

Executive Director's Remarks

2020 Annual Business Session
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I learned early in life, as the son of a Navy SEAL, what teamwork *means*, as well as what tools are necessary to guarantee a team operates efficiently and effectively. Every action a Navy SEAL makes is intentional – with the goal that the *team* reaches its full potential.

As a 2018 graduate of the Delta Regional Authority's Leadership Institute, I learned that sustainable community solutions are derived from inclusive partnerships.

From 20 years of marriage, I learned the value of having crucial conversations.

And, raising two boys into manhood, I learned how to make difficult and sometimes unpopular decisions that were in the best interest of our family as a whole.

These lessons, along with others, are what I purposefully attempt to demonstrate and what I expect from your League team.

Understanding that municipalities are the foundation of our state, and recognizing that we want ALM to be in a proactive position to support our cities and towns as they respond to the challenges and opportunities ahead, we are going to work harder than we have ever worked. However, if we are intentional and attentive, I have no doubt that our organization will provide the resources to our members that will foster communities where businesses want to invest and citizens want to live, work and play.

It is my intention to harken back to the early days of the League when our first Executive Director, Ed Reid, ensured our organization was recognized as the voice of and the most reliable resource for municipal government. As we move forward, ALM's focus will be advocacy, education, outreach and service development.



Enhancing our advocacy resources to reflect the 21st Century will allow us to expand our strategic partnerships; be more interactive with state policymakers throughout the year; develop strategic narratives that reflect the importance of municipalities; advocate on behalf of Alabama's municipalities at the congressional level; and identify and engage critical thought leaders who will not only help our cities and towns, but move Alabama forward. It is my commitment to you, that we will be inclusive and collaborative with *all* municipal officials from across our state to best represent citizens' needs and desires for a better Alabama.

We have already begun the necessary steps to put this structure in place. On June 1, we expanded and restructured our advocacy team. Kayla Bass was promoted to Director of External Affairs where she will work to promote League legislative positions through the development and implementation of grassroots campaigns and targeted advocacy strategies. Bryan Parker joined the League as our Director of Governmental Affairs with an impressive economic development background from his years with PowerSouth Energy and former Congressman Jo Bonner to focus his expertise on economic and community development. We recruited Baker Allen to join our team from the Governor's Office as Director of Policy and Research with extensive policy development skills, including substantial knowledge on issues that are vital to local governments such as broadband development, environmental regulation and Opportunity Zones. This will allow us to provide strategic data and statistics to back and enhance our position on issues. Furthermore, Kayla, Bryan and Baker will be working in collaboration with Lori Lein and Carrie Banks to enhance our outreach and services while ensuring we remain a steadfast



and reliable resource for our members, the Legislature, our congressional delegation and strategic partners.

Over the last three years, and especially during the last few months, we have enhanced our presence with state and local media. The League's advocacy and communication teams hosted "Media Days" the last two years, which serve as an opportunity to update reporters on legislative issues affecting Alabama's municipalities while also allowing elected officials to answer direct questions from media. Staff has also prepared and distributed relevant press releases and op-eds regarding municipal challenges and efforts throughout the year.

When the League expanded its advocacy efforts three years ago, it allowed us the opportunity to reevaluate how we focused on distinct municipal challenges. Since then, we have implemented strategic advocacy campaigns aimed at successfully sharing our narrative with the Legislature, the media and the public, while also narrowing our focus on legislative issues that have allowed us to take a proactive approach on behalf of municipalities. Additionally, we have intentionally endeavored to strengthen our relationships with our members in Congress and to expand our congressional network and outreach.

We are in the process of reevaluating conferences and trainings hosted by the League. When you attend an event hosted by us, whether it be our Annual Convention, the Municipal Leadership Institute, orientation sessions or other learning opportunities, we want you to feel there is purpose and intention – and that you leave our events with resources and relationships you can apply in your community to continue moving it forward.

In addition to these efforts I've just mentioned, ALM is working towards developing resources to educate citizens and children about the importance of municipalities, civics and good citizenship – while continuing to work strategically and intentionally with local, state and national organizations, agencies, stakeholders and partners to gather accurate, transparent revenue data; ensure municipal authority remains intact; and distribute critical information to cities and towns throughout the year.

On April 28th, in collaboration with the city of Tuscaloosa, ALM launched the COVID-19 Revenue Loss Portal at the recommendation of our 10-member Stimulus Task Force. Recognizing that Alabama's municipalities are on the front lines in the COVID-19 fight and are being hit the hardest by this pandemic, it was imperative that our organization join forces with municipal officials to identify the areas where our communities would experience the greatest loss of revenue, as well as a way to capture that data. Our hopes are that the COVID-19 Revenue Loss Portal will provide us with the accurate information we need to effectively advocate on behalf of our communities for replacement stimulus funds at the Congressional level.

It goes without saying that COVID-19 has upended lives and livelihoods and caused significant economic disruption throughout Alabama, particularly at the local level. Yet, even with the unprecedented challenges we're all now facing, in my 24 years with the Alabama League of Municipalities, I have never been more enthusiastic about our mission or the future of our cities and towns. I hope you feel the same way and will continue to be active in our organization as we work proactively to protect municipal authority. Our 22-member staff has a wealth of institutional knowledge – from advocacy to educational outreach to legal expertise on municipal government.

The Navy SEALs have a mantra: "The only easy day was yesterday." With that attitude, we can be mentally prepared for all we face each day. We know that Alabama is resilient. Its people are determined, innovative and ready to begin again – particularly at the local level – and ALM will continue to be at the forefront daily to ensure that the cities and towns across our state have the foundation they need in order for businesses to prosper and for citizens to live, work and play in their communities.

Strong, proactive local government matters now more than ever.

Thank you for your leadership in our organization and your community. ■

