



## **CITY OF HOUSTON MAYORAL CANDIDATES' FORUM SEPTEMBER 10, 2009**

### **WELCOME**

ANNA BABIN

PRESIDENT, UNITED WAY OF GREATER HOUSTON

### **ISSUES OF CONCERN**

LAURIE GLAZE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ONE VOICE TEXAS

### **FORUM MODERATOR**

JEROME GRAY, KRPC LOCAL 2

### **CANDIDATES FOR MAYOR OF THE CITY OF HOUSTON**

HOUSTON CITY COUNCIL MEMBER PETER BROWN

MR. GENE LOCKE

LT. COLONEL (RET.) ROY MORALES

HOUSTON CITY CONTROLLER ANNISE PARKER

### **Q & A SESSION**

JEROME GRAY, KRPC LOCAL 2

### **CLOSING REMARKS**

ANTHONY LOVE

PRESIDENT, COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS OF HOUSTON/HARRIS COUNTY, INC.

## ***Mayoral Candidates' Forum Transcript***

ABabin: While financing social need programs is important, a good relationship with our mayor and the city council ranks higher as it paves its way to coordination, cooperation, and community needs being addressed. United Way has had a wonderful relationship with our current mayor and staff. As the community opened its arms to New Orleans on August 31, 2005, Mayor White turned to the United Way to coordinate the social service response. It was a daunting task, but one we welcomed and handled with great care and coordination with the city, the county, and many of you sitting in this room. Tonight we welcome three of our four mayoral candidates. We received word earlier this day that Councilman Brown could not join us. I would say that whoever has the privilege and honor to be elected as our next may, we want you to know we will be on your team. And, as you know, team membership requires a relationship—one that we're willing to develop and work on. It requires us, thought, to be direct with each other about our concerns and advocate for issues that impact the lives of the people we both serve. Finally, it requires an understanding that we are all working for the greater good with the same goal in mind. It's not us against them—it is all us. We know Houston is not perfect, but it is our home and we love it. Whatever we can do to improve the quality of life for our residents is truly a big win. I want to thank each of the candidates for staying the course in seeking this important office. We know your lives have not been your own for quite a while now, and we appreciate the sacrifices you have made to let the community get to know you better and to understand the issues that are important to you. Now I'd like to invite each candidate to take about two minutes—introduce yourselves to the audience and tell us why you are seeking the office of mayor. And I will start with Annise.

AParker: Thank you. Good evening. I'm Annise Parker. You have an important decision to make. Who do you trust to be your next mayor? We need a mayor who can lead this city through this tough economy and keep Houston moving forward. I am the only candidate in this race ready to lead this city from the first day in office. I have a record as a strong fiscally responsible leader. I have a vision for the future. And I have a simple philosophy—the job of city government is to make your daily life better. I am ready to lead this city and I am ready to start now. And I want you to work with me as we do that.

The first thing I did as city controller was cut my own office budget two percent and eliminate my own car allowance, because I wanted to send a message to my employees that I was willing to cut my own salary in order to improve the dollars in the office. I created the rainy day fund for the City of Houston so that the city would have the ability to respond to a Hurricane Ike. I conducted tough audits that have identified millions of dollars in savings—money that is now working for all of us in parks, in libraries, in the police department. As we build our city of the future, we are going to have to build from our strength. We are an international city. As Mayor, I will market this city as the destination for foreign companies wanting to do business with the United States. We are the oil and gas capital of the world—and I spent twenty years working in that industry. But our future is in clean, green, renewal energy. We need to be the place people think of when they think—Energy. We are a city of small businesses and entrepreneurs. And I will ensure that Houston continues to be a place where small businesses grow and thrive.

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I have a long track record of working on issues of quality of life and of those who need the most in our city. I look forward to your questions. I look forward to the dialogue that will start here tonight. But that will end in the mayor's office in November. I ask you to join me as we transform our city. Thank you. (applause)

ABabin: Lt. Col. Roy Morales. Would you please tell us why you want to be mayor?

RMorales: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Roy Morales and I am running for mayor. I have proudly served my country for over twenty-three years in the United States Air Force and now, with your support and vote, I would like to continue that history of service as being mayor of this great city. I am running to make sure I improve your quality of life. But I am also running to make sure I protect that quality of life. I am a retired Lieutenant Colonel and decorated veteran. I have had many successful missions. You have a biography and know that I am a former chief technology office and worked on the space shuttle program. But I want to talk about what is important to Houston. We have some major concerns out there. One of them is that we are hurting economically. And a lot of our non-profits are hurting out there because it is hard to get those contributions. I am a Harris County School Trustee—I know it is difficult. I am on the board of several non profits—I know it is hard to get money out there. Now, I am the only candidate in this race that has frozen your property taxes as the Harris County School Trustee. But when I did that, I did not forget about our teachers. I did not forget about our occupational therapists, or our physical therapists. We still were able to give them a pay raise because we made sure that we worked with every department, and we made sure that we did what we needed to do—not what we wanted to do—but what needed to be done. We also need to make sure that we improve public safety.

There is a perception that we are not safe. If you perceive it—it is real. And we are going to change that. I am also going to make sure that we change the whole mentality at City Hall. That they understand that they work for you. So when we are in the RFP process, they understand that you are a team member. And, finally, I want to make sure we have a new vision for our families. One that includes education of our children. We cannot have any gaps. We need to make sure that our children stay off the street and away from the criminals. I ask for your vote on November 3. Friends, we are going to aim high and we are going to shoot for the moon again. I am Roy Morales. (applause)

ABabin: Thank you very much. And now, Gene Locke. Thank you.

GLocke: Thank you, and good evening. You have asked the question—why am I running for mayor? I love the city and I feel like at this point in my life I am compelled to give back and to do something that will have an impact on somebody else's life. Let me tell you something that is different from the standard stump speech that we give. The standard stump speech for me—I talk about public safety—I talk about quality of life—I talk about economic development and transportation. And those are all big issues in this city. I want to defer the discussion on those tonight. I usually talk about my qualifications and you all probably know that I am a former city attorney here. I have also been a lawyer in private practice and have worked on most of the major public and private agency actions from the stadiums to the Port of Houston to light rail. Tonight I want to tell you a little bit something different about me that might be applicable to this group. Before I was a lawyer, I was a person who was concerned

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about the delivery of services to people. I grew up in rural east Texas when there was no safety net. And I grew up in one of the four poorest counties in San Jacinto County. As a consequence of that experience—as a consequence of living in the Jim Crowe south and under Jim Crowe segregation—I learned to live the motto that my grandfather taught me. You are your brother's keeper. So you are looking at somebody who now is a lawyer and running for mayor—but previously I have headed several non profit organizations. And I have served on countless boards of non profit organizations that deliver services to the public. That is important for you to know because I have been on both sides of the equation. One side where I am representing the government and we are trying to see how best to give services. The other side as the recipient—the agency—that is seeking to get the services from the government to actually deliver them to the people. And I am not ashamed to say that, at one point in my life, I was at another stage—the recipient of your services. There are a lot of Houstonians who are at that stage—the recipient of your services. As your mayor, I will be sensitive to their needs. I will be sensitive to your situation as you try to develop a service delivery program for them.

This city can never be great unless we care for all of us—all of us—all of us. What does that mean? That means that your mayor needs to spend a lot of time looking for jobs and economic development. A lot of time trying to keep this city safe. A lot of time working on transportation matters. But there ought to be some time and some money dealing with the human reality that the least of us suffer from. As your mayor, that's my priority. I look forward to this discussion tonight. I want your vote—Gene Locke.

