



CITY OF COLUMBIA
SOUTH CAROLINA
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

2017 State of the City Address
As prepared for delivery
Mayor Steve Benjamin
January 31, 2017 – Columbia, SC

Good evening Members of City Council, City Manager neighborhood & business leaders staff other electeds etc.

Mom & Dad, Dee & the girls.

Thank you, Dr. Pastides & Dean Brews for welcoming us to the Moore School.

For nearly thirty years this university has been central to my life as it has been for hundreds of thousands of young people seeking to make their mark on the world over the last 2 centuries. "Serving as a Faithful index to the ambitions and fortunes of South Carolina."

This university has served as a launching pad for world changers, a true microcosm of society that in this very building now hosts the singularly best, the premier, the number 1 international business program in the world!

Connected and interconnected -- woven into what Dr. King called that single garment of destiny, with people from far flung nations all across the globe----

It may seem odd to some still that THIS university in Columbia SC could house such diversity & excellence, but I submit to you that it was always meant to be. From the very founding of this shining city on a hill, where the Broad & Saluda met the Congaree, the architects of an imperfect nation determined that Columbia, the name of liberty personified, would be... and I quote, a place where "the oppressed of every land might find refuge under the wings of Columbia."

We are bound, Dr. Pastides...in the belief that *emollit mores nec sines esse ferus*.

That learning humanizes character and does not permit it to be cruel and that the education received in this citadel of academia also prepares the world to be a better place.

And I pledge that we will always work in our mutual best interest and the interest of all Columbia regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status. In partnership, there is so much good that we can do together.

So thank you Pastor Jackie and my friend Rev. Bill Dieckmann. I ask my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for strength to work through this address tonight. To my friends from the House of David I say Shalom, to the followers of the prophet Muhammad I greet you with words of peace. As-Salaam Alaikum, for followers of the world's other great religions or those who have decided to chart your own path, I'll greet you the way my nephew DJ always does. -- A hearty "What's up?"

Thank you my sweet Arrington Jones & Dr. Ed Madden for reminding us of the power of the arts. And I commit to you that this city will continue to prioritize the arts and arts funding as we continue to grow.

The State of the City is a unique opportunity.

It's how we reflect upon, summarize and analyze the year past and look forward to the year ahead.

It's how we come to understand where we are, where we come from and chart a course for where we're going.

That's our goal again tonight, but how we're going to do it is going to be... a little different.

As I said, I am not exactly fond of public speaking. And though that may sound odd since, both as an attorney and as Mayor, it's a big part of what I do, I've learned to adapt.

I research, I practice and I prepare in every way that I can. But I also come to rely on artificial structures for support and security.

And it's not just those of us with a fear of public speaking. It's a natural instinct.

Any one of us would find ourselves gripping the sides of this podium or take comfort knowing that the long desk in council chambers hides the stomach that I've vowed to turn into a six pack --- well close to a six pack this year.

[LAUGHS]

A podium, a desk, a line of television cameras, the virtual friendships of Facebook, the anonymity of a message board post – it's tempting to hide behind these structures protecting vulnerabilities and insecurities that are all too human.

But too often, those structures become barriers allowing our fears to separate us – neighbor from neighbor and as importantly, the people from their elected leadership – then that's a problem.

Because if we're hiding from each other – we're not communicating, we're not connecting – and that connection is fundamental to who we are as a city and as a people.

So what do you say we break down some barriers tonight? Yeah?

[MOVES AWAY FROM LECTERN ON SIDE OF STAGE AND MOVES TO THE MIDDLE OF THE STAGE]

There. Doesn't that feel better?

Well, maybe not, but we're doing it anyway. (smile)

Because the truth is that, if we are to ever reach our true potential, I can no more separate myself from you or you from your neighbors than I could my left hand from the rest of my body.

The good book says that "the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now, if the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body... But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for one another.

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” – (1 Corinthians 12:12-26.)

Our city is a body – a body of different parts, of different industries, of different people.

A body that has its weaknesses but also has much strength.

A body that, though more than 200 years old, has more vitality and resilience than ever.

And if one part is honored, every part rejoices. If one part suffers, we all suffer together.

And just like our bodies, we must take care of our city.

We have to eat right, exercise, maintain good spiritual, emotional and mental health and periodically go to the doctor for a check-up, take our pulse and blood pressure, check our cholesterol and make sure nothing’s sneaking up on the horizon.

