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## Full Text: 2016 State of the City Address

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*For a condensed synopsis of the 2016 State of the City address, [CLICK HERE](#).*

The full text of the 2016 Columbus State of the City Address, delivered by Mayor Andrew Ginther, can be found below:

Good evening

I want to thank the Columbus Division of Fire Honor Guard for presenting the colors; Dominion Middle School student Natalie Smelko, for leading us in the pledge of allegiance; and Arnold Bangudi and the Whetstone Mixed Ensemble for that outstanding performance of our national anthem; as well as Whetstone student Akeem Adesiji for his wonderful words.

I want to thank the members of Columbus City Council: President Zach Klein, President Pro Tempore Priscilla Tyson, Shannon Hardin, Jaiza Page, Elizabeth Brown, Michael Stinziano and Mitch Brown.

Thank you to our esteemed City Auditor Hugh Dorrian, City Attorney Rick Pfeiffer and Clerk of Courts Lori Tyack, for being here tonight.

Thank you to the Franklin County Commissioners, John O'Grady, Paula Brooks and Marilyn Brown, to Columbus City Schools Superintendent Dan Good and the Board of Education, and to all the elected officials here tonight.

And thanks to my outstanding cabinet and my staff, especially my chief of staff, Greg Davies.

Most of all, I want to thank my wife and my daughter. Shannon, thank you for your many years of patience and sacrifice – for being my partner in life and in service. We're in this together and I could not do this work without you.

I want to recognize Whetstone High School Principal Janet Routzong for hosting all of us here tonight. And I would like to recognize my former teachers who had a huge impact on me during my school years, many of whom are here this evening.

It is with great humility and honor that I return to Whetstone High School, a place where a young man with big dreams and aspirations could shape his future and, encouraged by the promise of Columbus, become mayor.

I can still recall my first day as a student here at Whetstone.

I remember Mr. Bill Griffin, the great glee club and choir teacher, asking me to join the choir. Mr. Griffin knew I was the little brother of Kent Ginther, who was an outstanding singer, and was excited to add some new talent to his choir.

So he brought me in and asked me to sing a few scales. After a few seconds he stopped me and said, "Well, you look a lot like your brother. But the band room's down the hall."

I was a little better at football than I was at singing, and I had the honor of playing as a defensive end for the Whetstone Braves. I can remember on four or five distinct occasions having the opportunity to guard and contain some of Columbus City League's greats such as Marlon Kerner, the cornerback from Brookhaven who went on to play for the Ohio State Buckeyes and the NFL Buffalo Bills. None of you here tonight will find it hard to believe that I wasn't quite able to keep up with and contain Marlon Kerner, nor his teammates, June Henley and Terry Glenn.

On those occasions, my defensive coordinator and coach, Roger Hendrix, who was also my biology teacher at Whetstone, gave me some great football coaching as well as life lessons. He told me as I was trying to keep up with these outstanding athletes, "A man's got to know his limitations," and I've tried to follow that advice ever since.

I am very grateful to Roger Hendrix, Bill Griffin and all the great teachers, coaches, administrators and staff that helped instill in me the lessons and the values I carry with me today.

Our city is in a time of great momentum, a time of tremendous growth, hope and potential. My predecessor, my mentor and my friend, Michael Coleman, deserves much of the credit for leading us to where we are today.

This city has become a business destination, a boomtown, a place with a cool factor that draws young people from all over our country and the world.

We are compassionate, creative, entrepreneurial and vibrant. We are one of the best cities in America for jobs, and because of our economic vitality, the Columbus region is growing faster than any other metropolitan area in the Midwest.

We're open, welcoming, diverse, and we're smart. According to the Intelligent Communities Forum, we're the smartest city on the planet. We're the city where

people come to be who they are, and we're the city that works together better than any in the nation.

We are a city of great achievement, receiving numerous national accolades every year. Forbes Magazine declared Columbus America's Opportunity City—where you can make a tangible impact on your community while still enjoying a high quality of life, cultural amenities, and a diverse economy that you can only find in a major city.

We are a community that offers the opportunity to succeed—and succeed on your own terms. This quality comes from our greatest resource, our people.

Because of all of this, I stand before you tonight to announce the state of our city is strong.

