the middle of a recession and had to cut hundreds of millions of dollars in spending but make sure the city continued to run and that we continued to invest where we needed to in order to build ourselves out of the recession.

So jobs and sustainable growth were the primary focus, though most of what I've talked about has been fiscal restraint.

How have you been so effective at creating jobs?

Some of it is because of our deliberate actions and some of it is because our underlying

A Pro-Business City



**An Interview with
The Honorable Annise D. Parker, Mayor, City of Houston**

economy is in a better place than much of the rest of the United States.

We are still the oil and gas capital of the world but that is rapidly morphing into the new energy economy and that accounts for about 50 percent of our local economy.

Houston also has the largest medical complex in the world. We have America's largest foreign tonnage port; we have a robust high-tech aerospace component because of mission control for NASA; and we're also a large manufacturing sector.

We were one of the last areas into the recession and the first out. Our economy is diverse and significantly tied to what happens internationally – probably more than to the U.S.

How do you put those spending cuts in place without losing emphasis on public safety?

We did not lay off a single police officer or firefighter in the City of Houston. We invest tens of thousands of dollars into training first responders. We made sure we protected that asset, which meant I had to make deeper cuts in other areas of the city.

I focused first on efficiencies. I consolidated my payroll and HR divisions, and we're in the process of consolidating IT. We also looked at collections because the city had never had an effective operation to collect money owed to us.

So it's a mind-set change in terms of how things were being done?

Yes, but it also meant we had to upgrade. We compete very well with any big city in America. We have a great quality of life and a low cost of living, and we're an aggressive and business-friendly town, but one area we could improve in terms of our peers is to make better use of technology. So we're making aggressive advances in using technology internally to allow us to operate more effectively with fewer personnel, but also working to use technology to make our service to the public more extensive.

What investments have you put into infrastructure?

An investment in infrastructure is an investment in ourselves; not only are we creating jobs but we're also reinvesting in cities.

What a city has to offer ultimately is a platform on which businesses can operate. In order for you to operate your business, you have to have good transportation; you have to get a building permit if you need it; you have to have good water, sewer, and electrical connections.

So we raised water rates to recapture the cost of providing the service; we had a system

that incentivized water use, which doesn't help conservation. But we are taking that increased revenue and upgrading water and sewer lines across the City of Houston.

This proved handy last summer when we had the worst drought in recorded Houston history and had to use the revenue that would have gone into new sewer and water pipes for water and sewer repairs. If you do the right thing as a city, you're prepared for those unexpected emergencies.

How critical has it been to reach out to business leaders and build a strong public/private partnership?

Houston has a long history as a pro-business city but we don't believe in compromising environmental concerns or quality of life to be pro-business.

We are also the largest un-zoned city in America. So the physical landscape in the City of Houston can change quickly and we can redevelop areas without time-consuming zoning battles.

We have a very engaged business community. I work closely with the Greater Houston Partnership as well as with our regional chambers and economic development entities.

Our infrastructure initiatives would have been tougher to do without the support of the business community, which understands that you have to invest in infrastructure. The key is transparency and not surprising the business community.

How important is it to lend support to minority- and women-owned businesses?

The vast majority of job creation is among small businesses. And all of our big city peers have robust women- and minority-owned programs.

As a former business owner and a woman, it's important for me to improve access to the larger share of our community and the opportunities we have.

It's not about setting something aside for a particular community, but rather making sure that each community knows about the opportunities to bid. If there are existing barriers in a particular sector to a particular segment of the community, we must smooth the path so they can compete on a level playing field.

You've accomplished so much for your city. What has made you so effective?

Cities have to function at a very high level 24/7. There is not a Republican or Democratic way to fill a pothole, to pick up trash, to provide water and sewer service and so on. There is only an efficient and business friendly way to do it. ●