ABabin: Thank you very much. (applause)

ABabin: I thank you all for your opening comments. And now our forum continues with an overview of community issues presented by Laurie Glaze, the executive director of One Voice, a collaborative for health and human services. (applause)

LGlaze: I want to welcome all of you here tonight. This is a wonderful turnout, and I know that a lot of you thought that we were going to start at 6:00. So we really do appreciate you being here for the evening. And many thanks to our candidates who are here tonight. This is a very, very important event for One Voice, as well as for our community, because it does give us the opportunity to build a relationship with an administration that is going to be so important in terms of health and human services. As the City of Houston prepares for a new mayor, we must look at the accomplishments of the current administration. But at the same time, we must also look at the challenges and the opportunities that lie ahead for this new administration. How the new mayor defines the city's role for health and human services will, in part, determine the quality of life for all of us who live in Houston. Tonight's forum is focused on those services that are currently a part of the city's agenda—housing, health care, transportation, and the aging. All with implications that impact the entire health and human services delivery system. Not only here in our community, but throughout Texas and throughout the United States. Houston is the fourth largest city in the nation, with a population of approximately two million people. And we have a lot to be proud of for our city. But we have a lot of challenges. Houston and Harris County's populations are diverse—more so than even Texas or the United States. Forty-seven percent of Houston's residents speak a language other than English within their homes. And so while we appreciate the diversity and we embrace this

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diversity, we are experiencing many cultural differences and language barriers. Approximately twenty-three percent of Houston's residents live below the Federal poverty line. This is compared to eighteen percent across the State of Texas. Seventy percent of those who are over the age of 65 have an income of less than \$20,000 per year, thereby putting tremendous strains on our public systems. We have the largest medical facilities system in the world, and yet we have the highest number of uninsured in the nation.

One-third of the population of Houston is without health insurance. Many continue to use our emergency rooms for primary care needs. According to a 2009 report from the Greater Houston Partnership, our emergency rooms are on divert status thirty percent of the time. Community clinics are stretched beyond their capacity to serve our under-funded population. Stephen Klineberg has reported that within the next thirty years, the numbers of people in our community over the age of 65 years of age will double. The younger generation is disproportionately non-Anglo and they are far less privileged than we have been. And so, therefore, the aging of our community and our nation is not only one that is a generational division, but it is also one that is an impact on our socioeconomic status and our ethnic backgrounds. One Voice was created to address this multitude of issues that define our entire health and human services arena. We see ourselves as responsible for identifying issues and working on solutions that positively impact our community, our state, and our nation. In preparation for this forum tonight, One Voice representatives met with each of the candidates individually, and we presented them with tonight's agenda. It is our desire that they came tonight with an understanding of these issues as well as a commitment to work, not only within our community, but with our community to help bring about solutions to these many, many challenges. And so with that, I'm going to introduce our moderator, Jerome Green.

LGlaze: I'm sorry. Jerome Gray. (laughter) Who is Jerome Green? (laughter). It is my pleasure to have Jerome Gray here tonight. (applause) And I am even going to go the extra step and tell them—when we called and asked him if he would be willing to be our moderator tonight—I had an email back from him within fifteen minutes. That is unheard of. And so, forgive me for messing your name. We are very honored to have him here. Jerome is the senior news editor and anchor for KPRC Local 2 News. But I think the thing that has most impressed me about Jerome is that he is not only a dedicated news reporter, but he is so actively involved in the Houston community. You must go out on the internet and read about Jerome Gray. He has served on more than half a dozen boards for community organizations in this community, including the board of Search. He and his wife are personally responsible for raising over one million dollars for charities within our community. (applause) And that is to be applauded. (applause) And with that—I'm going to turn it over to Jerome Gray. (laughter)

JGray: Good evening to you all. And, Laurie, I must admit—Sometimes I do feel like Jerome Green. (laughter) Green when I'm feeling ill, or green with envy, but usually it is Jerome Gray. It truly is my pleasure to be with you all this evening. This is so incredibly important. You all know that. That's why you're here. And kudos to you all for coming out to take part in this forum. As Laurie mentioned, One Voice has gone through a lot of time and effort to make sure that you are informed about some key issues and where these candidates stand on those issues. I really want to get right into the thick of it as soon as possible. There are a couple of things I do

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want to pass along before we get under way. First and foremost—questions. At your table, you will find index cards. It's important for you to fill out any questions that you may have because we do want to allow some time for audience questions. So, please do fill out any questions you may have. We'll collect them, and at the end of the panel presentation, we will review and present the ones that we can to the candidates. I'm going to try to keep this on time as best as possible. As we begin the panel presentation—a few rules. Laurie mentioned that One Voice has met with the candidates. They are aware of this agenda. They know the questions. They have been presented these questions so that they can give you informed, concise answers—emphasis on concise. Because, the candidates will have three minutes. We have a timekeeper here. All right. Who will alert the candidates when it is two minutes—one minute—and time is up. And I'm going to urge the candidates to, please, when you see that time is up, abide by that rule. If not, I will take the microphone away from you. (laughter) No. I'm just kidding. I don't think it will get to that. Anyway—as I said, there is a lot of information we want to share with you tonight, and One Voice has done so much to prepare for this. So, let's get right to it. We have the rules straightened out for the candidates. We are going to begin with the area of funding and contract issues.

In the city's health and human services 2010 budget, nearly half of the budget is grant funded—federal and state. And over half is general funded. Some of these funds are expensed by the city to provide direct services, and some are contracted to community providers. Some of the issues include competition between city and community for available dollars; city processes and requirements which are set by the city that make applying for, receiving, and managing city contracts difficult; very limited city dollars that provide flexibility and can be available for emergency needs. These are just some of the issues. It is the overall consensus within the community that a more efficient contracting and management system would greatly improve the overall service delivery system. While everyone agrees that the city and its contractors must limit risk as much as possible, there is a point at which risk management begins to negatively impact critical service delivery. Current processes include a very cumbersome RFP process, an inability to secure contracts in a timely and efficient manner, and an inability to efficiently distribute funds. In turn, contractors cannot create appropriate service delivery programs, and clients are in jeopardy of either not receiving services and/or service delivery interruptions.

With all that said, just to set the stage for you a bit, the question is—As the next mayor of Houston, please tell us how city government could collaborate more efficiently when working with contractors. What systems would you implement to ensure that the RFP process attracts an appropriate pool of potential providers, that the contracting process is timely, and that available funds are used and for their intended purposes? We are going to start the question with Annise Parker. We'll let you take the first one.

AParker: If I just say that the process is a problem, can we stop there?

JGray: (laughs) If that is concise and that gets it across.

AParker: (laughs) That sums it up. One of the responsibilities I have as city controller is to make sure that the checks get out the door. So when you are a contractor for the City of Houston and for whatever reason your funds do not arrive timely, you generally

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call the controller's office. There's a great line which a lot of the departments use—Oh, it's just lost in the controller's office. Nothing is ever lost in the controller's office. We get everything out of our office within forty-eight hours of receipt. We spend a lot of time working with non profit agencies to track down back to the departments where the problem is in order to move things forward. I am also on the receiving end—and some of you in the room have called me—when funds were not delivered timely. And you have made commitments for salaries—you have made commitments for programs—and you have to dig into your own budgets because the city has not fulfilled its requirements. It is a cumbersome, bureaucratic process. We need to streamline it. I intend to appoint a transition team to help me go through these different processes. I am all about risk management. That is what I do as city controller. But there is a point where risk management becomes a burden. We need to find where that point is. We also need to examine who does the best job. I have always been concerned with the fact that the city competes directly for the grants that it administers. I do not believe that that is a good practice for the City of Houston. I think we ought to examine critically all of the—for each particular area of service—the service providers available and who does the best job—measured against real metrics. If someone else does it better than the city, if it's the county, then that is where the funds need to flow. I am willing to put everything on the table.