Yet, while we have much to be proud of, we still have challenges ahead.

We have neighborhoods in this great city that have not experienced this level of opportunity. Neighborhoods where families are struggling with fewer quality education options, higher unemployment, and disproportionate crime.

As a lifelong resident of Columbus, now raising my own child in this city, I take this personally. It's why I ran for mayor.

Our administration will be measured not just by our ability to put Columbus on the map, but to address the challenges of all the people who live here. Even as we tell our story around the world, we must do more to advance shared prosperity and lift our city up.

Every family in every neighborhood should be able to share in the success story that is Columbus.

We must begin by providing our youngest residents the most basic of opportunities: the opportunity for infants to celebrate their first birthdays.

Each year, in Franklin County we lose 150 babies before their first birthday. And, twice as many African-American babies are likely to die as white children.

In Columbus, these deaths are concentrated in neighborhoods in which there are lower levels of income, education and health. One of our neighborhoods loses four times as many babies as in the neighborhood next door.

This is a community crisis, and we have addressed it as such. In 2013, as President of Columbus City Council, I commissioned the Greater Columbus Infant Mortality Task Force, a diverse and knowledgeable panel to study why our infants are dying, and what we can do about it.

What I witnessed through this process was truly inspiring. Our community came together to reverse our intolerable infant mortality rate.

In 2014, with a group of dedicated partners, we launched the CelebrateOne initiative, prioritizing those neighborhoods where infant mortality rates are the highest and where we can have the greatest impact to save young lives.

In Linden, the Near South Side, the Near East Side, the Hilltop, Franklinton, the Northeast, the Southeast, and in Northland, we are working to educate, engage and enlist residents as advocates and ambassadors on this issue.

Our goal by 2020 and one of the most aggressive in the country: to reduce infant mortality by 40 percent and to cut the health disparity gap in half.

Councilmember Priscilla Tyson has been a strong partner in this effort. Please stand so we can recognize your support and leadership.

What we've been able to accomplish so far has been a testament to the determination of this community:

- Since October, Columbus Public Health has trained more than 200 safe sleep ambassadors, including pregnant women, new parents, grandparents, healthcare professionals, and community partners to educate at least 10 additional colleagues, friends or neighbors about safe sleep practices.

- To address one of the leading causes of infant death, premature births, we have initiated an historic new partnership between PrimaryOne Health and The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center to provide women with wellness services before they become pregnant; with prenatal care and birthing services after they become pregnant; and healthcare for the entire family once the baby is born.

- We launched a bold infant safe sleep campaign to spread the message that every other week, a baby in our own community dies because of unsafe sleep practices. These deaths are preventable.

- This campaign educates our parents and caregivers about the ABCs of safe sleep:

A) Every infant must sleep alone

B) On his or her back

C) In the crib.

Together, we are creating healthier communities, and we are saving lives. But we can do more.

Just last week, in partnership with United Health Foundation, we launched the CelebrateOne Connector Corps program, delivering new resources to serve women in neighborhoods that face higher rates of infant mortality and other health inequities.

United Health Foundation's \$1.7 million grant supports our "boots on the ground" work in these neighborhoods, which includes training conducted by Ohio State's College of Nursing for dozens of Connector Corps workers to educate mothers-to-be, mothers and families. This program alone will reach 27,000 women each year.

In Columbus, we have made the health of women and children a priority. Moving forward, we will continue to seek public private partnership opportunities to reach our goals.

We have not yet solved this crisis, but I couldn't be more proud of how this community has mobilized into action over the past two years. We are making a difference, and we will not be satisfied until every child in our community has the opportunity to celebrate that first birthday.

As our children reach their second, third and fourth birthdays, they must have the opportunity to learn – and to thrive.

Columbus is home to one of the first kindergarten classes in the United States, founded by a German immigrant named Caroline Frankenberg in 1858 at the corner of Pearl Alley and East Rich Street, where Columbus Commons is today.

With such a rich legacy in early childhood education, Columbus is just the place to lead the way in giving our kids the start they need to succeed.

The research is unmistakable: A child who receives a quality early childhood education is starting school with an unmistakable chance of success – not just in school, but in life.

