

Mary Clark

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3 **London: We are speaking with Camden Mayor Mary Clark. I want to thank**
4 **you for allowing us in today. What is your vision for South Carolina over**
5 **the next decade?**

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7 **Clark:** I think that the next decade will bring certainly more growth to the
8 population, to the state. I think it's projected that South Carolina will grow by
9 some 10 percent. I think Kershaw County will grow more by like 15 percent. That
10 is because of the Hispanic population. Legal and illegal immigration will probably
11 make this county grow more like 15 percent. I don't see the manufacturing sector
12 improving. The job losses that we've had in that, I don't see any reversal of that. I
13 think that we will have to depend on our business leaders to develop new jobs
14 and our workforce to have new skills. Of course, that is going to put pressure on
15 our local governments because we will have to provide more services with limited
16 and less funding of course. So those are some of the issues that I see in the next
17 ten years affecting South Carolina.

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19 **London: What key issues do we need to address in order to achieve a**
20 **better South Carolina?**

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22 **Clark:** The key issue I see facing us is educating our young people. We've got
23 to have a better-educated work force and we can't continue to educate the work
24 force for jobs that are unskilled. We've got to have more skilled jobs, and so
25 that's one of the issues. The other thing I think we have to do is encourage our
26 young people to go into math and science careers because they will be the future
27 of tomorrow that will be developing the new jobs and so I think that it's important
28 that they become better equipped by studying the math and sciences.
29 We also need to find a way to integrate the growth of the Hispanic population and
30 others into the work force. I don't think that we can any longer say to the Hispanic
31 population that you've got to learn English. It's our responsibility that we teach
32 them English so that they can be better citizens and make a greater contribution
33 to the society.

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35 **London: How do we position ourselves to take advantage of the**
36 **opportunities that are going to be presented by the new global economy**
37 **and society and still maintain our assets and the quality of life?**

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39 **Clark:** I have three things to say: Educate, educate, educate. And I really can't
40 say educate enough. We have to have a well-educated workforce to compete
41 with the global countries, with the global economics in other countries. You know,
42 for years and years we have tried to protect the jobs in the state, the
43 manufacturing jobs. My husband retired from the textile industry. And so as the
44 foreign imports started coming in, the textile business leaders went to Congress
45 and said, you know, you've got to help us. Let's do something. So we developed
46 *Made in the USA* and *Buy American* programs and we developed those

1 programs. Foreign imports kept coming. We kept enjoying the luxury of those
2 cheaper prices. And so in today's world, the jobs like Spartan Mills and Spring
3 Industries are no longer with us. There are a few left but they are very small. So
4 hindsight says that perhaps we should have not been fighting the imports so
5 much but developing new technology for the jobs that we could be doing here. As
6 you know, we once were an agrarian economy and we embraced that, and then
7 as the manufacturing developed and moved into South Carolina, we embraced
8 that, and as the global economy technology moves into South Carolina, we must
9 embrace that too. So we have to be prepared for new careers in what's
10 happening worldwide.

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12 Camden is very fortunate in that we recently partnered with a new company that
13 is located in Downtown Camden. It's Agilis Engineering. It's an aerospace
14 engineering firm. They hired fifteen engineers and they plan to have fifty in three
15 to five years. They have offices in Florida and Costa Rica. So when they looked
16 at Camden, they were impressed by the quality of life here. It shows that we can
17 have progress with protection and still maintain the quality of life that this
18 company saw in our little town of Camden. What he saw was an opportunity for
19 his young engineers to come to a town that they could walk to work or ride their
20 bicycles or golf carts, walk downtown for lunch and so we are real excited that we
21 are moving in that direction and not destroying the quality of life that we all enjoy.
22 So it's progress with protection and yet we feel like we're beginning to meet
23 some of the needs for the global economy.

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25 **London: Will the next generation of South Carolinians be able to compete**
26 **in the global economy?**

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28 **Clark:** The next generation will not be able to compete in the global economy if
29 we do not do a better job of educating our citizens. We have to find a way to
30 make the young people want to learn new skills as much as they want to stay up
31 late and watch television. We have to do this through our public schools –
32 everybody has to work at that, and if we don't do this, then we will fail. If I had the
33 answer to how to do it, I would probably be as wealthy as Bill Gates. I don't have
34 the answer, but I do know we have to do it.

