

Holloway makes first convention welcome since storm

Here is the prepared text of Mayor A.J. Holloway's welcome remarks delivered June 29, 2006 to the Urban Water Council, a convention that the U.S. Conference of Mayors organized at the IP in Biloxi, marking Holloway's first convention welcome since Aug. 29, 2005.

Good morning, and thank you for being here. This is a milestone occasion for the city, by the way. This is the first time for me to welcome a convention to Biloxi since Hurricane Katrina.

When I did these welcomes before the storm, my role was to tell you a little bit about our city. Biloxi has a long and colorful history, dating back to 1699, when French explorers established the Biloxi settlement.

I used to tell groups that in Biloxi they could find first-class, affordable accommodations; great restaurants; championship golf courses; deep sea fishing; miles of sand beaches; museums and historic sites; and, of course, we have a few casinos in town, too.

All of the excitement began in 1992, when these waterfront casino resorts began opening and igniting our economy.

The number of visitors we saw each year jumped from a million a year 10 to 12 years ago to between 10 and 15 million a year in the years before the storm.

We'd seen the number of hotel rooms go from about 3,000 10 years ago to almost 15,000 here in Biloxi just before Katrina, and almost 20,000 rooms on the Gulf Coast overall.

We'd overseen 6 billion dollars worth of growth, and seen 15,000 new jobs created in the hospitality industry.

But with all of the growth we'd seen, we worked hard to maintain our sense of place and our small-town charm, and we worked even harder to enhance the quality of life for our residents.

I'm here today to tell you that we're going to do all of those things again – sooner rather than later.

The issues that you're here to discuss are ones that will be vital to our success. Most residents, however, don't think about these issues. They just flush that toilet and forget about it.

I want to thank the U.S. Conference of Mayors for organizing this affair, and all of you for being here.

By the way, one other thing I used to tell the convention groups. As the chief economic development officer of this city, I want you to keep one thing in mind while you're here:

"The amount of fun that you have is directly proportionate to the amount of money you spend."

Have a great time here in Biloxi.