My goal is simple: for every child in Columbus to have a high-quality early childhood educational experience, but we know that we are going to need a lot of help reaching that goal.

Councilmember Liz Brown is helping to lead this effort. Please stand and be recognized.

We appreciate that the State of Ohio is expanding funding for early childhood education in the 2017 school year. And we appreciate that the state is partnering with us locally on this goal. But Ohio remains far behind other states when it comes to investing in early childhood education. In fact, among the 50 states and the District of Columbia, Ohio ranks 36 in access to pre-K for four year-olds.

The state can do more – we ask the State of Ohio to begin to treat pre-K as an essential part of elementary school education by making state resources available for all kids.

Quality pre-K is not daycare. It is an education experience all of our children deserve to have, whether they live with two parents or one, whether their families are home during the day or at work and regardless of their zip code.

This is why the City of Columbus has invested our own resources in expanding early childhood education, creating 1000 quality pre-K opportunities since 2014.

In the coming year, as we increase our capacity, we will also increase quality for our kids.

A big step toward this goal will be the Linden Park Neighborhood Pre-K Center, which will open this fall.

Only one third of children who live in the Linden community have access to early childhood education opportunities before kindergarten. That leaves two thirds who aren't afforded an equal opportunity to succeed.

Columbus City Schools is planning to repurpose the Linden Park Elementary School on Myrtle Avenue, and we will partner with the district to open a first-of-its-kind quality early childhood education facility with 14 classrooms for more than 200 students, when it reaches full capacity.

We believe this will be the first pre-K center in the nation in which the school district and community providers work together under one roof, pooling their resources to provide pre-K and additional services for children and families, and professional development for educators and providers.

As we expand pre-K throughout Columbus in the coming years, the Linden project will serve as a model, not only for our community, but for the entire nation.

I would also like to encourage our partners at Columbus City Schools to evaluate the feasibility of adding pre-K classrooms to any new or renovated buildings in this

next phase of the facilities master plan.

I want to thank Dr. Dan Good and the Columbus Board of Education for their initiative and commitment in moving forward on this issue.

A child with a quality education should grow into an adult with an opportunity for a good job.

We must ensure that the skillset of our workforce properly aligns with available jobs. To fill these jobs, we are refocusing our workforce development efforts. With our partners in Franklin County, we are restructuring the Central Ohio Workforce Investment Corporation, or COWIC, into an even greater resource for those individuals seeking work and those employers seeking workers.

And I want to thank Suzanne Coleman Tolbert for her outstanding leadership of COWIC.

We will strengthen practical job skills opportunities through programs like apprenticeships, recognizing that a college degree is not the only road to the middle class. There are many different paths to success.

One such program locally is being offered by the fine men and women at the Electrical Trades Center. They received \$4.7 million from the U.S. Department of Labor to offer an apprenticeship curriculum that includes courses in math, construction economics, career opportunities in the industry, computer skills and electrical theory. Those who complete the apprenticeship program will be placed with an employer for on-the-job training.

Another great program is the Columbus Sheet Metal Workers Apprentice program. Olivia Biggers is a participant in this program, working to follow in the footsteps of her mother to become a sheet metal professional. The apprenticeship program affords her good benefits while paying for more than half of the Columbus State Community College classes Olivia is taking so that she can earn her associates degree without incurring any college debt.

These are exactly the type of programs we should be promoting in our schools' curriculum, and I will partner with the schools, organized labor and employers to expand skills that will allow our children to be successful in life.

We are home to established Fortune 500 corporations as well as innovative new startups. In fact, last year, Columbus made the single largest leap in startup ventures of any major metro area, rising from 22nd to 12th place in the Kauffman Foundation's 2015 index of startup activity.

And, according to Thumbtack's recent survey of African-American business owners, Columbus is ranked No. 3 in the nation for African-American-owned small businesses.

Over the past 10 years, the City of Columbus has approved 371 loans for a total of more than \$11.2 million for small businesses, and has pursued progressive strategies to attract private investment in small business start-ups.

We have supported small business incubators, including CCAD's MindMarket and Rev1 Ventures, which help cultivate creative talent and shape new ideas into successful businesses that improve our quality of life.

