



2016 State of the City Address

Hon. Mayor Stephanie A. Miner, Mayor

Southwest Community Center
January 28, 2016

Good evening. Thank you all for joining me for the 2016 State of the City Address.

My thanks to Pastor Regina Reese-Young for that beautiful invocation, and to Third District Councilor Sue Boyle for her introduction.

I want to thank the children of the Southwest Community Center PRIDE Program for leading us in the Pledge of Allegiance. Weren't they great?

I want to acknowledge the members of the Syracuse Common Council: In addition to Councilor Boyle, Council President Van Robinson, Majority Leader Steve Thompson, President Pro Tem Helen Hudson, and Councilors Joe Nicoletti, Jean Kessner, Joe Carni, Chad Ryan, Khalid Bey and Nader Maroun.

I also want to thank City Auditor Marty Masterpole for joining us tonight.

Welcome to our City Court Judges in attendance this evening. We appreciate you being here.

Welcome to Syracuse Schools Superintendent Sharon Contreras, and to our Commissioners of Education. Thank you for coming.

I want to acknowledge representatives of our statewide and federal elected officials, as well as our state delegation – Senators John DeFrancisco and Dave Valesky, Assemblymen Bill Magnarelli and Al Stirpe, and, of course, our newest Assembly Member Pam Hunter.

County Executive Joanie Mahoney and members of the County Legislature are in attendance as well. Thank you for being here tonight.

I also want to thank Sharon Owens and her entire team here at Syracuse Model Neighborhood Facility, Inc. and the Southwest Community Center. Sharon – thank you for the introduction and thank you for hosting us here this evening.

Since becoming the CEO of Syracuse Model Neighborhood Facility, Sharon Owens and her team have taken on the challenge of rebranding the Southwest Community Center as ground zero for services, not only to the Southside, but all city residents. Managed by a fiscally sound organization with skilled staff and dedicated community partners, Southwest has never shied away from rolling up its sleeves, standing at the forefront to embrace community challenges, and creating an environment of hope.

At the Center you hear the laughter of children and their conversational chatter during dinner time; line dancing “grooves” played promoting exercise and healthy living; the sounds of giving, whether it be a food, turkey, clothing or toy giveaway; and intense community conversations to address our challenges and promote our strengths.

We are very proud of the many services provided by the Center, including its afterschool programs, emergency case management services to seniors and families, reproductive health services to women, men and teens, and its CUSE Cares gun and gang violence initiative that combines the resources of multiple programs designed to address these issues in our city.

This very small snapshot of the great work done here at the Southwest Community Center gives us insight into the true meaning of public service. People committing themselves to the service of others. Working to provide people with the help they need. Working to lift up those who have stumbled. Helping children learn. Helping adults find work. Defusing violence and creating pathways to opportunity. Generating hope. This is no easy task. The dedicated people that make sure the doors of this center open each day, and the eager people who come through them, all know this.

These are tumultuous and challenging times. This past year saw Syracuse as the focus of several academic studies and socio-economic essays highlighting the growing rate of extreme poverty, and the racial and ethnic lines upon which the scourge of poverty is felt. Syracuse is the 23rd poorest city in the United States. 43 percent of school-age children live below the poverty level. 65 percent of African-Americans and 62 percent of Hispanic-Americans live in areas of extreme poverty.

It has been sobering to absorb all the statistics that have come to light in 2015, but the truth is these numbers are a confirmation of what most of us have known all our lives. Our community's economic and social struggles are nothing new, and were part of why many of us chose to engage in public life in the first place.

How is it we are seeing inspiring new projects take place in our city – projects many thought would never be achieved – and yet see such struggle? Our community is full of stark and haunting contrasts. How do we balance our excitement and optimism, with the honest and responsible acknowledgement of such troubling realities? These are feelings by which I'm sure we are all constantly torn.