So, here we are. And to help us check the numbers, I’d like to introduce you to a new friend, she’s our Virtual Inter-Columbia Intelligence expert, but we just call her VICI.

Say hello, VICI.

VICI:
Hello, VICI.

Sorry, she can be a little buggy. We got her through the Department of Defense surplus program. (smile)

VICI:
Would you like to play a game?

No thank you, VICI. Why don’t you give us the year’s highlights instead.

[HEADLINES FLASH ON THE SCREEN]

Whoa whoa whoa – slow down there. That’s a little overwhelming.

VICI:
What would you like to know, Mayor Benjamin?

Hmm... tell me about our grant awards.

VICI:
In 2016, the City of Columbia was awarded more than \$13 million in federal, state and private grants.

Which we owe to city staff & our grants professional Chris Segars! A round of applause for them please.

[PAUSE]

VICI, what do we have on the number of trees planted in our city last year as part of of 10,000 trees initiative?

VICI:

Keep the Midlands Beautiful, City of Columbia Parks and Recreation and Forestry and Beautification planted more 626 trees in the city, which includes 30 different species.

Fantastic. What about diversity? How diverse are we?

VICI:

The residents of the City of Columbia speak more than 90 languages and represent more than 200 nationalities.

And are we encouraging diversity?

VICI:

Yes. In fact, Columbia received the highest equality score in the State of South Carolina and one of the highest in the tri-state area from the Human Rights Campaign.

Incredible. Is that the only recognition we received this year?

VICI:

No, sir.

Then what else do you have?

VICI:

Columbia was named in the Top 50 Best Places to Live in 2016 by U.S. News and World Report,

*Columbia ranked 4th lowest in startup costs in the nation at \$232,541 – lower than Charleston by 5.3%
Columbia was named the 3rd best college town in America 2016 by Livability.com*

Columbia established the first urban gigabit community in the state in Bull Street,

Spirit Communications Park was named the 2016 Ballpark of the Year by Ballpark Digest,

*The City of Columbia was named the 2016 Outstanding Government Program award winner by the
National Recycling Coalition for its solid waste department,*

*The Columbia Museum of Art was the only art museum in the country to win a National Medal for
Museum and Library Service, the nation's highest honor for museums in service to their communities.
The CMA was also named the 2016 winner of the Elizabeth O'Neill Verner Governor's Award for the
Arts as the top arts organization in South Carolina, becoming the first and only museum to have twice
received this extraordinary recognition.*

Wow. Somebody's been busy.

VICI:

That's just for starters.

What do you mean?

VICI:

There's the economy.

What about it?

VICI:

Unemployment in Metro Columbia is currently at 3.8%.

That's lower than both state and national unemployment and represents a 58.2% drop in unemployment over the past six years with over more than 51,000 new jobs created in that time and nearly 10,000 new jobs created this past year alone.

So you're telling me that together the folks in this room have helped create more than 51,000 new jobs and cut unemployment by nearly 60%?

VICI:

Isn't that what I just said?

It is, but I want to make sure your math is right.

VICI:

Let me check...Ok, it seems I made a mistake.

What kind of mistake?

VICI:

I forgot to add the 12,157 jobs that are available right now.

So it's actually over 63,000 new jobs.

VICI:

That is correct.

And what would our unemployment rate be if all those jobs were filled?

VICI:

Less than 1%.

And we will make the competitiveness of of city our priority. With Richland & Lexington Counties, EngenuitySC, The Midlands business leadership group , our Chamber, Central SC Alliance, USC, Allen, Benedict, Midlands Technical College Columbia College, CIU, the Lutheran Seminary and all of you, we will focus on

- 1 - Talent (developing a strong pipeline, including a strong focus on skilled trades across the city that can give someone a wonderful standard of living for a lifetime
- 2- Entrepreneurial and Business Environment (constantly investing & rethinking how we do business)
- 3 - Innovation
- 4 - Industry Clusters (insurance Technology, health Science, Future fuels)
- 5- Livability (from extending the Greenways to Railroad Quiet Zones and creating vibrant public spaces and promoting the arts with the Central. Carolina community foundation and the Knight foundation) we are doing incredibly well in his space.

Working together the sky is the limit.