We established the small business concierge, to help entrepreneurs navigate city government, and the Small Business Builder, an online roadmap for each stage of starting or expanding a business.

But there is more we can do to create an environment in which small businesses can grow and thrive.

Despite all our progress, barriers still exist for start-ups looking to break through.

Often, the amount of money a small business needs is too small, the business is too young, its plan is too innovative, or its credit history is too short in order to get the access to capital it needs.

That's why I am proud to announce that Columbus is committed to becoming a Kiva City – a partnership of local community groups and microfinance organizations working together to connect lenders with entrepreneurs. Kiva provides a first rung on the credit ladder by providing crowd-funded zero-percent interest microloans.

We've raised \$65,000 so far in private loans from Access Ventures. The City of Columbus, Greater Columbus Arts Council, The Columbus Foundation and United Way of Central Ohio all are committed to kicking in another \$25,000 each, bringing our total to \$165,000.

I want to thank Councilmember Shannon Hardin for his leadership on this effort. Please stand and be recognized.

When we reach \$225,000, Columbus will join Pittsburgh; Little Rock; Detroit; New Orleans; Los Angeles; Newark, New Jersey; the District of Columbia and Richmond, Virginia, as part of the broader Kiva City program helping small business owners get the financing they need to grow and create jobs.

The initial \$225,000 in grant support will be leveraged into \$1 million in interest-free micro-loans to 200 new, underserved local entrepreneurs over a three-year period, promoting further business development and resulting in a \$2 million incremental economic impact.

This is an opportunity for new local businesses in our community and our neighborhoods to thrive.

We have heard your call for new investments in some of our oldest neighborhoods. Even as we continue our revitalization efforts in the Southern Gateway, Franklinton and on the Near East side, we know there are other neighborhoods that could benefit from more city investment.

Our 2016 capital improvements budget will propose investments of \$27 million in Linden and its contiguous neighborhoods, including infrastructure for the adjacent American Addition neighborhood, sidewalks on Joyce Avenue and the reopening of the newly renovated Douglas Community Recreation Center this spring.

Our capital budget proposes \$34 million for the Hilltop, including sidewalks on Mound Street that will allow children to walk safely to school, neighborhood flood control and streetscape improvements along Broad Street as well as the reopening of the rebuilt Glenwood Community Recreation Center in April.

Councilmembers Jaiza Page and Michael Stinziano have been strong partners in our neighborhood investments. Please stand and be recognized.

These investments will not solve every problem these neighborhoods are facing. But we believe they will improve the quality of life for their residents and increase their opportunities for safety and success.

We will continue to invest in Restoration Academy, which offers a second chance to restored citizens who are ready to contribute to their communities and support their families. And this year, I am pleased to announce that we will offer two classes of Restoration Academy, with one class specifically for 18 to 23 year olds. The City of Columbus alone has hired 40 graduates to date.

A coordinated effort to change the future for justice-involved families in Columbus is required. It is imperative that these efforts are based on evidence-based programs and services that have been proven to both reduce recidivism and improve family stability. We will bring together a range of partners including government agencies, neighborhood associations, nonprofit agencies, educators, health care providers, business leaders and others who will commit to working together for the good of Central Ohio families.

As we leverage the collective resources of government, private investors, nonprofits, businesses and foundations, we will also leverage the collaborative spirit that has become our community trademark. I strongly encourage our private sector to join companies such as Ridge Corporation and become even more engaged in this work.

We are focused on fostering greater diversity and inclusiveness. We know our diversity is one of our great strengths, which is why we have been recognized nationwide as one of the best cities for women, for African Americans, for new Americans and for the LGBT community.

But this is a strength that needs to be continuously nurtured, and the city has a role to play.

Last year, many of you invested time and ideas in My Brothers' Keeper, a White House initiative we launched here in Columbus. I am excited to announce that my administration will continue to build on this strong foundation that was started by Mayor Coleman. I want to thank Councilman Hardin and many of our youth and men of color who participated in shaping the final report.

In addition, to help ensure that all women and girls in our community have an equal opportunity to achieve as men and boys, my wife Shannon will spearhead the Columbus Women's Commission to set objectives and provide specific recommendations that we can use to empower this community's women and girls.