But we are certainly not the first to ask these questions and feel this tension. Almost 53 years ago, a man sitting in a jail cell described his frustration in seeing, quote, “the vast majority of your twenty million black brothers and sisters smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society.” In his Letter from a Birmingham Jail, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. remarked on the, “interrelatedness of all communities,” and our, “inescapable network of mutuality.” As Dr. King saw two Americas, separated by race and class, he also understood very deeply the indivisible nature of our national fate. Our fundamental national successes and failures, inevitably, will be shared. The same is true for Syracuse.

Tonight I want to amplify our shared successes as a city, but also directly acknowledge the gravity of our city's poverty, and discuss steps we are taking, and must take, to address it.

There is no better place to begin these steps than in our schools. A sound public education is the most sensible economic development investment we can make as a community, and is the most powerful tool for providing children life choices and economic opportunities.

We all know the last year has been a difficult one for our schools. Implementation of Common Core, teacher evaluations and a new code of conduct, in combination with our perennial challenges of underfunding, have created a perfect storm. Nevertheless, the families and teachers of our district have remained focused on progress, not excuses.

We continue to see positive trends in our graduation rates. The Syracuse City School District's overall four-year June graduation rate of 55 percent is the highest it has been since the 2008 graduating class. Concurrently the four-year August graduation rate has risen from 49 to 58 percent, and the five-year rate has gone from 54 to 60 percent.

Four out of the five high schools are showing improvement, and the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central led the way with a June graduation rate of 79 percent, and an August graduation rate of 81 percent.

The dropout rate continues to decrease, falling from 26 percent in 2008 to 16 percent in 2015.

While these numbers do not satisfy us, they are objective signs of progress.

The increases we are seeing in graduation rates mean more young people with the opportunity to go on to college with the support of Say Yes to Education. As we continue our

support to Say Yes and our commitment to the Say Yes to Education Endowment Fund, we must maintain our focus on creating meaningful career pathways for all students.

There are now 21 Career and Technical Education offerings across the five high schools, including automotive technology, computer forensics, culinary arts, and health professions. Through the Syracuse P-Tech program students at ITC can take part in a five or six-year program that combines high school, college and career training. At the end of the program they can earn an Electrical Engineering Technology Associates degree or a Mechanical Technology Associates degree through Onondaga Community College.

School choice options are also increasing with the opening of the Syracuse Latin School; Delaware Primary, a dual-language program; and the Public Service Leadership Academy at Fowler. In the fall we will open the District's first Montessori School at Lemoyne Elementary, adding to the portfolio of school choices.

We are also proud of the work we have done on the Joint Schools Construction Board. As Phase One closes and Phase Two ramps up, we should mark the importance of our efforts to involve minorities and women in the project workforce. In Phase One we set a goal of 9 percent minority-owned business participation, and 6 percent women-owned business participation. We not only met but exceeded those goals, reaching 11.9 percent minority-owned business participation, and 7.6 percent women-owned business participation. That's nearly 20 percent in total for the project.

The inclusive success of the Joint Schools reconstruction program, and the many initiatives underway to improve our schools, are a testament to the commitment we are making to our children and our community.

I want to acknowledge the efforts of Superintendent Sharon Contreras, the Board of Education, the Joint Schools Construction Board, the school district staff, and particularly the teachers and families of our district for your faith, passion and dedication. Thank you.

The efforts of the Joint Schools Construction Board remind us of the importance of leading by example. Investment of public dollars should support economic empowerment for those who do the work of public service. That's why this past fall I raised the minimum wage for City workers to 15 dollars an hour. People working full-time, endeavoring to improve our community, should not have to live in poverty. I want to thank the Council for their support of this measure, and extend my gratitude to all City employees for their hard work and passionate service. Thank you.

On the far end of the poverty scale are those without the stability that comes from employment and social connection. The issue of homelessness is also front-and-center nationally, as it should be. In the post-recession economy, many households who might never have imagined needing a food pantry or basic shelter are now reaching out for this sort of help.