And so I'm also proposing that we host The Longest Table in Columbia, SC

Our city is great because our neighborhoods are great. And we must make them stronger and more vibrant. That starts with better communication.

To increase the levels of communication, collaboration and opportunity in our neighborhoods, we're going to host The Longest Table, an event that literally uses an incredibly long dinner table to connect people with their neighbors. From Northwood Hills to Hollywood Rose Hill, Edgewood to Wildewood there won't be any excuses as to why we can't converse and break bread with people who live a stone's throw away from you.

Imagine 500 citizens dining together. Not on Facebook or Twitter. Face to face. Sharing a meal. Our hopes, our fears, our dreams for OUR city.

[PAUSE]

So, VICI, if our city is a body, how would you describe it?

*VICI:
Healthy.*

Yes, "Healthy" is a good word. But not really the one I was looking for.

*VICI:
Fit?*

Closer, but not quite.

*VICI:
You want me to say "strong," don't you, Mayor?*

I really do.

*VICI:
Fine...the State of our City is STRONG.*

Thank you.

[PAUSE]

But, you know, as impressive as all that is. It's just the bones of our body – the foundation and frame that gives us structure and shape.

It doesn't tell you about the father who can finally give his kids the Christmas they deserve because he got a job that pays him what he's worth instead of what he'll take.

It doesn't tell you about the twenty-something with a Masters in Psychology who took off her waitress apron for good because she finally got a job that uses her degree.

It doesn't tell you what new businesses like NoMa Revival, the War Mouth, Studio 2LR, the CottonTown Brew Lab and Indah Coffee Company mean to neighborhoods throughout the North Main Corridor.

It doesn't tell you about the homeless man who's moved into an apartment now because our Workforce Development Program trained him for the first full-time job he's had in years building Spirit Communications Park and now he's got the skills and the experience along with nearly 40 others trained to chart his own course into the future.

That's the heart of the story...what really matters.

And it isn't just the big new projects and developments, though we certainly have our share of them.

And it's not just new industries coming to town, through China Jushi investing \$300 million and creating 400 new jobs certainly doesn't hurt. Thank you Richland County Council for your leadership and your partnership. Please stand.

It's small businesses like the Ally and Eloise bakeshop opening their second location on Main Street, Carolina Kernels on North Main, new entrepreneurs taking advantage of our Vacant Abandoned Building Incentive and local high-tech start-ups like TCube Solutions investing \$1.7 million and creating 100 new jobs at their new Bull Street facility.

It's the deliberate, step-by-step work every day building a momentum that drives us into the future.

That's how you take care of your body to make it strong and resilient. You take ten more steps today than you did the day before. Then ten more the next day. Then ten more and ten more.

Imagine what else we can accomplish with that kind of focused, relentless pursuit.

Think about this for a second --as we build our brains--in your average middle-income neighborhood, the ratio of age appropriate books to children is 13 books for every one child while, in lower-income neighborhoods, the ratio is one book for every 300 children.

Imagine that. Imagine growing up in a household without any Dr. Seuss. Without Huckleberry Finn. Or A Wrinkle in Time. Or The Hungry, Hungry Caterpillar.

Imagine those things being completely absent from your life. And it's not like you grow up not knowing -- a child knows that those books are absent from his life. Imagine what that does to her

Never mind the barriers it creates in learning how to read.

Growing up in that environment, even if you CAN read, it teaches you NOT to. You learn not that reading isn't important but that, for YOU...it's wrong. If you do read you're somehow pretending you're better than your family, better than your friends, better than everyone around you.

How do we change that?

How do we fundamentally reshape the world of possibilities for our children?

How do we develop these incredibly powerful little brains

One step at a time. One book at a time.

Imagine giving that child a book. And then another. And then another. And watching them consume the written word like you've never seen before. That's what we did with Books 2 Boys.

Thanks to Cigna Insurance, Richland County PublicLibrary and our Parks and Recreation Staff we've given away more than 1,500 books to boys in our city fundamentally changing the way they see themselves and the world around them.

And yes to all the mothers and fathers of daughters --- Bethany & Jordan Grace-- we're launching a Books 2 Girls fair on March 8th

But let's take more steps. Let's take two. Let's take ten.

I envision our city being a body of people who don't merely coexist; but support one another, lift each other up so we can reach higher.

That's why, a few weeks ago, I issued a challenge to our residents to sign up to mentor a child or young adult in our city.