JGray: Okay. Next—Roy Morales.

RMorales: As an Air Force officer, I was trained as an acquisition officer. I received what is called a Level III. That means, ladies and gentlemen, I am qualified to direct and manage multi-billion dollar projects. Part of that training included contracting. We went through a process called total quality management. They call it Six Sigma now. But it is still the same thing. It is making sure that your workers take ownership of what they do. You know, there are some individuals at the City of Houston that are there just to collect a paycheck. And I have to change that whole philosophy so they become an owner of the process—making sure that if they are out there placing a contract for building permits—they have to understand that those businesses need those permits right away so that they can start and they can hire employees and those employees can put food on the table. The same can be said for your organizations. We need to make sure that it gets handled quickly and properly. So you can start serving your clients. That is what is important. And I am going to change that mentality. I talked about it earlier. We will do that with what I call integrated product teams, which will be city employees and contractors working together. But a great contract means that we have to have great RFPs. That's where it all starts. We have to understand as a city that we don't develop the answer—that's your job. We just tell you what the problem is in the best way that we can. That is the first process. And then we need to make sure, once those contracts are out there and that you have completed the work, we keep track of how well you did that work. And if you did a great job—guess what? You will get bonus points. We will make sure that we keep you in business because we can trust you. If you are not doing a good job—you will get another opportunity. But we will start with those that are successful first. Thank you. (applause)

JGray: Next. Gene Locke.

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GLocke: What I wanted to do in trying to respond to some of the questions tonight—because they are prepared questions—was actually prepare the answer that I could be held accountable for. What I would like to do is to comment on each question and then tell you what the goals of the Gene Locke administration would be. Tell you what the challenge would be to meet those goals. And then tell you specifically what I would intend to do to try to accomplish those goals. The comment on this issue is simple. When there is a bottleneck on the delivery of services because of either an RFP process or a funding, real people are harmed in a real way. This is an unacceptable situation. It needs to be cleared up immediately. What are the four goals of the Gene Locke administration to try to tackle the funding contract issues that were spoken to in the question? First, we need to create more accountability at all levels of the city and to do a better job of capturing and utilizing Federal dollars. We need to streamline, secondly, the RFP process. The example that I have is, as a private business person, I tried to do business with the city on several occasions and ran into a real, real cement wall. It didn't feel good. Third, we need to ensure that our limited resources flow to the appropriate agencies for effective utilization. And the fourth goal would be to eliminate the ineffective and inappropriate competition between the city and non profit service providers for Federal dollars. Now, what is the challenge to make that happen? The challenge is simple. We have to attack our bureaucracy and establish some level of accountability. What would Gene Locke try to do? Well, to accomplish these goals. First, with the RFP process, we need to decide what is required and what is desired. And if it ain't required, just because it is desire, it doesn't have to go into process. Part of bureaucracy, I've learned as a lawyer, in establishing contracts, for example. They can go on and on and on and on. And sometimes you just have to stop it and rewrite the whole doggone thing. We need to establish very specific time goals on what we are trying to do in the RFP process. Examine the best practices in other cities. And receive comments consistently on the RFPs from the vendors whom we are doing business with. On accountability, I have mentioned that we need to rewrite some of our contracts to make sure that the expectations of all of the parties are understood. We need to have performance audits of all of our service providers. We need to provide for public discussions of the status of projects that would involved both the people who are delivering services and the city. And, finally, we need an omnsbudsman at the city to work with non profits who negotiate with the city and who provide services so that you can head off problems on the front end rather than running into serious problems on the back end. Thank you. (applause)

JGray: All right. Thank you. We are going on now to the area of health care. Traditionally, the City of Houston Health and Human Services Department has been seen as prevention focused. Its goals include promoting wellness, preventing disease, preparing residents to respond to challenges and disasters, and protecting the community against environmental hazards, epidemics, and chronic illnesses. However, in the past several years, Houston has recognized that the health of its citizens goes beyond their physical health and, today, its mission includes promoting and protecting the health and social wellbeing of Houstonians. The City of Houston Health and Human Sciences Department has worked diligently to enhance its core public health functions and expand the roles traditionally played by public health departments. While we recognize that the city Health and Human Sciences Department does not act as medical homes for clients, its mission does include partnerships to build capacity and make available a service delivery system that links

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families to needed services, such as financial assistance, food and housing assistance, school readiness, child care. Currently, the city and Harris County are discussing the benefits and issues associated with the city's primary care services being provided through the Harris County Hospital District. Federal health care reform legislation has important provisions related to prevention and wellness, and any enacted plan should have aggressive public health and prevention initiative to adequately address future health care costs and inflation. So that sets the stage a bit. The question—As the next mayor of Houston, discuss how you would move forward on strategies to access care, provide an integrated delivery system, enhance core public health functions, optimize administrative infrastructure, and provide mandated services. Include in your discussion development of community partnerships, funding challenges and opportunities, achieving economies of scale through leveraging resources and building capacity. We're going to start with Mr. Morales.

RMorales: I think this starts with—we have another partner out there. That's Harris County. The whole goal for all of us should be prevention. It is always better to halt something in its early stages until it grows. It is better to take care of that acorn before it is an oak tree. That is how we need to look at this. We need to be able to initialize all of our efforts early on. The bottom line is that it is only going to get worse out there if we do not have health care reform—a good one. And if we do not solve the illegal immigration problem. That is going to tax all of our systems. The Federal government needs to do something about that because right now when you go into the emergency room they are filled. Because people do not understand that there is a better place to do it. Those are primary care clinics. The cost is staggering. We need to be able to put out public information on that. In English and in Spanish, so that our community understands that there is a better way of doing this.

JGray: Mr. Locke?

GLocke: In our country, the status of health care is embarrassing. That is a powerful comment because we are a rich, great country. But there is somebody right now while I am talking who is need of health care and has no place to go. What are my goals as mayor of the City of Houston to try to respond to the question that was asked? Three goals—first, to provide more health care facilities in the city, particularly federally-qualified health clinics. That has to be a priority. Secondly, to provide greater coordination among the public agencies—the City of Houston, Harris County, and other public agencies. But also provide greater coordination between public agencies and private agencies. And, third, to provide as a matter of course one-stop services in the delivery of health care to include a fully-integrated service delivery system. What is the challenge to this? Money and coordination. What would Gene do to try to accomplish the goals that I have talked about? The first thing I would do is to try to ensure that the city's health department and the Harris County Hospital District work closely, closely, closely—hand in glove—to try to provide the best possible health care delivery.

We need to coordinate our efforts to maximize our services and minimize our costs. We need to meet on a regular basis and map out a game plan that utilizes the best of the limited services that both of us have. Secondly, we need to coordinate our efforts to go after Federal funds. We do better when we pursue Federal funds when we go after it as a team in an organized, coordinated manner rather than each agency going it alone as the Lone Ranger. Third, we need to continue and expand the traditional

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city role of the city's health department. That is health education, prevention, and early intervention. And, I think at the city, those things that are typical in our population ought to be readily available to the citizens of Houston and to the city employees. I am talking about everything from high blood pressure testing to screening for breast cancer and prostate cancer. Those things can be readily available to citizens. We need to aggressively partner with non profits to create more federally-qualified health clinics. Finally, my time is up, we need to make sure that we develop these one-stop delivery systems like they have in Kashmere Gardens. (applause)

JGray: Ms. Parker.