Fortunately this community is home to a dedicated network of homeless service providers and agencies that address the emergency housing needs of its residents. This network has shown an amazing ability to adapt to a new paradigm in dealing with the new faces of homelessness, namely the increased number of women and children. Not only are these families removed from the general, more chronic homeless population, but are also immediately assigned professional caseworker support to rapidly re-house them into permanent housing. This "housing first" model has been extremely successful here in Syracuse. In the past two years, the number of occupied

shelter beds in this community has dropped from roughly 600 a night to 380 in the first week in January of this year – when our winter really set in.

Syracuse has also been a national leader in addressing veteran homelessness. Being the largest city in proximity to Fort Drum, and during a time when our nation's troops are returning home from two foreign wars, the issue of veteran homelessness looms large for this community. But through the efforts of the Housing and Homeless Coalition, headed by Melissa Marrone, our community has reached what has been referred to as “functional zero” in veterans' homelessness.

Does this mean that there will be no more homeless veterans in this community? No. What it does mean is that if you are a veteran and find yourself in need of shelter, a network is in place to ensure you will be in permanent housing within a minimum of 45 days and not be forced to dwell in homeless shelters in perpetuity.

We are proud to have attained this status bestowed by HUD, and to be acknowledged just last week by First Lady Michelle Obama. I want to thank the Housing and Homeless Coalition, the Veterans Administration, Clear Path, John and Leah Ann Tumino, and all our partners for their work in reaching this achievement.

Syracuse continues to be acknowledged as a leader when it comes to housing and community development. The establishment of the Greater Syracuse Land Bank is likely the most significant manifestation of our innovative approach to tackling vacant and blighted housing that drags down the values and pride of our neighborhoods. Approaching its fifth year of existence, it is just now achieving the scale necessary to “move the needle” on our vacant housing inventory.

To date, the Land Bank has acquired over 900 properties, with 600 more anticipated in the next two years. They have been successful in selling 250 properties, leveraging 8.2 million dollars in private investment, and creating local jobs that churn money back into the local economy. Those 250 sales have also returned nearly 10 million dollars in assessed value to taxable status, and are generating approximately 400,000 dollars in local property taxes annually.

I want to thank Land Bank Executive Director Katelyn Wright and the Land Bank board members – particularly Dwight Hicks, who has just completed his time on the board after 3 and a half years. Thank you Dwight.

We need this sort of community-wide approach to improve the conditions in which our citizens live. The Green and Healthy Homes Initiative is finally underway here in Syracuse. GHHI was charged in 2008 by the Council on Foundations and the White House Office of Recovery to lead national efforts to integrate lead hazard control, healthy homes and weatherization and energy efficiency work.

Locally, the CNY Community Foundation has acted as facilitator, bringing together PEACE, Home Headquarters, public health and social service agencies, and City and County lead offices to create a streamlined process for connecting citizens with services that support well-being at home. This consortium applied for and received 1 million dollars from the office of Attorney General Eric Schneiderman. A full time "outcome coordinator" has been hired to start streamlining each agency's applications, and the program is expected to begin accepting the first customers this spring. I want to thank all the partners for their outstanding work on this initiative.

I hear frequently from constituents a desire, not just for quality housing, but affordable housing. I hear this concern all over our city, including downtown. One project I am proud to discuss tonight is the one set to begin at the Clinton Plaza tower on South Clinton Street.

This 305-unit affordable high rise at the foot of Armory Square hasn't seen significant investment since it was built 45 years ago. In fact, 60 units have been completely off line for over 10 years due to their deteriorating condition. Recently expiring affordability covenants on the property meant the tenants there – mostly on fixed-incomes and many with disabilities – faced the prospect of the building becoming market-rate, possibly forcing them to leave their homes.

I'm pleased to say that today, the City of Syracuse has closed on the financing that will help leverage almost 40 million dollars in improvements to this building while still guaranteeing the affordability of the units. The exterior renovations will better tie this building into Armory Square and other downtown assets, but more importantly this investment will provide much needed upgrades while guaranteeing the affordability of the apartments.

