

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Thank you Desiree, for that introduction. Thank you, Jorge for your contributions to working families in Chicago and for helping us market this great city. And thank you to everyone gathered here for the role you've played in helping us reach the record numbers that Desiree just shared.

From our earliest days as a city, Chicago has been a beacon to immigrants from all around the world. They're drawn by the rich history of our city, the character of our neighborhoods, our world-class cultural attractions, and the friendliness of our people.

But when it comes to attracting visitors, for too long, Chicago was punching below its weight. Our convention industry had slid – losing shows to places like Orlando and Las Vegas.

And we were spinning our wheels when it came to promoting our city as a tourism destination to the rest of the world. Other cities had offices in other countries to promote their tourism – New York City had 18, Las Vegas had 12, and Orlando had eight. But Chicago had just two.

As a result, we slid to 5th place as the most popular destination for conventions and to 10th place as the most visited city by international tourists. This was causing us to lose out on jobs, growth, and more opportunities to improve life in our city for all of our residents.

While many cities saw a decline in visitation during the recession, Chicago's visitation decreased more dramatically. And while competing cities like New York and Las Vegas increased their visitor numbers after the recession, Chicago's actually continued to decline.

Just three years ago, Chicago had three different offices within a mile of City Hall promoting tourism. Three different strategies and three different administrative budgets, wasting money on overhead rather than on marketing to national and international tourists.

The lack of a strategy was costing our city jobs and revenue. It was hindering our growth. And it was keeping us from taking full advantage of the potential that tourism has to create jobs, grow our economy and improve the quality of life for all Chicagoans.

That's why one of my first efforts in office was to overhaul our approach to attracting tourists and the convention industry – a singular strategy for both. We did it in two fundamental ways:

First, with the help of the Civic Consulting Alliance, we brought all of the government stakeholders to the table and created one agency to market Chicago to the world. Choose Chicago, under the leadership of Desiree and Don Welsh, has consolidated three local tourism

efforts into one, saved millions of dollars a year on overhead, and reinvested that money into opening offices overseas, where the tourists actually live.

Second, we took the politics out of McCormick Place and bridged the divide that was making it uncompetitive for major conventions. Rather than fight decades-old political battles, we formed a partnership with Labor to start a new chapter at McCormick Place. We settled a lawsuit with the Teamsters and the Carpenters. And we reached a new agreement between the Electrical Workers and the Stagehands.

In the past, conventions didn't want to come here because they saw us fighting like the Hatfields and the McCoys. But we are now pulling in the same direction with the shared goal of expanding our convention business and creating more jobs. We are wearing the same jersey now – the colors of the City of Chicago.

It is no longer a zero-sum game at McCormick Place. And more convention business means more jobs for the residents of Chicago. Right after we settled the labor disputes, Hyatt and Hilton announced \$500 million in new investments. It is a new day at McCormick Place and in the City of Chicago.

We've come so far that now Jorge and other labor leaders are actually leading the pitch teams for new convention business. The Carpenters are also working with us to recruit conventions using a special fund for that purpose. In short, labor is putting its time, its money, and its energy behind the effort to grow tourism throughout the city. And I'm grateful for their partnership.

These two reforms – consolidating our efforts to promote tourism and a new strategy at McCormick Place have gotten government and our politics out of the way of innovation and private sector growth. The results are clear:

- In 2007, we had 30,000 hotel rooms. But soon we will have grown by a full third. This industry is booming right now and it's translating into thousands of new jobs.
- More people are staying in our hotel rooms – and for longer than ever before.
- Nearly 10 million hotel room nights were purchased in Chicago last year. In 2014, for the first time ever we will likely break the 10 million mark.
- The last two years marked the first two times that the Chicago hotel tax receipts exceeded \$100 million. This means more jobs and more tax revenues for the city, which are being paid by tourists, rather than residents.
- In just one year, we've gone from fifth place to second place as the most popular convention destination in the country.
- We've opened ten international offices to promote Chicago tourism in growing markets like China, Mexico, Brazil, Germany, Japan, the UK, and Canada. Now we can finally

compete for those lucrative international tourist dollars that used to go to New York, Las Vegas, and Orlando.

- We've jumped from 10th to 9th as the most visited US city by international visitors. The biggest boost is coming from Asian and South American markets. Every international visitor spends on average \$4,000. This injects money into our city, puts more tax revenue on our books, and creates more jobs for Chicagoans – a win-win scenario.
- We've brought marquee events here to the city, including the 12th World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates, the NATO Summit, and the Big Ten Basketball Tournament. Chicago was also just chosen for the Frozen Four hockey championship as well as the NCAA Championship for men's gymnastics. These events will bring thousands of visitors to Chicago.

I want to thank all the partners throughout the city who recognized the value of attracting these high-profile, high value events to the city. From the investors who are financing new developments to the members of UNITE HERE who are some of our greatest frontline ambassadors as banquet servers, doormen, bartenders, and numerous other positions in the hotel and leisure industry.

This morning, I went to the Kinzie Hotel and cut the ribbon on that facility which will be opening in February, employing nearly 100 UNITE HERE members. This is a great example of the strong foundation we are building that has resulted in more growth, more jobs and a better quality of life for all Chicagoans.