VICI, what do we know about the benefits of mentoring.

VICI:

A child with a mentor is 55% more likely to enroll in college and 130% more likely to hold a leadership position.

And what's our goal?

VICI:

Right now, we have a goal of attracting 100 adults to sign-up to be mentors via the form on the Mayor's Mentoring Network page.

Why?

VICI:

Because children with mentors are children with greater support and therefore greater futures.

We want each of you to take this step with us. Play a role in changing the life of child or young adult in our city.

Be that catalyst for greatness because we are only as good as we prepare the next generation to be.

Our Mayor's Fellows program has seen more than 200 students since it began in 2011. Each semester, we welcome the best and brightest undergraduate and graduate minds in the city to play an integral role in maintaining a fast-paced, high-volume office. Please stand.

We've invested in our children by providing them with summer Jobs. I'm proud of our partnership with the Columbia Urban League.

This past summer, the Summer Work Experience Leadership Program, or SWELP, gave 600 teenagers a job in our city. The program not only pays the teens a stipend and gives them work experience, but it prepares young minds for the workforce at a young age, making them more attractive to potential employers in the years after. We are nurturing our talent pipeline.

Brand new members of our Youth Commission are here to help us set policy for the next generation. Our Columbia Youth Commission is back in action this year, giving us the opportunity to close the gap between city government and our city's youth – a demographic that though unable to vote, provides invaluable perspective and feedback to how our city can truly reach its full potential.

We want to give our children a leg-up to education before they even get to their kindergarten classes.

That's why we've partnered with Square Roots, becoming the first city in the nation to sign-on as a Birth40 Coalition city.

And, in doing so, we are committing to improving maternal and infant health in our city, ensuring we implement programs that will streamline the sharing and dissemination of best practices, innovative solutions and current evidence-based research to ensure our children not just survive, but live full, healthy and fruitful lives.

But I want us to do more than just mentor and give boys and girls books. I want us to improve literacy throughout our city and our region.

I want us to improve school attendance and increase access to quality early childhood opportunities by creating an Early Childhood Advisory Council to identify existing opportunities and evaluate gaps in resources for our youth.

But let's take 10 more steps. - A healthy child, and a healthy person, any healthy city must have access to healthy food.

I'd like the first 5 rows in this auditorium to stand up.

Great.

You represent the number of people in our city who live below the poverty line and, suffer from issues related to hunger and healthy food access every day.

How can that be?

In America the land of milk and honey the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the history of the world?

How can we have dozens of grocery stores and hundreds of restaurants in our city, and people still go hungry?

And yet people suffer from food insecurity.

We made a major step last year in the partnership with Senior Resources and with that, thousands of healthy daily meals to seniors all across the region. We were also able to partner with Walmart during the holidays to provide more than 1,700 seniors in our city with full dinners, but we must do more.

We were even just awarded a \$120,000 grant from the United States Conference of Mayors and American Beverage Foundation to teach children how to grow healthy foods and the importance of diet and exercise, but we must do more.

We're going to establish Food Policy Council that conducts a food system analysis to understand where we're lacking and how we can connect the slow foods, local agriculture the farmer's labor to dinner tables all across our city.

We're going fight the food deserts by supporting an urban farming infrastructure, a food hub and a community owned food cooperative that allows community members to both own and run a cooperative grocery store that has competitive prices and healthy foods in their neighborhoods, spurring entrepreneurship and opportunity all across our region.

If we think about food in terms of opportunity, there are so many incredible innovative solutions to solving issues related to hunger. The city will be looking into ways in which we can improve zoning laws and rehabilitate abandoned lots to ensure productive use of space in the creation of more urban farms. City Roots has done tremendous work in our city, why not multiply those efforts?

A healthy body must be housed. I know that safe and secure shelter meant the world to me growing up in Sam and Maggie Benjamin's house.

How do we make our best efforts to connect people with housing they can afford?

The next ten steps mimics what we're doing it right now by working to create an environment that encourages developers and contractors to build mixed use, mixed income, workforce housing across our city.

And I know we can do it because we already have.

The influx of students living downtown did not happen by accident; it was intentional. It was deliberate and it has led to unparalleled urban growth.

And we should be willing to apply those same principles to continue incentivizing private contractors who want to build the millions of dollars worth of beautiful, yet affordable, housing our citizens deserve.