AParker: Thank you. You know, I'm not used to coming to events where they allow us to use notes and I have to actually put my glasses on. I assume that you wanted to hear from us directly, but I will use—take advantage of the opportunity to remind myself of some of these issues. First of all, I believe that access to health care is a fundamental human right. Period. (applause) And I do not know what will happen on the national level in dealing with this issue. Until it is solved comprehensively, we are left to pick up the pieces on the local level. The city has taken a great step forward in leading by example in that we have chosen, in how we spend our money, to require that contractors doing business with the city provide health insurance for their employees. We are a four billion dollar corporation. How we choose to spend the city's money makes an impact. It can move the needle in the City of Houston. And I certainly intend to continue and expand that commitment. We are a donor city in a donor state. We leave more money in Washington and in Austin than we receive. We have to aggressively fight for all grant funds that we can in the City of Houston, and I would designate a grants coordinator for the City of Houston so we would have a one-point person that that information—not to be a bottleneck—but that would be abreast of all of the information in our various grant applications and would coordinate with the other agencies in the area as they seek these funds as well. We are on the prevention end, as was mentioned. We have a critical problem in the City of Houston in that we spend two-thirds of your tax dollars on public safety, one-third to the police department and another one-third to the fire department, the 911 system, and so forth. Many in this area use the public ambulance system—your tax dollars—as a taxi to get to the hospital. Then they end up in the emergency rooms on the other end. It would be cheaper for the City of Houston to actually provide taxi vouchers for folks than it would be to transport them in an ambulance. We have to be willing to consider all of those kinds of options in providing care. We have a great Tell-a-Nurse program. We need to expand that. We need to have an integrated delivery system. We need more Federally-qualified health clinics. Whether it is best for the city to provide those or for the county—in working our various non profit partners, we will do that. Finally, the city needs to take a bigger role and continue our aggressive enforcement of the larger public health issues like our air quality problem in the City of Houston. We have made a major investment in the monitoring equipment so that we can create a record of violation and pursue litigation if necessary. But whatever it takes to improve our air quality without having to wait for the Federal and state government to intervene. Thank you. (applause)

JGray: Thank you. The next area we are going to move on to is transportation. Development of a healthy community requires an accessible and affordable public transportation system to coincide with health care, housing, and aging systems. If citizens are

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dependent on public transportation, it impacts every aspect of their lives. Houston can and, in many cases, does provide excellent care and resources to its citizens—when they can get to them. However, the lack of an efficient public transportation system and mobility issues prevent people from receiving these services. They may be able to get to the health clinic, but unable to get back home. The lack of a reliable system presents those with physical and/or behavioral health issues with critical safety issues. Those seeking employment opportunities may miss them because of their dependence on public transportation, and businesses and organizations seeking to grow work programs are limited in their abilities. Issues of safety when using public transportation and mobility issues keep many isolated and incapable of getting needed services. Between 2002 and 2005, the fatality rate among older adults in Harris County was twelve percent higher than the statewide older adult rate and fifty-two percent higher than the statewide average for all Texans. In 2006, a United Way of Greater Houston survey that included adults sixty years of age and older reported that fifteen percent of those respondents in the Harris County area walked, wheeled, or used a scooter for transportation. Of those, forty-four percent also used public transportation. Respondents reported that broken and missing sidewalks made their transportation significantly more difficult. The telehealth triage program of the Houston Fire Department reports three hundred and three calls per month for services. Eighty percent of those calls required ambulance. Of those, forty-seven percent required an ambulance because they do not have other transportation. And here is the question—Please share with us your thoughts around Houston’s public transportation system and how you would engage the community beyond the current METRO structure to create quality, cost-effective, and reliable transportation options and improve neighborhood amenities to promote safe pedestrian and motorized mobility. We’ll start this question with Mr. Locke.

GLocke: Thank you. I want to at least comment—the reason that I prepared notes was because the people who organized this forum took great time and great energy in asking all of us some very difficult questions. And they wanted some concrete answers from us. I thought it only appropriate and respectful to prepare thorough and direct answers. Now, the question on transportation. The present situation is unacceptable because we don’t have a public transportation system that is appropriate for the needs of those people who are transit dependent. What would my goals be as mayor? First, I would like to have a regional approach to solving the transportation problem in the region. That would include everybody from TXDOT to METRO to the toll roads to those of us who drive the thoroughfares of the city. Third, I’d like to make sure that we build out the light rail system. I’d like to make sure we build out a great, great bus system. And, finally, let’s find a way for transit-dependent people to get the critical services that they need. What are the challenges to that? The number one challenge is that we have to re-think the relationship between METRO and the service-providing industry of Houston—the non profits. The second thing we have to do is find the necessary funding to improve the sidewalks that we heard complained about in the question. Now, some things that I would do as your mayor—I’d create a department of transportation at the city to address the regional problem of transportation. I would convene a meeting between METRO and the service delivery non profit industry to make sure that we work out a way to lower your cost for providing for your clients without impinging on METRO’S bottom line—and I think that can be done. Third, I’d like to have some immediate options for people who are dependent on public transportation to get to health care providers in critical situations. An option between

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inadequate public transportation and using an ambulance. I think there are a lot of options that can be available. We need to explore those. We need to improve the METRO bus system generally—across the board—so that it works much better. It goes to more areas. It handles more thoroughfares. It is cleaner. It is safer. It is more efficient. Finally, we need to improve the METRO lift system that is a system that is used by a lot of your customers to make sure that it works right. Now, on the issue of developing new sidewalks? The greatest challenge there is because the city's scarcity of resources. But there has to be a pilot program in place that we implement—at least between senior citizen centers and commercial centers so that seniors can get back and forth to commercial places. Because for many of them that is their only day out of the facility. We owe them that. (applause)

JGray: Ms. Parker?

AParker: The City of Houston needs and deserves an integrated multimodal transit system that has everything from commuter rail to light rail to park and rides, to better a better road system, to bike lanes. It has to be done on a regional basis. One of the problems going forward is that METRO's service area cannot accommodate the traffic from commuter rail, so we are going to have to work with the surrounding counties. There is a particular focus now on the 290 corridor as the first place to effectively bring commuter rail into the City of Houston. I have voted for and supported—worked hard for as a councilmember—a light rail system. And I believe that we need to have an expanded light rail system sooner rather than later. My concern, however, is that I see METRO cannibalizing the bus system in order to feed the light rail system. We may have a light rail system that gets people from one side of the city to the other, but not have the buses to get them from side of the neighborhood to the other to get to their jobs, to get to the grocery store, to get to the services they need. I don't believe METRO is accountable with their numbers, nor are they responsive to the neighborhoods. I would go in and clean house at METRO. In terms of sidewalks, the city has adopted a plan now for new design standards in transit corridors. I support those design standards and would fight for infrastructure dollars, stimulus dollars if possible, to allow the city to invest in sidewalks in those transit corridors. Currently, we only put sidewalks in areas around elementary and middle schools and I can't see us doing a full sidewalk program city-wide, but I absolutely will commit to trying to do sidewalks where appropriate in transit corridors. Finally, we do have to, in terms of dealing with METRO, convince them to restructure, redo, and rethink their METRO-LIFT program. We also have to incentivize more accessible cabs in the City of Houston. We are the agency that regulates the cab industry—it is a heavily regulated industry. A very small number of cabs in the City of Houston are actually wheelchair accessible. If you rely on the public transportation system—the cabs—you can wait hours and hours. The City of Houston can address that through our regulatory process, and I would commit to doing that. Thank you. (applause)

JGray: Mr. Morales?