Studies conducted by The Women's Fund of Central Ohio demonstrated that in this region significant economic disparities between women and men persist.

For example, women who have some college education as well as those who have received a graduate degree earn about 75 percent of what their male counterparts earn.

Further disparities exist when race and ethnicity are factored in. For instance, Hispanic-Latino women in the region have been less likely to earn a high school diploma, which correlated with the likelihood of low earnings and living in poverty.

We are grateful for our partnership with the Women's Fund in the establishment of this commission and look forward to its recommendations.

I want to recognize Women's Fund President Nichole Dunn and my wife Shannon Ginther for their work on this important initiative and ask them to please stand to be recognized.

And by the way, I am extremely pleased to share with you that my administration

has more women serving in my cabinet and on the Mayor's Office staff than any administration in the history of Columbus.

To complement and support efforts such as the Columbus Women's Commission, we've also restructured our government to create the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

Part of its role will include community engagement, dialogue and outreach to improve race relations, and the reduction of cultural divisions.

But we'll also make sure that we practice what we preach when it comes to our own hiring and purchasing.

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion is enhancing the impact and effectiveness of our equal business opportunity operations to ensure that diversity becomes a prime consideration for all of the city's goods and services' needs.

And it will work closely with our other departments to develop a recruitment, retention, promotion and development plan to support diversity within our workforce. We will set realistic, but aggressive, diversity and inclusion goals that reflect our demographics, and we will benchmark our progress.

If you're not measuring it, then you don't mean it – and I mean it.

I also believe we can be more accessible and responsive to our residents.

All of our residents should have the opportunity to be heard by their public servants and their elected officials.

Over the past year, I've had the chance to visit our neighborhoods, and hear the hopes, the dreams and the concerns of our residents. A month ago, we hosted a series of weekend family reunions, in six different neighborhoods, where I had the chance to hear directly from you about what you like – and what you didn't like – about city government.

What I heard is that you expect a government that is more accountable and accessible. You expect a government that reflects you.

That's why we're creating our new Department of Neighborhoods, which will consolidate constituent services that have in the past been located around various city agencies.

Neighborhood Pride, the Community Relations Commission, our neighborhood liaisons, and our 311 call center will be under one roof – and more accessible to the public in one of our central city neighborhoods.

Now your gateway to government will be in a one-stop shop focused on service, openness, transparency and accountability.

All of our residents, kids and adults, civilians and police, deserve the opportunity for a harmonious community built upon mutual respect, security and trust, not fear.

The Columbus Division of Police represents the best of us: men and women who put their lives on the line every day to protect ours.

Day in and day out, they perform their duties with honor, integrity and effectiveness, reducing the number of violent crimes in our community every year, even as our population is on the rise.

As we show respect to all of our uniformed public safety officers and the difficult jobs that they do, it is important to recognize that it is more dangerous than ever to wear a police uniform.

We are painfully aware that police in cities around the country are facing unprecedented challenges in their relationships with the communities they serve.

Baltimore, Chicago, New York, Cincinnati, Cleveland and so many of our great cities are faced with conflict, distrust and division over incidents in which citizens have died as the result of police interactions.

Each of these incidents is unique, with its own set of circumstances. But they all are part of a disturbing national trend.

Columbus has averted the fate of these other cities. But because we have been fortunate, does not mean we are immune.

It would be naïve for us to believe that we do not have African-Americans and other residents in our city who fear being targeted or fear for their lives in their interaction with police.

It would be naïve for us to believe that we do not have dedicated police officers who fear that when their duty requires them to use force, residents will assume they acted with ill intent.

As outstanding as our police and our residents are, there is always the possibility of a tragic incident that results in divisions and discord that we have seen in these other cities.

That is why we have been extremely proactive in making community police relations a priority.

Bike patrols, walking crews, community liaison officers, school resource officers, social media outreach, our Diversity Recruiting Council, listening tours – these are just some of the many ways our police make every effort to engage with the communities they serve, keeping communication lines open and building trust and goodwill.

We know that mistakes can happen, generally as the result of insufficient training, which is why we don't put our police officers on the streets until they are fully prepared.