I will be submitting a plan to council focusing on those broad themes for us to hash out the idea together.

One step...then two...then ten. And we're starting right now.

[PAUSE]

VICI, talk to me about sustainability.

VICI:

There's a lot to tell, Mayor. You have to be a little more specific.

Ok, tell me about our water and sewer infrastructure that works to keep clean water flowing, updates old infrastructure and keep our rivers and streams clear for generations to come?

VICI:

The City has invested more than half a billion dollars in water and sewer improvements over the past 10 years.

In addition, the city has inspected roughly 317 miles of sewer lines over the past two years thanks the new sewer line rapid assessment tool and this year broke ground on the new 15 million water distribution and wastewater management facility and is pursuing (LEED) green building silver certification for the project.

And, as of today, how much of the much maligned general Water/Sewer Fund transfer into our General Fund?

VICI:

Zero dollars.

You see, we know that our contribution to a better environment makes a difference

A true commitment to toward sustainability matters

VICI, tell them about rain barrels.

VICI:

In 2016, the City of Columbia launched a new program to teach citizens about the benefits of using rain barrels and how to use them effectively.

To date, 394 citizens have signed up for the program and the City plans to give away 1,000 rain barrels, which keeps approximately 50,000 gallons of rainwater from otherwise flooding into our streets, potentially damaging our infrastructure, homes and businesses.

Through programs like Solarize SC we've installed enough solar panels on homes and businesses across the city to generate over 8.2 million kilowatt hours of electricity over the guaranteed lifetime of 25 years.

VICI, give me a real-world perspective on what that means.

VICI:

It's like removing greenhouse the gases of 13 million car miles and the carbon dioxide equivalent of 6.1 million pounds of coal being burned or 13,000 barrels of oil consumed.

We're the first city in our state to power all City Council meetings on renewable power.

We've converted 95% our traffic lights to energy efficient LED technology.

And right now, we're well on our way to becoming the first STAR Communities-certified city in South Carolina. And once we've achieved that status, we'll be provided with the highest level of training and technical assistance for our sustainability needs.

Sustainability isn't just a buzz word in Columbia. It's become a way of life. And we're living proof that it works!

I know that VICI Mentioned the new U&E HQ's earlier but I want to use it as an example of our commitment to true sustainability

Adaptive reuse

Run down car dealership

Second largest only to the baseball stadium barely a mile away

Almost 15 million dollar investment

Lauren Put up photos

[PAUSE]

We ARE a sustainable city. We are a resilient body.

We don't crack under pressure even when it's the weight of 11 Trillion gallons of water fell from the sky but rather gather ourselves up and stand together even stronger and more tenacious than before.

Together...indivisible...all the inseparable parts of this one body Columbia. United left hand and right, heart and head.

As we begin 2017, we are making excellent progress continuing flood recovery efforts. Engineering and design are underway for Canal repairs, and we have recently seen definitive reports on the full extent of flood-related damages to that important asset.

In the coming weeks and months, the City, in conjunction with FEMA and the State, will develop repair solutions that not only protect the city's critical drinking water supply for over 400,000 of our regional citizens, but will also reflect the City's vision and resolve to emerge from the October 2015 flood disaster stronger and more resilient than before.

Through your efforts, and with FEMA public assistance, the City has accomplished repairs to much of our damaged critical infrastructure. Much work still remains,

This year we will begin implementation of a \$20 million grant from HUD to assist property owners in the repair of homes and businesses.

We will continue to pursue other avenues of FEMA assistance through additional grants to assist property owners in flood recovery efforts and will keep all our apprised of progress as these efforts evolve.

Mother Nature & Climate change tested us and our citizens, but our first responders supported by showing up in all of our glory.

Our First Responders -- we salute you. (Clap)

The Columbia - Richland Unified Fire Department now enjoys the highest ISO rating available and our Though those bonds have been tested here and across our nation.

This December marked two years since the CPD launched our Justice for All initiative. And enjoys a strong and rising national reputation.

Vici, take us through the numbers.

VICI:

Gladly, sir.

Following the principles outlined in Justice for All, the Columbia Police Department has increased the percentage of officer diversity hires from 39% in 2015 to 68% in 2016.

Furthermore, the Columbia Police Department is leading the region in employee compensation for our officers, with career and leadership training for each member of CPD personnel.