The City has committed 675,000 dollars in HOME funding to this project, and I want to thank Department of Neighborhood and Business Development Commissioner Paul Driscoll and his team for helping make this possible.

Even as we are encouraged by developments like these, there has been much discussion in recent months about economic development and the role of local governments in our community.

We all know economic growth is crucial to improved economic opportunity, job and wealth creation, and healthier public budgets. I believe that growth must be shared, and must translate to direct community benefits that create a rising tide that lifts all boats.

We also know that we have entered a new era in local government, and the work of providing public services effectively, efficiently and equitably requires new thinking and new approaches.

Both the troubling turn of events associated with the Inner Harbor project, and the work of the Consensus Commission on local government, highlight the difficult questions that surround these fundamental issues: How should a struggling community foster robust economic growth without allowing developers to take advantage of us? How do the most disadvantaged among us maintain a seat at the table when decisions are made about our collective economic future? How do we thoughtfully adapt our local government structures in ways that improve efficiency and service delivery, but also promise equitable representation across our entire community?

We ask these questions at a time of tremendous economic activity in our city – 1.2 billion dollars in the last six years to be exact – but that economic success leaves out too many of our people.

The 71 million dollar renovation of the Hotel Syracuse is in full swing. We have seen the opening of new businesses like Liehs and Steigerwald, Wolff's Biergarten, the Evergreen, Brilbeck's, and Modern Malt. And we completed the first "Syracuse Main Street" projects right here on South Avenue, and on Grant Boulevard on the Northside. In fact, with support from City agencies and other community partners, we will be looking forward to the development of a new

Price Rite grocery store just down the street at the corner of South Ave and Bellevue Ave. This store will make this neighborhood more walkable, and will help support the nutritional needs of a community that has lived in a food desert for far too long.

The truth is our progress is reaching new heights, and new developments continue across our city neighborhoods. But while we foster a more active environment for investment, we must also hold developers more accountable to ensure consistency, transparency, and that all of our residents directly benefit from lucrative tax breaks, not just the lucky few.

That vision might be most important, because our future is bright with new opportunity. Earlier this week the Consensus Commission released its draft recommendations for improving and modernizing local government. I want to encourage all members of our community to take the time to review the report. Educate yourselves about the issues and the details of these recommendations, and avail yourselves of the opportunity to participate in the public meetings that have been scheduled – some right here at Southwest. This is an opportunity to state your priorities in public policy and our local governments that can help us take a long-term, systemic approach to address poverty, improve equity in representation, and promote economic growth and economic opportunity for all. This process needs diverse voices to be effective, and the details matter.

I look forward to the community dialogue in the coming weeks, and I want to thank the Commission members for their hard work.

As we continue our focus on economic growth and empowerment, we must also be mindful of the foundation on which this growth is predicated. That's right – I'm about to talk

about infrastructure again. It's true. I've been beating the drum about the condition of our water, sewer and road infrastructure for several years, and for those of you who frequently hear me speak, I regret to inform you I intend to keep doing so.

That drumbeat is one that is growing across our state and across our country. Not two weeks ago in the City of Troy, NY a century-old, 33-inch water pipe broke, causing a state of emergency and the loss of more than 10 million gallons of water. It took nearly 5 days to repair the pipe during which time residents and business owners were advised to limit water use and boil their drinking water. And, of course, there is the tragedy unfolding in Flint, Michigan

Our situation here in Syracuse is very different from Flint. We are fortunate to have one of the cleanest, most reliable water sources in the country. But events in Flint remind us that all levels of government have a responsibility to provide the infrastructure that supports the basic essentials of life in a community, and a sacred charge to keep the public's trust and perform the difficult and quiet work of protecting people.

I speak often about our aging water pipes, roads and sewer lines here in Syracuse. This time last year I announced that Syracuse was one of only 14 cities selected to participate in Bloomberg Philanthropies' Innovation Teams program, which aims to enhance the capacity of City Halls to solve intractable urban problems and improve the lives of citizens. We in City government believe substantive innovation is key to our future success, and the team's first area of focus is infrastructure.