Our Division of Police provides almost twice the state minimum training requirements. We've added annual de-escalation training, bias training and created diversity and inclusion liaison officers to improve relations with all of our communities throughout the city.

These efforts have achieved results. Citizen complaints about police have declined each of the past four years. And, we are one of only five major American cities that have not experienced increases in violent crime since the 2014 deadly police shooting in Ferguson, Missouri.

Working together, we will ensure that we continue to have the best trained and equipped police officers in the region and in the nation – so they can protect the public, and protect the public's trust.

We are currently in the process of preparing to outfit our police officers with body-worn cameras, audio-visual devices on their uniforms that create a record of law enforcement activities.

According to a recent national survey, 95 percent of all large police departments are planning to proceed with body-worn cameras, having either already implemented or expecting to add this policing tool. Police organizations, including the National Fraternal Order of Police, have provided guidance for best practices as police forces throughout the country equip their officers and develop policies for implementation.

The Department of Public Safety will begin equipping officers with body-worn cameras by the end of this year, and the policy will be thoughtful and deliberate. Last year, we appointed a committee of leaders from across the community to evaluate the most effective and efficient way to incorporate body-worn cameras in Columbus.

I appreciate Police Chief Kim Jacobs' leadership and commitment to getting this done this year.

Instituting police body-worn cameras will not cure all police-community conflicts. However, I expect that this new law enforcement tool blended with ongoing training and support resources will promote more positive interactions, enhance public safety and strengthen Columbus' neighborhoods.

We must balance our goals of transparency and protection of civil rights with the critical privacy interests of our citizens. It is a process that requires careful consideration and preparation to get this done right. But we will get this done, and we all will be safer for it.

Council President Zach Klein and Councilmember Mitch Brown are helping to lead this effort. And, I'd like to thank them both for their service and their leadership. Councilman Brown is here tonight, please stand and be recognized.

Opportunity is a distinctly Columbus characteristic – even as we accept the challenge of extending new opportunity in the areas I've touched on tonight.

But what makes Columbus truly special is how we respond to opportunity.

We don't just follow the path that has been laid for us. We blaze our own path.

We see that drive in our businesses and our universities, in our financial institutions and our fashion designers, our sports teams, in the renovated Lincoln Theater and the restored downtown riverfront.

We saw it in our legendary artists – Aminah Robinson, who we lost last year, and Denny Griffith, who we lost just last month, whose spirits of inspiration and adventure we will keep with us for generations to come.

We also see it in Seth Townes, an outstanding senior at Northland High School.

If you watch the local news, you've probably seen Seth's basketball highlights for the city-league champion Northland Vikings.

Thanks to his work ethic and talent on the basketball court, Seth has the kind of opportunities that many of us could only dream about.

Seth was a prized recruit fought over by college basketball programs across the country. He considered UCLA, Michigan, Florida or Butler. He could have played for Mike Krzyzewski at Duke. Many of us here would have loved to see him play for

Coach Thad Matta here at Ohio State.

But Seth had another opportunity. A 4.0 student, Seth was also recruited by Harvard University.

Now Harvard doesn't offer athletic scholarships. It doesn't churn out NBA players in the manner of Duke, Carolina, Ohio State and other big-time basketball schools. The Harvard Crimson has never won an NCAA basketball championship. They've never been to the Final Four.

Seth loves basketball, but he isn't the type of guy who does what is expected of him.

Even though Seth could have gotten a great education at any of those elite basketball schools, he was determined to seek out the unique experience he believes he will receive at Harvard. Seth blazed his own path.

Seth still intends to make it to the NBA – and if I were you, I wouldn't bet against him – but he's going to do it his way.

"Dismantling normality – that's what I stand for," Seth told the Dispatch last month. "I'm attempting to dismantle normality, personally, by going to Harvard."

Seth and his family are here tonight. Please stand and be recognized.

And so, another young man with big dreams and aspirations will take all he's learned from Columbus City Schools to build his own legacy.

That too is the legacy of the City of Columbus – a place where each of us from neighborhoods extending all across this great community can work together to meet new challenges.

When we extend opportunity to extraordinary people in an extraordinary city, we are all elevated to new heights. We are, after all, America's Opportunity City.

God bless you, and God bless the City of Columbus.