

# President's Perspective

2020 Annual Business Session  
July 23 • Montgomery

Mayor Leigh Dollar • ALM President

## We are Stronger Together

2020 has been anything but normal as indicated by this year's convention – a condensed one day event where everyone was six feet apart and wearing masks. Every municipal leader has been faced with decisions and challenges that we never dreamed of; yet, we were elected to serve through leadership, and we all want to make a difference in our community no matter how large or small. We are going to make positive differences this next year together!

We are all navigating a pandemic that none of us have experienced in our lifetime. We have learned new terms such as social distancing, sheltering in place, zoom fatigue and flatten the curve. Over the last few months, we have been on more conference and video calls than we care to count. We have closed our cities, and we have opened our cities. We all are making the best decisions we can with the information we have to keep people safe while trying not to destroy the economy and our local revenues.

At the end of the day, I hope we have learned the value of human connections.

Also, many of our municipalities have experienced civil unrest in the past few months. It's difficult to put in words the many emotions our society is dealing with. In valuing human connections, we must stand together against racism and injustice. Municipal officials are a group of deeply motivated individuals who want the best for our communities. While we may not have all the answers, we were elected by our citizens to have critical conversations and make difficult decisions. We have lots of work to do. Let's commit together to hold ourselves accountable by



*Athens Mayor Ronnie Marks officially passed the president's gavel to Gunter Mayor Leigh Dollar on July 23rd during the League's Annual Business Session in Montgomery.*

listening, learning, doing better and being better. Local leaders – *all of us* – are at the grassroots level. We understand our communities because we live, work and play there along with our constituents. **Grassroots governance is where positive change happens.** We were mandated by the vote of our communities to be the conduit for positive change – to shape the narrative and to energize, inspire and engage our citizens!

As we look toward the next year, I want to thank everyone at the League for everything they do for all our municipalities. I want to also thank the League staff for making this year's unconventional annual convention a reality on July 23rd in Montgomery. It may have been smaller, but it still took a lot of work to put together and to navigate all the challenges associated with COVID-19. I look forward to working with Greg Cochran in his new role as Executive Director along with our excellent staff. Carrie Banks and her team always make us look good. Lori Lein and her team keep us legal. Kayla Bass and her team stay on top of all the legislative issues. Richard Buttenshaw and his team manage a host of financial and insurance services that are critical for our cities. Chuck Stephenson and his team keep up with all the League's technology – and actually make it work! Theresa Cook and Cindy Price make sure we are where we're supposed to be and that our CMO credit is logged and accurate. I also welcome our newest staff members and look forward to getting to know you and working with you. If I didn't mention you by name, it doesn't mean you are unnoticed – we appreciate each of you and your efforts on our behalf!

How fortunate are we to have these gifted professionals working so hard for all of us? We truly have a rock star crew and are blessed to have them on our side helping with anything we need. Our League is committed to putting the resources together to identify opportunities for our communities and help us as local leaders face unforeseen challenges. I have witnessed firsthand the League organizing task forces to get in front of an

issue, whether it be online sales tax or the loss of revenue during this pandemic. The League has formed solid relationships with the Governor's office, legislative leadership, key state agencies and with our congressional delegation to put our municipalities first. Our League is called on to have a seat at the table when crucial discussions happen and decisions are being made. Your municipality is important and lots of work is going on daily through our organization to help your municipality stay solvent.

The League is monitoring newly introduced and potential legislation that may impact our cities and towns. Even so, we need you to help us with this. Local leaders know their legislators personally and have a relationship with them. If you don't, please make it a priority to form a relationship with your legislative delegation. It is so important that we work in unison as we fight for or against legislation that affects our municipalities. Please let the League know your thoughts on legislation because your input matters!

You and your municipality are important to the League. We need you to be active because the only way we can be better is together. Together we can address any opportunity or challenge presented. There is strength in numbers. I encourage you to get involved – whether it's on a committee, through CMO workshops or by serving on a task force. We CAN make a difference by having a unified voice.

As I accept this responsibility to lead the League over the next year, I promise to you it is not for a title. We have lots of opportunities and challenges ahead of us. I look forward to meeting these opportunities and challenges head on with energy and enthusiasm to benefit all municipalities in Alabama. However, this can't be accomplished without your help because we are stronger together.

I want to thank the Guntersville City Council and staff for allowing me this opportunity to not only represent Guntersville but to represent all municipalities. I have the best team in Guntersville which makes my job so much easier. The most important group I want to thank is my family. Without them, I wouldn't be where I am today. They are my rock but also keep me grounded.

I have enjoyed working with Past President Mayor Ronnie Marks this year as he taught me the ropes. I look forward to working with Vice President Mayor Gary Fuller who will be an excellent ambassador for the League. I look forward to working with all of you as we continue to make positive differences in the great State of Alabama together.

I will conclude by recognizing that for most of us, it is election time. If you are running for reelection, I wish you the very best. If you've decided not to run for reelection, thank you for your service to your municipality. Community service is one of the greatest honors and privileges. ■