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36 **London: What in your mind are the responsibilities of South Carolina**
37 **leaders regarding future generations of South Carolinians?**

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39 **Clark:** I think as leaders of our state, it is our responsibility to do this. We have
40 to stop the bickering and the posturing on the state government level. This is not
41 a partisan issue. Our state is at stake. So we must all work together to see that
42 we can accomplish this.

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44 **London: And what other issues should the state address that are**
45 **particularly important to you?**

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1 **Clark:** There are many other issues that we face. Our crumbling infrastructure is
2 certainly one of those issues. The federal and state government originally helped
3 us, and they're going to have to help us again. Our water and sewer needs to be
4 upgraded. Our highways, our bridges all are in dire need of repairs. Our schools
5 need help, and we're going to have to have help from the state and the federal
6 governments in order to do this. We also, with less manufacturing, we're going to
7 see more and more imports, so our ports have got to be adequate so we will
8 need help to be sure that our ports are adequate for the traffic that comes
9 through them. Again, this is all going to cost money. We have to educate our
10 people to understand that there are no free lunches, and that we're all going to
11 have to be prepared to pay as we go.

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13 **London: What are your thoughts about regional planning or looking at**
14 **issues on a broader level?**

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16 **Clark:** Yes, we do have to think regionally. We cannot think local anymore. Here
17 in Kershaw County, we are working together to build a new sewer system that
18 will take care of the county and not one in across the river that takes care of that
19 part of the county and the one that we have here to take care of the city. There
20 are just not enough funds if we don't pool our money and do things more on a
21 regional basis and this goes for the state too. I think our colleges some years ago
22 learned a valuable lesson that you can't have a teaching school in every college
23 in the state of South Carolina. So now, I think we're probably down to a couple of
24 schools, colleges that have the education for teachers. So we have to look at
25 where we're duplicating services and see if we can't combine those. We have
26 special purpose districts all over the state, and those special purpose districts are
27 very territorial and they're very hard to dissolve those special purpose districts.
28 But we've passed that in my opinion. Even though they have lobbyists out there
29 that lobby really hard to keep the special purpose districts, I think it's very
30 important for the state to probably disband most of the special purpose districts
31 and integrate those into city, county, state projects.

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33 **London: One of the things that we didn't talk about earlier but I know is**
34 **something that's definitely on the minds of many people that are in**
35 **municipal government is the issue of annexation here in South Carolina**
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37 **Clark:** Annexation is a very big issue in the state of South Carolina. I have been
38 associated with the municipal association for years, and we have lobbied and
39 lobbied and lobbied to try to change our annexation laws. Our annexation laws
40 are the most restrictive, I think, in the United States. For years, we didn't have a
41 city with a population greater than one hundred. We do have a few now, but
42 there still aren't large cities like Charlotte and Raleigh and some of those and it's
43 because of the annexation laws and I think that something like seventy-five
44 percent of the homeowners and landowners have to petition to be annexed. To
45 get 75 percent of the people to agree to anything in a neighborhood is very
46 difficult. North Carolina's annexation laws, if you furnish services for a year to an

1 area, you're automatically annexed and so that's an easy thing. And of course we
2 would be eligible for more federal funds, there would just be a lot of things that
3 would happen if we had larger cities, and annexation could fall into just the path
4 where you are offer services and you are annexed. That would also help with
5 some of the duplication of services because you've got all these small little
6 municipalities and they all have to have a police department. They all have to
7 have a fire department. They all have to have their city halls and all the things
8 that go along with being an incorporated area. The other thing that really is a real
9 hindrance to our state are the donut holes we call them. We have several donut
10 holes here in Camden - one just as you come in on Highway One where the old
11 the Bi-Lo shopping center used to be, and that's just almost right downtown but
12 it's not incorporated into the city of Camden. We have no jurisdiction over that
13 piece of property, and it doesn't lend itself to following the rules that we have in
14 our town. And so when you come into town it's just an eyesore. That's not the
15 only thing but we don't have the police jurisdiction so the sheriff's department has
16 to be called if there are any problems in these little areas that are unincorporated,
17 and of course they're all over this county - it takes longer for that response time.

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19 With the local option sales tax that most of the counties have adopted,
20 annexation into the city doesn't cost a lot for the person coming into the city.
21 Sometimes it's just that idea that I don't want to be annexed or I don't want to be
22 incorporated. Really, it would be in the best interest of the citizens as well as the
23 best interest of the state. I think we'd be much more efficient.

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25 **London: It is certainly inefficient financially. Thank you for your time.**
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