RMorales: One of the things that is not on my resume is that I am a former commissioner on the city's disability board. Sidewalks were a big issue for our board. We wanted to make sure we could put them in at every new venue that was built. We need to beyond just schools. We need to look at primary clinics. We need to look at hospitals. You know, I go to the VA Hospital every once in a while on Alameda.

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It really tears me apart when I see an ambulance at OST and Alameda and you see a wheelchair out there in the middle of the street. You have to ask yourself—Why? Why is that happening? Controller Parker mentioned it a second ago about what METRO has done. To feed the light rail system, they took so many buses off their routes. Would those buses have been there for individuals that had the misfortune at intersections like OST and Alameda? That really, really upsets me. And that is why—when I talk about METRO—any government agency that takes money from you needs to be an elected body. So you can vote them in or out. Because METRO has not had leadership for several years. Nothing has been done other than putting more ridership on the train and taking away the buses. That is where we need to start first. As far as what the vision is for Roy Morales? Yes, we need a rail system above ground. One that can be built without affecting our businesses. One that, if it breaks down, will not cause a traffic jam. We need trolleys in the inner city. We need park and rides just for this light rail system. We need commuter rail all the way out to Richmond, to Conroe, to League City. And we need to make sure that our disabled are not forgotten as we develop these new modes of transportation. (applause)

JGray:

All right. Thank you. We have two more areas of focus before we open it up to the audience questions. So, again, if you would—keep in mind the index cards and writing your questions because we will be collecting them so we can present those questions. Moving on to aging community. In its aging agenda for Houston/Harris County, the community identified eight areas that are important when creating an elder-friendly community. Recommendations were made for improving everything from health and well-being to housing, transportation, and volunteer opportunities for seniors. The report also indicated that we need to do more to ensure that seniors are safe, have access to services, and that basic needs are met. Older adults are faced with waiting lists for services critical to maintaining their independence. Currently in our area, more than sixty-five hundred individuals are waiting up to six years for in-home care through the Department of Aging and Disability Services. And those on the waiting list for home-delivered meals can wait on average three to six months for service. Home repair continues to be a top need of Harris County's vulnerable older adults, with limited to no service options available. As our population ages, the roles of caregivers, many of whom are family members, will continue to increase. Approximately eight percent of the Houston population is sixty-five and older. By 2036, Houston's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday, adults sixty-five and older will make up sixteen percent of the city's population. Caregivers and their new roles will tremendously impact the city's workforce. Currently, the City of Houston is estimated to have annual lost productivity for their employee work force alone in the amount of \$772,000.

The question—There is no doubt that older adults want to remain in their homes and neighborhoods. Discuss with us the challenges that Houston faces as it works toward creating an elder-friendly community, recognizing that many of these challenges are not limited to this specific population. As the mayor of Houston, what would be some of the goals you would set for creating an elder-friendly community that allows seniors to age in place? What would you do to improve the city's response to the growing need for home repair and home modification services that are so critical to allowing seniors to remain in their own homes? And how would you envision the corporate community's involvement in providing support to family caregivers, many of whom are their employees? That question will start off with Ms. Parker.

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AParker: Starting with the last question, just as corporations have had to recognize child care responsibilities for their employees, they will in the future have to recognize elder care responsibilities for their employees. This is an area that I have some experience with. For a number of years I was a United Way volunteer in their senior services program. I visited all of the senior centers around the city and ate a lot of meals in those programs. But then it came home to me personally. In 1991, my 90 year old grandparents moved in with me. My grandfather was with me for a year and my grandmother for another three years and then two years in a nursing home here. Because of my role—my volunteer work in the United Way—I knew all the services that were available at that time. And I still struggled desperately to cover their needs and mine as well. I understand what the problems are and how difficult. Let me just say that was one of the best experiences of my life and also one of the worst. We have a couple of areas that I want to touch on that you may not be thinking about. When Hurricane Rita came through Houston, I volunteered over at the Houston Emergency Center. I fielded phone calls. Remember, Rita was the evacuation hurricane. Ike is the electricity outage hurricane—Rita was the evacuation hurricane. And for about eight hours right before the hurricane, I spent the time on the phone. Most of the people on the other end of the phone line calling in were seniors. No transportation. Not enough food in the house. No one to evacuate them. No way to get to where they needed to be for safety. We absolutely have to have a reliable network database of vulnerable members of our community. The best way to do this that I can see would be to coordinate on a neighborhood by neighborhood basis—whether it's a non profit organization—whether it's a neighborhood church—whether it's a civic association—where they do a house by house inventory and report that inventory to the fire department. And the fire department compiles a master database so that whenever an area of the City of Houston—whether it is flooding—which somehow sometimes happens here in the city. Whether it's a hurricane. Whether it's any other kind of natural disaster.

That we know who is there and what they may need and that we upgrade that list. That is something that cannot be provided by the city. It will have to come as citizens recognizing that we have a responsibility to engage with our neighbors. So it will start with a call for greater civic involvement. (applause)

JGray: Mr. Morales?

RMorales: Annise, what a great idea. In 2004 and 2005, as the Assistant Director for the Houston Emergency Center, that was one of my concerns. We were starting to experience a lot of hurricanes in Florida and they were starting to head toward Texas. I wanted to put a plan together on how we could identify, first, homes for the disabled and for the elderly. If we had to send the fire department out there, we needed to do it soon because our fire trucks can only travel during certain periods when we have a tropical storm. They can only handle so much in the height of water. So we want to be able to recover immediately or after the storm passed to get out there. I also had the idea for condominiums and tall buildings where we have information right away for the elderly and the disabled. And this can be done with today's technology. We can ensure and we can improve on the way we help our citizens. Now, talking about—I'm looking here at 65—well that's going to be middle age soon. Maybe 75 will be middle age, I hope, as I get older. (laughter) But technology is there but we've got to start now. We need to educate our youth that—and we've been informed about health and wellness—it's time to start now.

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So you don't go through the problems of what I saw with my great-grandmother. We took care of her. She was 104 years old before she passed away. And we've got to do a better job for the elderly. How do we do that? I'm going to come back to it as I always talk about property tax relief, even for our elderly. Because, ladies and gentlemen, every seven years your property taxes double. By the time you get to 65 and 75, you still don't own your home. You owe it to the government. We've got to make sure we cut those taxes. I know we freeze at a senior level, but we still have appraisal rates that go up. We have to be able to change that. As mayor of Houston, when I start setting the example, as a leader, of dropping property taxes—then it will just go across the whole community. With the county, and especially with their independent school districts, where most of your tax dollars are spent. And they will start getting control of their budgets. (applause)

JGray: All right. Mr. Locke?

GLocke: Having the opportunity to see and live with our seniors is a blessing for us. What goes with that blessing is an obligation to make sure that their lives are as rich and as meaningful as possible.