Since May the i-team has been working alongside the Departments of Public Works, Water, Engineering and others to develop strategies that will improve the city's infrastructure in ways that meet our challenges and budgetary constraints. The team uses a data-driven,

innovation delivery approach, and its research on infrastructure over these past few months has been extensive. The i-team has met with City workers at every level, with representatives from other agencies and utilities, hosted sessions to elicit input from city residents, and visited other cities to learn about best practices in infrastructure management. They have studied the latest technologies. Their work culminates in specific initiatives that will create the biggest impact for our city.

The proposed solutions don't require billions of dollars of investment. They can be implemented right now with creative thinking, smart new techniques and hard work. Within the next few months, City departments will be putting in the necessary elbow grease to implement these new infrastructure solutions.

This new infrastructure improvement portfolio focuses on three main, interconnected concepts. First, we will use data and technology to identify and inform our infrastructure management. Second, we will better coordinate infrastructure repair and replacement in our city's rights of way. Third, we will improve our customer service.

First up is data and technology. It would cost the city more than 700 million dollars to replace our entire water system. Given this daunting price tag, we have focused on finding low cost solutions that prolong the lifespan of our water system and that help us intervene before small problems exacerbate into emergency situations. New technologies on the market make it possible to identify leaks in our system before they become the debilitating water main breaks pictured in the news.

This spring we will pilot sensor technology in the downtown area, where our water main breaks are the most prevalent and disruptive. You can see one of these sensors on display just

over there. This technology measures sound frequencies within water pipes to detect leaks, then feeds this information into a web-based system that analyzes the information to identify problem locations. By detecting leaks before they become breaks, the City will spend less in materials and labor. An added bonus is that we can schedule leak repairs, which will be less disruptive to businesses and residents. This represents a fundamental shift, from an almost entirely reactive approach, to a more proactive management standard.

These sensors represent a bold new approach to managing our water infrastructure. This is new for us. Challenging the status quo and embracing new ways of doing business can push us out of our comfort zones. But we believe this is just the sort of smart approach that has the potential to revolutionize the way we manage our water system.

Another low cost approach to maintaining our water system includes better valve maintenance. Flow through water mains is controlled by thousands of valves located throughout the city, most of which are old and in disrepair. Just like your body, water valves need regular exercise to work properly and broken valves need to be fixed or replaced. When a water main break occurs, valves shut down the flow of water so our crews can dig up the main and fix it. But when the closest valve to the water main break isn't functioning, or it's so brittle it breaks when our crews attempt to close it, workers have to move farther away from the break location to find a valve that does work. Shutting off valves farther upstream means that a larger area and a greater number of people lose water service. Regularly exercising, testing, fixing and replacing the more than 10,000 water valves in our system will reduce the number of people affected by water main breaks.

Using a special device called a Wachs machine, we will be able to more effectively maintain our water valves. This machine automatically opens and closes water main valves, and

tracks important information about valve condition. It uses sensors to monitor valve rotation, and exercises them without breaking them. The Water Department will monitor our valves from spring until winter, testing 25 to 35 percent of the water valves each year. Exercising the valves will keep them functioning, and inform our valve replacement strategy.

We will also begin using sensors to inform street repair. This spring, we will pilot a new technology called the Street Quality Identification Device, or SQUID for short. SQUID is a sensor and imaging system that is attached to a car and driven around the city. SQUID collects data on the bumpiness and roughness of a road, and takes pictures of potholes and cracks. The data collected by the device is mapped and used to objectively rate and rank the quality of our streets. We have been manually rating road conditions for three decades, and this device will help confirm and increase our knowledge about our streets. This chart shows the relative number of roads that are rated good, fair, and poor, and their change over time. As years have gone by, we have fewer roads in good condition, shown in green, and more roads in poor condition, shown in red. This type of analysis will allow us to prioritize street repair and identify appropriate interventions based on road condition. We want to use SQUID to help us identify opportunities to perform low cost street repairs before they degrade to the point of needing more costly reconstruction, and help us fill potholes and cracks as soon as possible after they appear.