Give me some specific transparency action.

VICI:

CPD publishes annual and internal affairs reports each year that include the complaint and outcome of every internal affairs complaint filed that year.

Though not required by law, all interview rooms are equipped to record all felony suspect interviews and the new CPD website includes all calls for service and other information of interest to the public.

From the Defending Childhood Initiative and Coffee with Cops to the Citizens Advisory Council, CPD introduced a series of programs designed to foster proactive relationships and an open dialogue between CPD and the people of Columbia – all of our diverse communities – so that we're engaging the public, not just policing them

VICI Watson

I've given her the last name Watson because Just one block south of us one of the biggest announcement from 2016 that represents exactly where we're going as a community..

The USC partnership with IBM in the new Center for applied innovation Will facilitate groundbreaking research concentrating on computing technologies and data analytics demanded by global businesses.

This partnership will also focus on the application of cognitive capabilities and the Internet of Things to develop new solutions to world problems.

We are going to change the world right here in Columbia SC

Vici is a representation of what IBM's Watson is able to do.

Imagine what type of innovation can emerge from here and from the potential new medical campus at Bull Street Dr. Pastides which we remain excited and look forward to making it a reality

(Bull Street slide)

Because we know as One Columbia, one city, one body – it's not a matter of whether the hand or the foot wants to be part of the body; it's a matter of how they collaborate to make that body whole. How they move that body forward.

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

And perhaps most instrumental in the body is the part that does move us forward. Not the legs or the feet, but the eyes.

Because we must have vision

“Without a vision, the people will perish.”

We dream. We aspire. We innovate. We challenge.

Our vision leads us in tackling difficult issues. It leads us in rejecting the status quo and making meaningful, necessary changes.

In October, our City Council convened for a retreat. At that retreat, we conceptualized seven goals of a vision that will lead us to truly becoming the city we want to be, not just today but for the next 20 years.

VICI as we say goodbye can you play our vision preamble by City Manager Wilson?

[VIDEO OF TW STATING PREAMBLE]

By 2036, Columbia has captured the new American dream. While embracing our 250-year rich history, we enthusiastically welcome the future. We are proud of our soul, our unique character, our diversity, and our human potential. We stand as a city for all people. As a center of commerce, technology, and education, we have defined our city as one full of vitality and inclusion with a charming and cosmopolitan feel. We will create our desired future. We will continue our success.

So, how will we get there? We focus.

Our seven focus areas for the City Council vision statement are:

Attracting and retaining talent –

Planning together –

Connecting our community –

Empowering our residents –

Enhancing Columbia's neighborhoods –

Economic prosperity –

Leading the way in innovative and high-quality municipal services –

As we greet each other at the reception please look at other council people on the screens and they will explain what each of it to the seven pillars means

Watch with me.

All of City Council including me didn't think they were cool enough to be in this next phase but with that staff talk us into it anyway (smile)

[CITY COUNCIL VISION STATEMENT MUSIC VIDEO]

Closing remarks

You know, I've heard that one of the most important steps in human evolution was when we began to stand upright walking on two legs rather than four.

On the one hand, that natural tendency to look out across the grasses of the savannah rather than focusing on the few things that were immediately within our grasp not only gave us a tactical advantage, allowing us to see predators further away, but it opened our vision all the way to the horizon which helped nurture a sense of curiosity about our world, a desire to investigate and explore and find our place in it.

So, in a very real way, this sense of wonder, this ability to imagine and see the connections between things, this VISION is the most fundamental part of our human body. It's what separates us from animals. It's what led us to develop the first tools. It's how we came together as tribes and communities. It's what led us to build cities like this in the first place.

And it is our vision which allows us not only to see each other, but to connect on more than just a superficial level but rather identify with each other and recognize our shared hopes and our shared mortality.

Yet as we stand here tonight, there are some who would use that vision to drive us apart, to separate us by race, gender, sexuality, nationality, religion and all those other false barriers into bickering factions of community rather than see us embrace our shared identity and our shared destiny.

But we must refuse to fall into that trap. We must refuse to separate our left hand from our right, our head from our heart.

I refuse to let this city – our city – be torn apart by purveyors of blind bigotry and hate.

We will continue to stand as a beacon of America's founding principles.
All equal.

We are one body...one nation...under God...with liberty and justice for all.