One of the big problems we have is to bring attention to the reality that the American population is aging. That's my comment. Now, hear my goals. First is to improve and ensure safety for seniors. Secondly, to provide support for seniors to allow them to stay in their homes and stay in their communities. Third, to coordinate critical services available and needed by the seniors—services like transportation, food delivery, health counseling, and entertainment. Reduce the waiting list for all the critical services that the question implied—particularly the senior home repair program that the City of Houston operates. And provide for more volunteer opportunities for seniors to give back to their communities. What's the challenge? The challenge is realizing that the American population is aging. Realizing that we need to give attention to a new problem and a new challenge that is in front of us. And also realizing that the problem is not monolithic. Because we are a great, diverse city, we have diversity among our seniors. We have some seniors where it is culturally expected that the children will take care of them. We have other communities, like the Vietnamese community, who came here and don't have any children before them. So that the seniors are trapped with nobody before them. They have special needs. What would I try to accomplish as your mayor working with the seniors issues? First, I would try to shine light on the problem. That's obvious. And a part of that means that somebody in the mayor's office has to be assigned to senior affairs. Secondly, there needs to be greater coordination of our efforts in this area. I'm not now spending money—I'm talking about trying to coordinate the various agencies. We have to work better with Harris County—we have to work better with the non profits—to make sure that we address the issues of seniors. We need to implement as part of my safety plan a community-oriented policing program—neighborhood policing—some people call it. And in this program, we can identify where our seniors are in the community and make sure that our police officers know who they are, where they are, and keep them safe. We certainly need to implement a goal of reducing the waiting list on the seniors home repair program—immediately—in the first nine months of my administration. And, finally, we need to prioritize the home repairs that seniors are asking for while they are still little problems and before they become gigantic problems that we cannot deal with. Thank you. (applause)

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JGray: Thank you. Our last area of focus before we get to the audience questions—homelessness and housing. Homelessness is a public issue that should be owned by the community. To be homeless, living on the streets, is to carry in your backpack not just all that you own, but also the heavy weight of misconceptions about who you are, why you live as you do, and what it would take for you to change your circumstances. In 2004, a cross-section of community leaders known as the Blue Ribbon Commission to End Chronic Homelessness, provided oversight to a planning process that led to the development of the community strategic plan to address homelessness. In 2008, the plan was updated based on findings from community research studies, as well as Year One program implementation. Some of the progress currently being made will not continue without the full investment and involvement of the local government. In particular, the City of Houston's Housing and Community Development Department and the Houston Housing Authority, must take the lead in the development of affordable, supportive housing for people who are currently homeless. The Housing and Community Development Department receives approximately \$62 million per year in Federal funds. Millions of dollars are awarded to programs that have received these funds for five years or more with little to no progress in decreasing the number of people who are homeless. Additionally, not fully expending Federal dollars limits the ability of the city to receive additional funds, while at the same time limiting critical services to help people who are trying to get off the streets. The Houston Housing Authority is responsible for public housing within the community. According to its website, it owns and operates twenty housing communities with more than 4,000 rental units and more than 200 single family homes. It assists nearly 15,000 households with rental housing of their choice in the private market through its voucher program. While the authority may recognize the homeless population, the numbers of homeless in our community do not reflect a significant impact in their efforts. In communities where there is strong leadership, the housing voucher program has positively impacted those who are chronically homeless. The question—As the next mayor of Houston, please discuss how you would address issues of affordable housing in Houston, including policies that would recognize the city councilmember's concern as only one of many factors when determining approval of affordable housing projects in his or her district. How would you work with city council and the community to encourage acceptance of affordable communities? What will be your commitment to resolving issues within both the Community Development Department and Houston Housing Authority, and ensuring that all available funds are used appropriately for homeless services and housing? And we'll start this one with Mr. Morales.

RMorales: Addressing housing for the homeless is only a part of the problem. If we focus on that, we will never solve this problem. We need to find out why our fellow residents are homeless. And we have to lay out a plan on how to give them a pathway to having a roof over their head—having food on the table. I talk about stories when I come to these forums. I talk about a gentleman over on South Main—Michael—a former chef at Pappasito's. Why is he out on the streets? Why doesn't he have health care? He will say—Roy, look. I can't walk. My skin—I can't take care of it. I can't cook any longer. We have to find out why he ended up like that. Yes, we can give them shelter. But we have to have a long range plan for that. We have to also understand that a majority of those individuals that are homeless suffer mental illness. It is a shame when this state ranks fiftieth in helping those individuals. Ladies and gentlemen—this is the 21<sup>st</sup> century. John F. Kennedy gave us ten years to go to the moon.

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We need to start setting limits like that for ending homelessness in Houston, Texas. And as mayor, I will do that. We have to find solutions for these individuals. Just simple things. They are being taken advantage of. When they do get a disability check, they set it up with some—They call themselves non profit—but they are not. And they take these individual's check and they cash them. We, the city, can provide answers. We can work with people like UPS stores so these individuals can go and collect their money and not be taken advantage of. Again, this is the pledge that Roy Morales will give for his administration—We are going to see a decrease in homelessness. And we are going to give them a pathway together as a team—to be able to live the quality of life they deserve. (applause)

JGray: Mr. Locke.

GLocke: The question, really, inquires in two areas—homelessness and affordable housing. Let me try to address both of those. First, as to homelessness—you cannot be a great city unless you take care of the least among us. Now, affordable housing—Our housing market is one of our great strengths here. It is the hallmark of building neighborhoods. The more people we can put in affordable housing, the better off our city is. So that's our goal. Let me tell you I have specific goals for both areas. First, on the homeless issue, the mayor obviously has to shine a bright light on the issue of homelessness. Which means the mayor has to take control and be a leader in the area? Part of that is adopting an updated version of the strategic plan to address homelessness. The city needs to do that. We need continued coordination of services among all of the stakeholders who are working in this area of homelessness. We need to actively address a plan to provide housing for the homeless. The best way to stabilize and attack the problem is to at least get people off the street. We need to learn from the state-of-the-art programs that other cities are running—Denver and New York and Chicago and others. And certainly we need to effectively and efficiently use Federal funds that come our way. Now—the goals for housing. Continue to increase our efforts to provide affordable housing. That's our hallmark. We have to revamp the city's housing and community development program. You have to make it functional. You have to reverse the city's relationship with HUD. You have to make it less adversarial. You have to revamp the approaching activity of the Houston Housing Authority to make public housing available and accessible. Our challenges in this area are the attitudes that people have toward the homeless and the attitude that people have about providing affordable housing. What would I try to do? One—I would establish a mayor's initiative on the homeless that would bring all of the stakeholders together to work on the issue. Two—immediately implement performance measures of accountability for all of the city departments that have grants and do funding in the area. Require direct reporting to the mayor on key issues related to housing and homelessness. Make sure that there is a regular interaction between the city departments that provide services and the service providers that provide services to the city. Increase the use of TURS to provide affordable housing. And establish a uniform policy on the location or relocation of public housing in general and housing for the homeless in particular so that no one neighborhood is overburdened, but no one neighborhood has the right to turn down people who are in need of housing. (applause)

JGray: Ms. Parker.

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AParker: In dealing with this issue, one of the problems we have is—actually, for several of the issues that have been talked about tonight—you don't need the city to tell you what to do. We don't need another plan. We actually have a plan. And we have service providers who are in the community providing these services. The city needs to just facilitate in the execution of that plan. Starting with the Housing and Community Development Department—if you were to go to the controller's website you would see an audit that was performed in 2004 of that department laying out many of the problems that exist. We just went back and did an update of that audit last year and the problems are the same. That is one area where there are two department directors that I have said need to change. I want a new Police Chief for the City of Houston. And I want changes at the top in Housing and Community Development. That is a department that needs to be taken apart and re-invented. The fact that we had to send \$15 million of your local tax dollars back to Washington because we could not spend it under the rules of those programs is an embarrassment to the city and a burden to the taxpayers of Houston and should not have been tolerated. The critical issue for homelessness—the old model was you've got to get clean and sober and we'll find you a place to stay. For others out there, we have great programs. We have single room occupancy units around the City of Houston that I have personally toured and support. The new model is—You know what? How do you get clean and sober when you are in a chaotic situation. What you need is housing. So we are going to have to be pushing millions more dollars into housing first in the City of Houston. And the problem is going to be—(applause)—what is imbedded in this question and that the current administration's policy has been—if a councilmember does not like it, we are not going to do it. There is a major education campaign that is going to have to go on city-wide as to the needs for these services. The fact that they can be cited in communities all over the city safely with no negative impact on the community and the mayor is going to have to work closely with councilmembers to make sure that they all understand the responsibility to take some of these sites in their districts. Frankly, I have been a councilmember—sometimes it is just important to let a councilmember vote against something and go on down the road to provide the services that you need to provide. (applause)

JGray: All right. That concludes our area of focus. Now we are going to move on to the audience questions that you have.