But as my children will tell you – I'm never satisfied.

We have finally begun to put Chicago on the map as a destination. If you want to see the most American of American cities, you come to Chicago. After years of sliding backwards in the number of conventions we host, we are back near the top – but we've set our sights on becoming number one.

When we reorganized our tourism strategy two years ago, I set an ambitious goal – the first goal Chicago has ever set for tourism – to attract 50 million visitors a year by 2020. Today, just two years later, we are more than two-thirds of the way towards closing the gap between where we were and where we needed to be. But we can do better.

On the heels of this morning's news that we hit record hotel occupancy last year, I'm announcing today a new goal of reaching 55 million visitors a year by the year 2020 – five million more than we thought we could attract just two years ago.

When we reach this goal, the tourism industry here in Chicago will support more than 175,000 jobs and thousands upon thousands of families.

It means more construction projects will go forward, more hotel rooms will be booked, more restaurants will be filled, more museums will be visited, more theaters will be packed, and more music will be enjoyed. It means more people will dine in our award-winning restaurants, and more visitors will see the city that we know and love.

It will mean almost a one and a half billion dollars in tax revenue from the tourism industry, which will be used to invest back into our city to improve the quality of life for all people who call Chicago home.

This aggressive goal will require us – everyone in this room – to be far more creative and innovative in developing strategies to draw these tourists to our city. We all have a role to play.

- We're investing heavily in the City's transportation networks so that tourists can get around easily and affordably.
 - We're rebuilding the Blue line to take 10 minutes off the trip from O'Hare to downtown, and experimenting with ways to provide tourists with unique travel experiences from the airport to downtown.
 - We've overhauled our taxi regulations so that rides are cleaner, safer, and friendlier.
 - And we've launched Divvy, which quickly became one of the largest bike share programs in the country and is just as popular with tourists as it is with our residents.
- We're working hand-in-hand with organized labor to be competitive with Orlando and Las Vegas.
- And we're making infrastructure investments that will make Chicago stand out in the country – investments like the new Riverwalk now under construction.

Let's start with the Riverwalk as an example. This month we are launching an international design competition to light up our city that will start at the river's banks – making the Riverwalk the spine that connects residents and tourists to different neighborhoods and throughout the central part of our city.

We are seeking proposals from teams of the greatest artists, architects, engineers and designers in the world to light up our buildings, our parks, our roads, and our open spaces. It will start at the river but extend all through the city.

The images you're seeing on the screens are examples of how we can take this empty space and make it into a tourist destination. It will make nighttime in Chicago an experience unto itself. It will make us North America's City of Lights. People will come from far and wide to see what we've done.

Additionally, last week we announced the first city-wide celebration of Chinese New Year. This is a way of capitalizing on the great strength of our Chinatown neighborhood, which will soon celebrate its 100th anniversary. I envision it as another one of Chicago's iconic events that will attract visitors from far and wide and continue to place Chicago at the center of the global conversation.

This celebration will help to capitalize on the work that I have been doing with China, with the support of World Business Chicago. As part of my efforts to attract more Chinese visitors, last month I traveled to China and met directly with their tourism industry and talked to them about our ambitions for this event.

We have also signed a landmark agreement with the mayors of Beijing, Shanghai, and other large cities that will make Chicago America's gateway city to China. Our Chinese New Year celebration will also help us attract visitors to our city during times of the year – like this week when our weather is a little challenging and tourists are normally inclined to stay away. This celebration will capitalize on our efforts to make Chicago the most China-friendly city in the US.

These types of projects are part of our new effort to elevate Chicago – a concerted effort by government, the private sector and labor to conceive of and implement iconic infrastructure investments and events that will improve the quality of life for Chicagoans and attract more tourists to see our great city and enjoy the things that we already enjoy here.

In the coming weeks and months, I will be unveiling additional initiatives to remake the tourist industry in Chicago. We want to improve every aspect of a visitor's experience here - from the moment their plane touches down at one of our airports, to their trips on our public transportation system, to the museums they visit, to the restaurants they dine in, to the hotels they stay in, to the music and theater they enjoy. Now is the time to elevate Chicago.

I'm proud of the work that we've done. We've made important gains that are bringing more opportunities to more Chicagoans. We've showed ourselves what is possible in just three years. But we can aim even higher.

All the pieces are in place to make Chicago one of America's top destinations for conventions and tourism – from downtown to the more than 200 neighborhoods that form the heart and soul of our city.

We've made a lot of gains in just three years. And we fought hard to make them. But make no mistake. We could slide back just as quickly as we've moved forward. That's why we're not resting on our laurels or taking anything for granted. That's why we're going to continue being aggressive and unlock new opportunities to bring even more visitors to our city – so we can get the jobs and economic growth that comes with them.

That's why we're joining together to elevate Chicago.

Now is the time to work even harder. Now is the time to aim even higher. We've seen what we can do in just two years. As we've always said here in Chicago, 'make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men's blood. Make big plans and aim high in hope and in work.'

By staying focused, by raising the bar, and being dogged in the pursuit of our goals with so much at stake, we will make Chicago's future even greater than its past.

Thank you.