Speaking of which, in order to extend the lifespan of our streets, we will improve the way we fill potholes. Beginning immediately – when our crews are not busy with snow removal – we will designate DPW street repair crews to utilize two Durapatch trucks. These trucks, which the city already owns, fill potholes faster and more effectively than traditional hot and cold patch methods. This means roads will last longer, and commutes will get smoother.

In addition, we will implement a new maintenance procedure called crack sealing in which we will fill and seal cracks on the roads to prevent water and salt from reaching the road base, which creates potholes and leads to more rapid road deterioration.

Both of these methods of repair will be part of a road infrastructure management plan in which we will use data and analysis to select the most appropriate interventions to extend the life of our more than 400 miles of city streets.

These new approaches to street repair will replace some of the more traditional road work that you encounter during a typical Syracuse construction season. Historically, the majority of our street repair budget has gone towards major reconstruction, where asphalt is taken off and then repaved onto the street. This method of “milling and paving” creates a new road, but is very expensive, limiting the number of roads that can be reconstructed each year.

Instead of the traditional “mill and pave” approach, we will implement a new type of top coat resurfacing, called micropaving, that will allow us to intervene sooner, so that we can keep our roads rated in good condition longer. This type of resurfacing is one tenth the cost of our current mill and pave method, and will enable us to improve more of our streets each year. By implementing preventative maintenance techniques like crack sealing, pothole filling and micropaving the City could save as much as 30 million dollars over the next five years.

All of this work will be tied to a mapping system, so that we can use geospatial analysis to help identify clusters of infrastructure problems within the city. This will allow us to make better decisions about how and where to focus our infrastructure improvements, and better plan for future construction.

The second component of our infrastructure improvement portfolio entails more deliberate coordination and planning of right of way construction projects among city departments, private utilities and developers.

By projecting out and mapping construction projects years into the future, we will be able to more easily identify construction conflicts and opportunities. While emergency road cuts are inevitable, this approach will significantly minimize the reopening of a road for planned construction projects after it has been paved. This “Dig Together” strategy will also allow the city to stretch its dollar by addressing all of our underground infrastructure maintenance needs while the road is open. These actions will reduce the number of times we open a road and save us money so that we can undertake more projects.

We will ensure that all parties follow enhanced guidelines and rules during the actual construction process to ensure that our roads are repaired with integrity. With more stringent road reconstruction guidelines we will greatly reduce unsatisfactory road patches that further degrade the quality of our roads.

Finally, we want to make it easier for citizens to tell us when they experience or witness infrastructure problems. As many of you know, “City Line” is the system that Syracuse residents use to submit a variety of service requests to the city by phone or online. Using City Line informs us about where you need our help, and utilization of the online version of this system has increased in recent years. But we have also heard that it could be more user-friendly.

You can still reach City Line by calling 448-CITY, but starting today you can also submit service requests using our improved, easy-to-use webpage – cityline.syr.gov.net. This new webpage allows you to submit requests for service for things like sewer backups, trash removal,

and pothole filling and then track the status of your service request 24-hours-a-day online, or by phone during business hours. Over the next few months we will roll out even more improvements to our customer service system, with the goal of providing more convenient ways for you to report problems so we can respond quickly.

In addition to improving the service request experience, we are also improving the ways we inform you about construction projects. They say that in Syracuse we have two seasons: winter and construction. This means that during the summer many roads are closed to motorists and pedestrians for construction so that the streets and underlying infrastructure can be improved. Construction is unavoidable and ultimately benefits the city, but we don't want it to negatively impact you. Planned projects should not be a surprise to the public. We are launching a new online notification center where people can easily find information about upcoming roadway construction projects in Syracuse. Our new webpage, cityline.syr.gov.net, contains a construction map which shows the locations and details for current and planned road projects in the city. You can go there now to see some of the upcoming construction season's projects. The map will be continuously updated as new information becomes available.