JGray: Several candidates have mentioned increasing the number of federally-qualified health care centers in Houston. This is a great goal. But what specifically can the City of Houston and the mayor's office do to promote new federally-qualified health care centers and support current community health centers? And, let's see—Mr. Morales, you took it first the last time so we'll move on to Mr. Locke for this one first.

GLocke: I think here is a great opportunity for us to partner with non profits to provide the services. One model that is workable is for the city to secure or make available space for the building of the clinics. So you create the partnership where the non profit and the city apply together for the federal funds, knowing that the non profit will actually run the facility. But the city will provide the resources there. But the other models that we could use also—we can use the city and the county working together to provide the services. We can look at where we have parks and where the county has parks in the region to see if it is appropriate close to the parks to provide clinics that are workable and sustainable. I think we are limited only by our own creativity.

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And if we start with the premise that we know we do not have a lot of resources at hand, we have to force ourselves to be creative, non-traditional, and get the job done.

JGray: Great. You did that so well in terms of time because I forgot to share with you all—the candidates—in this area we are tightening up your time. You have two minutes. But you did a great job of covering up. Didn't even have to put a sign up or anything. Ms. Parker, we'll let you take a shot at this. Two minutes.

AParker: One minute should be enough. We need to aggressively pursue all the funds that are available. We need to identify and work with the non profit entities. We need to make sure that we don't duplicate any services that are being provided by the county, but we need to site these clinics in communities as conveniently as possible, and we need to roll them out. We lag behind many other cities in the FQHCs. We can provide locations and one of the good things that you have seen over the last few years in terms of relationship between the city and the county is that we are doing more coordination of response. Whether it is parks where one provides the maintenance, one does the building, one provides the land, a library—again, where the city and the county coordinate—we can do the same thing in a whole range of social services that we have never gone to before.

JGray: Mr. Morales.

RMorales: My plan would not be much different. We have to have public/public partnerships. We have to have public/private partnerships. We have to be able to provide—maybe not just the building—but maybe technology services or other services to support that building. But, we have to do what we talked about in the military—thinking outside of the box. And for something like this, we have to go out there and get those dollars from the federal government that are due to us.

JGray: Okay. Thank you. The next question from the audience—The city will be getting stimulus funds for homeless prevention and rapid rehousing. How would you prioritize using the funds? This will first go to Ms. Parker.

AParker: First let me give a plug for the City Controller's website. We actually have a link off the website—we have all of our audits—we have a lot of information there. We have a link off the website that shows a spreadsheet with all of the Formula Eight money that we are going to get for stimulus funding. And those competitive grants for which the city has applied. You will find that it is a fairly bare bones spreadsheet because a lot of those stimulus dollars—the check is still in the mail. They say we're getting it. If you wonder why you have not gotten it—it is because we have not gotten it yet. This is an ongoing problem. I believe in home ownership, but I can go a whole lot farther with my housing dollars in clean, decent, affordable multifamily units. I would take the city in a slightly different direction than what the current mayor has done with his emphasis on home ownership. I believe in home ownership. A lot of our people are not ready for home ownership. They need housing. We can get a lot more bang for the buck in multifamily units. (applause)

JGray: Okay. Mr. Morales.

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RMorales: At the Harris County Department of Education, we are waiting for that money, too. I know it is important. But for me to answer that right now until we sit down and see what money is coming and if there is any money coming next year—because we have a lot of serious problems out there right now. We have talked about that. We have talked about the perception which is turning into reality as far as public safety. And as far as emergency services. That affects everybody. To answer right now—I have to be able to study and see where the current dollars are being allocated. (applause)

JGray: Okay. Mr. Locke.

GLocke: I'm not sure that I understood the question. I thought the inquiry was based on an assumption that federal stimulus money was available for housing for the homeless. And the question was what do we plan to do with that? Obviously, then, we need to make sure that the Houston Housing Authority, which has the responsibility for public housing, jumps in and is guided and directed so that we immediately create some options, develop a uniform policy as I suggested earlier, and try to use that in coordination with the people who are working with the homeless population to identify those people who are the best candidates for the housing and see if we can use the money intelligently and efficiently and actually do some good.

JGray: Okay. Thank you. (applause)

JGray: The next question from the audience—and we'll start this one with Mr. Morales—Of all the various health and human service issues, what are your top two priority concerns?

RMorales: The first one—if you didn't get it the last time—is homelessness. That is my top priority. There is no excuse for individuals to be out there on the streets without a roof over their head. Or their children to be without food. That will be my number one issue. My next issue is to make sure that our senior citizens, that our disabled, can get around town. That they do have the transportation to get to the doctor, to get to the occupational therapist. We need to make that a priority. And those are my first two. (applause)

JGray: Mr. Locke.

GLocke: It is real hard to pick over some dire needs. I would like to be able to say it is homelessness because I am committed to that. When I first started to run, I committed to having a mayor's initiative on the homeless. I understand the importance of affordable housing long term for this community and, if we can really make a dent in affordable for our people, we will make our city a better place. So that has to be the top of the list. But how can you turn your back on the needs of seniors in this city? How can you ignore the reality of some of the statistics we have discussed today? And so my heart kind of begs out that we have to have a seniors program. And I'll tell you the one that I think I could fix the earliest as mayor is the transportation problems we have talked about today. That is almost a bird in the hand as a fixable problem that is not going to require a lot of expenditure of time or money. So it is just too difficult for me to pick two. If I had to and was forced and I had a gun to my head—I would probably say homelessness and affordable housing. (applause)

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JGray: Okay. Thank you. Ms. Parker.

AParker: This is a tough question. I spoke earlier about my personal involvement with issues of elder care and that is a huge concern for me. I am also on the advisory board for Bering Omega and have been involved in HIV and AIDS issues for a very long time—since the creation of the KS AIDS Foundation long ago. That would not be the top one either. Homelessness has to be number one. I have a personal commitment to homelessness as well. My oldest son, who is now 33 years old, was a street kid turning tricks on lower Westheimer when he came to live with me at 16. I made a personal commitment to do what I could to take people off the streets of Houston. I don't expect everybody to adopt somebody and move them into their home, but we all have a responsibility to people on our streets. In the richest, greatest country in the world, we should not have people living on the streets. So, homelessness is number one. Then, closely related to that, I also have two children who were adopted out of state custody. The number of unwanted children in our state system is a personal burden on my heart. (applause)

JGray: Okay. Thank you. Mr. Locke will be first for the next question—What are your specific qualifications to handle the finances of the city as mayor?

