



VIEW*&*VISIONS

Bowles Rice

BOWLESRICE.COM

SUMMER 2022



Steve Williams
City of Huntington

Steve Williams was elected mayor of Huntington, West Virginia, in 2012, and was re-elected in 2016 and 2020 to become the city's first three-term mayor. Under his leadership, Huntington was named the \$3 million grand prize winner of the America's Best Communities competition for a comprehensive plan to transform Huntington into the economic gateway of the Appalachian region. Williams was named as the 2015-2016 Mayor of the Year by the West Virginia Municipal League. He serves on the National League of Cities' and U.S. Conference of Mayors' boards of directors.

Somebody Needs to Do Something!

“Somebody needs to do something!”

We have been hearing that refrain an awful lot in recent years. The town square isn't necessarily where people gather to gripe anymore. It can be at the breakfast table, a gathering during a coffee break, in a waiting room, in the checkout line, at the ball fields, or just on any number of the mind-numbing social media outlets. We hear the same refrain, “Somebody needs to do something!”

Bad roads. Flooding. No internet. Lack of jobs.

Somebody needs to do something! Well, that somebody is each of us.

In the 1930s, massive public investments were made to lift the nation out of the Depression. Public investments were made 60, 70, 80 and 90-plus years ago. Water systems; flood-control measures; rural power networks; public facilities, such as parks and government buildings; interstate highways; and airports are just a few of the myriad public infrastructure investments that caused our nation to grow in exponential proportions. Some have been upgraded, but many have stretched their useful life to the point of significant decline.

A few issues have begun to reveal inevitable facts. Replacement investment needs to be made, and replacement means state-of-the-art design. Not 1930s, '40s, and '50s design, but 21st century, digital-age design.

Throughout Appalachia, we certainly benefited from water systems, highway systems, and flood-control measures. But somehow, as the nation continued to grow at exponential rates, our region continued to somehow always trail far behind in economic growth and prosperity. The region that provided the raw materials



to provide power and steel to the growing metropolitan regions always seemed to barely get by, even in the most prosperous of times.

Highways were built, but some areas remain isolated to the point that outside entrepreneurial investment won't even support the location of modern grocery stores. In a digital age when it is just as easy to make a call or send an email across town as it is to telephone and email Europe or Asia, there are areas of West Virginia and Appalachia so remote that a cell phone signal is impossible to detect, much less the utilization of telemedicine to address simple medical follow-up appointments.

Thanks in large measure to the collective efforts of Senators Joe Manchin and Shelley Moore Capito, we have the most significant opportunity of our lives before us with the unprecedented investment that is being provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Legislation and American Rescue Plan Act passed by the Congress and signed by the President. The discussion now needs to be whether we, in West Virginia, and our neighbors throughout Appalachia are going to take full advantage of the opportunity before us to reverse 60-plus years of disinvestment.



“We must be bold in our expectations and be stubbornly demanding on the expectations of our public and private leaders.”

Every public dollar spent on infrastructure should leverage no less than \$20 of additional investment. A very conservative effort in Huntington’s \$40 million ARPA appropriation should yield no less than \$20 to each \$1 investment, totaling \$800 million invested in one city. Such a leveraged investment resulting from infrastructure projects would not only lift a city’s economic impact, but also would stimulate immense transformation in a region and beyond. Imagine the impact on a statewide scale.

We must be bold in our expectations and be stubbornly demanding on the expectations of our public and private leaders.

Investment in Huntington to maintain 1930s-era infrastructure is occurring for the first time in more than 60 years. Sanitary sewer upgrades are occurring for the first time in more than 40 years. Storm water flood mitigation infrastructure is being built for the first time ever. Our downtown is being reimaged and redesigned, and 21st century-era digital broadband investment is lifting an economy founded at the outset of the 19th century Industrial Revolution.

Huntington is becoming the eclectic, dynamic metro area of the Ohio River Valley and of Mid-Appalachia. West Virginia can be poised just as well. We must plan and prepare our efforts to

launch ourselves into the digital age by investing in opportunities to re-establish ourselves as the epicenter of creativity and diverse opportunity that arises out of the broad expectation of digital transformation.

Advantageous partnerships with our universities is our means to a prosperous end.

We need to build new highways to the remote areas and water lines where water trucks once brought fresh water. We also must build a robust broadband system that enables us to compete in the global marketplace.

We must look at the infrastructure funding as manna from heaven and seek to build our own Marshall Plan for West Virginia, much like the Marshall Plan for Europe was established to lift those devastated nations after World War II.

Scottish explorer W.H. Murray eloquently said, “In all acts of initiative and creation, there is one elemental truth, the absence of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans. The moment one commits one’s self, providence moves too. Boldness has genius and magic in it.”

We must commit our innate instincts. We must demand brilliance of action. We must expect to succeed at a level never before contemplated. Very simply – we must.

Somebody is doing something. We are...! **V**