We will be able to begin all of these exciting new initiatives during this upcoming construction season, thanks in part to support from Assemblyman Bill Magnarelli. Last summer, he secured 10 million dollars in funding from the State and Municipal Facilities Program to help improve Syracuse's infrastructure. We are excited to use these funds to kick start our new infrastructure program.

We are eager to move forward with this new paradigm in infrastructure management. While all communities struggle with major infrastructure challenges, not every city has an i-

team. This is a rare opportunity, and the rollout of our new initiatives this year is a turning point for the City of Syracuse. We will once again tap the innovative spirit that has made Syracuse's history so rich.

We will be announcing more details about our new infrastructure programming soon. I want to thank the i-team for their creative expertise, as well as DPW Commissioner Pete O'Connor, Water Commissioner Debi Somers, City Engineer Mary Robison and all the City staff dedicated to making our city stronger.

Another technological aspect of city operations is the timing of our traffic signals. Believe me; I have heard from plenty of constituents about the timing of our traffic lights, particularly heading in to or out of downtown. I live through it myself every day. Since the mid-1990's the City of Syracuse has conducted a series of projects intended to improve traffic safety, reduce drive times and reduce vehicle emissions. Using closed circuit television and computer-synchronized light timing, we collectively refer to these efforts as the interconnect project.

The first phase of this program – completed in the early 2000's – involved 124 intersections in and around downtown, and led to a reduction in vehicle delay between 14 and 18 percent, a reduction in fuel consumption between 7 and 14 percent, and a reduction in emissions between 9 and 13 percent.

This year we will complete the second phase of this project. This phase will enhance the CCTV and fiber optic communication network, and add 44 new intersections into our city system. You've waited patiently at traffic lights, but you won't have to wait much longer for this project to improve your daily commute.

In City government we never forget that one of our primary responsibilities is public safety. The Syracuse Fire and Police Departments are challenged each day with responding to some of the most dangerous and tragic situations faced by people in our community. These men and women have stepped up and led their departments in new and creative ways. Using data, technology, and best practices, these departments have adapted to a new paradigm of service delivery.

While the efforts of Syracuse's bravest and finest have not waned, due to retirements the ranks have thinned.

Tonight I am proud to announce that in April our Fire Department will be welcoming a new class of 25 recruits.

In our Police Department, we saw the retirement of 36 sworn officers in 2015 alone. I have spoken to former police chief, and newly minted Council Majority Leader and Public Safety Chair, Steve Thompson, and he has expressed the need to add to our force. I agree. Accordingly, on March 7th we will be swearing in a class of 25 new police recruits. These recruits will begin the six-month academy, followed by 12 weeks of field training before they are assigned to duty.

I want to thank Fire Chief Paul Linnertz and Police Chief Frank Fowler for their ongoing and steadfast efforts to protect our community. Thank you.

In closing, I want to reflect on something I witnessed that really struck me. It is common for classes from our city schools to come and visit City Hall. And there is a standing rule that when students visit City Hall they are welcome to visit the Mayor's Office and have pictures taken. Recently, a class from Seymour School came to visit me, and each child got to sit at the

Mayor's desk for a picture. As one young girl excitedly took her seat in my chair, I could see that she had duct tape wrapped around her old, fraying boots. Duct tape, holding her boots together in a Syracuse winter.

This is just one heart-wrenching example of the struggles we see every day, that too many of our people are facing.

This story should remind us of Dr. King's message. We are all part of an inescapable network of mutuality. The message itself is simple, but it is the action it inspires that is most important. Dr. King also said that, "human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability." We must actively, thoughtfully and doggedly pursue the future we want for our city and the people who live here. We must continually commit ourselves to the work of lifting up our community. We must create a concentration of opportunity to combat our concentration of poverty. And we must not stop until that opportunity is within reach for all.

To all of you who have committed yourselves to this cause, and are reaching each day to create this better future, I thank you for your efforts, and I thank you for being here this evening. Goodnight.