GLocke: I am one of the persons who is responsible for managing one of the largest law firms in this country—Andrews Kurth. I ran the city attorney's office in the 1990s. I ran Congressman Leland's congressional office in the 1980s. I ran my own law firm—Nelson and Locke—both in the 1980s and the 1990s. I have—as I mentioned earlier—been both the chairman of the board of some non profits and the executive director of non profits where I have had to find money, raise money, spend money, budget money, and go through all of the ordeals associated with that. And my wife and I have raised five kids in a house when there wasn't always a lot of money. You put all of that together—and you look at the task at hand of running the city—and you reduce it down to the basics. How much money do you have coming in? How much money do you have going out? And what are you trying to do? If you keep it that simple, you can really figure out where to go. Now, obviously there are some nuances to the issue of running the city. It is a \$4 billion dollar budget that you have to deal with. But do not get buffaloeed by the nuances. The reality is what it is. We have to curb our spending at the city until we get our revenue up. That is just the reality of the situation. We have to do it in a way that spreads any pain around equitably. So that nobody has to bear the burden themselves. And I have said publicly—and I'll say it again—to the extent that there are problems at the city, we'll all work together to get through them. We will all be aware and informed on what the problems are, and we will work together. And I will give leadership. I will give leadership in those areas so that the city knows what we are going through and we will get through it together.

JGray: Thank you. (applause) Ms. Parker.

AParker: Clearly, no one in this race knows as much about the inner workings as I do since you have tasked me with that for the last six years. It has been my privilege to serve. Before I came to city government, I spent 20 years working in the oil and gas industry doing project economics. I also owned my own small business. I had a retail book store for ten years. I understand cash flow. I understand that you have to have your expenses below your revenues.

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I agree—it is not high finance—the basic concepts, that is. But in terms of managing a \$4 billion budget, finding the resources to provide the services in a low tax, low service state and, by God we're proud of it—that is a challenge for anyone. And no one has as much knowledge of where the stress points are in the city budget, what can give, and what can't—as I do. As controller, I am the auditor for the City of Houston and I have audited programs and services across the city to find efficiencies. We are going to have to figure out a better way to do what we are already doing for less dollars. The single largest item in the city budget is public safety. If you go to my website—AnniseParker.com—you will see a whole range of policy initiatives. But I spend quite a few pages talking about better policing in the City of Houston, coordination of response among the various policing agencies, and how we can do more with less in policing and free up some of those budget dollars for the other services that we care very much about. (applause)

JGray: Mr. Morales.

RMorales: I have had the opportunity to manage a million dollars of your tax dollars. I have also been the Harris County audit and budget chairman, ensuring that we use every tax dollar wisely. And making sure that every department is audited at the Harris County Department of Education. What we are seeing now is a serious problem with the city's budget. Over the last five years, the city has had a \$1.5 billion deficit in the general fund. If you look city-wide over the same period, we see a \$1.3 billion deficit when you take into account the long term debt obligations. Basically, we have a balance sheet that is bankrupt. We have to face it. And we have to get started to fix it together. We do that by auditing every department, just like Mayor Whitmire did. That starts with the Houston Police Department and the Houston Fire Department. Mr. Locke has talked about leadership—we have all talked about leadership. I am going to lead by example because, ladies and gentlemen, I know people are homeless, people are without jobs—I am going to take a pay cut. And I expect every senior executive within the City of Houston to take a pay cut. I want to make sure that our employees are part of the solution. I talked about that earlier. I want to make sure they have a suggestion program like we had in the military, where they find ways of cutting dollars, but making the process better. And I will provide a stipend to encourage that type of thinking. (applause)

JGray: All right. Thank you, Mr. Morales. We are going to try to get one more question in from the audience. According to the census bureau in 2007, there were approximately 230,000 people above the age of five with disabilities in the City of Houston. The Houston Housing Authority reports that close to 40,000 families with disabilities need affordable, accessible housing that they cannot provide. Almost twelve percent of all people on the Authority's waiting list for housing are people with disabilities. More than eighteen percent of those waiting for financial assistance vouchers are people with disabilities. If elected the next Houston mayor, how will your administration create more affordable, accessible housing for people with disabilities who are at risk of becoming homeless. We will start with Ms. Parker.

AParker: I think you are going to find that we all say that we need more affordable housing and we commit to that. As a councilmember, I was a proponent of and tried to pass a visitability ordinance for the City of Houston so that for construction of new housing with public dollars that it was all accessible for the disabled—I have to stop here—

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Visitability, for those of you who don't know, means that if it is public dollars being spent the house ought to be accessible to anyone in a wheelchair or who is multiply handicapped. I thought it was a good idea then—I still think it is a good idea now. And I want to come back and revisit it. (applause)

JGray: Mr. Morales.

RMorales: Well, first off, everyone of us should be out there in the community and talking about the census and making sure everybody signs up. That is how we get our tax dollars. Being associated with the Head Start program, we do not have enough slots because in the last census people did not sign up. That is my plug. I want to make sure that we do that. Get the word out. So now we can have an effect on housing for our disabled and for children that are disabled. Like Ms. Parker, we need to revamp that housing authority. That is one of my goals. So we can lay out the plan on how we can handle situations like the disabled and like these children that are out there. We will come up with a plan. (applause)

JGray: Mr. Locke.

GLocke: As a matter of policy, we ought to marry disability issues with housing so that every public dollar that is spent provides for an opportunity for a disabled person or a disabled family to have access to housing. That has to start at the mayor's office—at least educating the council and making sure that that is where we are going. Also, giving directives through executive orders that when we spend dollars, we will spend them that way. Making sure that the appointees on the Houston Housing Authority are sensitive to that and understand that that is where we are going. It is not going to be a matter that will turn overnight. But it is one of those things that will be a high priority in my administration and will try to make happen. (applause)

JGray: Thank you, Mr. Locke. At this point, let's give all our candidates a round of applause for giving us concise answers. (applause) I didn't have to grab anyone's mike. We got it all in in time. It really has been my pleasure to serve as your moderator for this forum. Again, I want to say kudos to you all for coming out tonight and listening to what these candidates have to say. Of course, leading the city is a very important job. We certainly want to know where our candidates stand on a wide range of issues. And Kudos to One Voice for pulling this together. As I get ready to give up my microphone, again, let me say it has been my pleasure to be with you tonight. We wrapped up a few moments ago talking about homelessness and housing issues, and certainly someone who knows a lot about the homeless problem in our community is going to give us our closing remarks tonight. We will ask Anthony Love to come on up.

ALove: Thank you so much, Jerome. In January of 2010, a new mayor will take the oath of office and begin to serve our community. This new administration will face a number of challenges and opportunities. I am confident that our next mayor will meet these challenges and embrace and capitalize on these opportunities. Tonight's turnout is a testament to the fact that we care about this community and its most vulnerable citizens. We want real and effective solutions to the complex and critical health and human service needs plaguing Houstonians. The candidates have shared with us their ideas, but we cannot expect the next mayor to do it alone. Those of us here tonight

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have a responsibility to help the new mayor and his or her administration to find solutions to the issues that hinder our brothers and sisters from pursuing a full and productive life. It will take us to be the change we want to see and be a full partner in creation of this change. The sponsoring organizations—One Voice of Texas—Care for Elders—The United Way—and the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County—are here to ask for your help. When meeting with the candidates prior to tonight's forum, each of them committed to work closely with our organizations to find solutions and make the necessary changes to strengthen our health and human service system. So how can you help? First, I encourage you to find out more about each candidate. Then in November, vote for the candidate that you feel offers the best chance for real and positive change. Then we need you to stay involved. Be an active participant and work with us to find bold, creative, and effective solutions. The next mayor and his or her administration will have a full plate and we want to make sure that effective health and human services policy is an appetizing entrée on that plate. We appreciate you joining us tonight. Our work is just beginning and we look forward to working with each and every one of you in the coming days, weeks, months, and years. Thank you again, and good night. (applause)