

# 2019 State of the City Address Speech

Good evening, everyone.

A special welcome to my fellow members of City Council, Madam City Manager, all elected officials, neighborhood & business leaders and staff.

Mom & Dad, Dee, my wonderful in laws Donald & Adrienne Gist

Bethany and Jordan Grace – our daughters who are, with each passing day, becoming the young women God predestined them to be. We are so, so proud of you.

I'd like to also recognize Dr. Harris Pastides, a dear friend, who – in nearing the end of his ten- year tenure as President of the University of South Carolina – has become arguably the most admired and decorated leader in the history of the university. While it's not my "well done" you're looking for in this life, Harris but I hope you are proud of all you've accomplished. You will be missed, my friend.

[pause]

And thank you for hosting us here at the University of South Carolina at this incredible new School of Law.

I remember many, many moons ago walking the halls of this School - not this first class building, though of course - never imagining in a million years I'd be back here – more than two decades later – delivering this address to the people of our great city. If you could ask 3L Steve Benjamin what plans he had for his life and career, he wouldn't have come close to touching on the incredible plans God had in store for me.

So to my current law students here in attendance, remain encouraged and expectant. You'll be amazed at where the road from Carolina leads you. Commit to upholding the standards and values of the practice of law – values of not only justice and fairness but also equity and the promise of basic human rights.

Look forward to the opportunity to play a role – whether small or large – in shaping the outcomes for people all across our great nation and the world, remembering that the vision for a more perfect union is ever in sight.

When in a position of power or authority, it's imperative that we exercise our ability to influence and advocate on behalf of those who may not be able to do so for themselves.

Remember that Leadership is not about titles. These temporary positions are fleeting.

A thoughtful leader recognizes that we are the manifestation of loving families, neighborhoods and communities that recognize that we lift people up—we don't beat them down.

And while this world grows more troubling by the hour, so it seems, I want you – and everyone else in this room – to remain hopeful. Hopeful for a tomorrow that does not always look like today; a tomorrow that brings less concern for future generations and more evidence of brighter days to come.

[pause]

My childhood was full of pain, and I say that very tongue in cheek as I was raised in an incredibly warm and affectionate household, early morning hugs and late night kisses from a Dad who worked very long hours and a Mom who worked full time cooked, cleaned and did everything possible to care for her home overrun by 3 men.

I mean that it was full of physical pain, rock fights and street football, standing directly behind the batter in stickball, chemical projects gone wrong, as acid burned through my favorite pair of Converse.

I was a curious and clumsy kid. Bethany and Jordan Grace love to hear stories of the boy they've nicknamed "Bad Stevie," falling off of fences, garages and UPS trucks. Shopping cart races in New York City were unique experiences.

However-- One of my most vivid childhood memories is the stinging pain of being struck in the face with roller skates.

The year was 1981, and I'd just started at my new school Robert H. Goddard Junior High, named after the famed rocket scientist, or 202 as my wife still likes to laugh about the fact that NYC schools all have numbers.

Although I'd never been particularly good at it, I loved rollerskating.

Skating had enveloped American Pop Culture, and our teachers decided to take us on a field trip to Laces Roller Rink on Cross Bay Blvd in Queens.

Flashing lights, music blasting Y-M-C-A, disco balls---we had an awesome time.

So much fun that a group of us from our neighborhood decided to go back that very next weekend.

Things were very different on our 2nd visit.

The lights, the music and disco balls were there, but the environment had dramatically changed.

"Get out of here, n\*\*\*\*\*!!" - several skates flew - one struck me in the left side of my face.

What I didn't fundamentally understand at the time is that WE---we children were a part of NYC's experiment with school bussing.

I'd had experience with a few white teachers and administrators, but this was my first exposure to

Italian, Irish, German, Jewish and Russian peers---

We were bussed from our home on Sutter Ave that boasted only one quiet older white family into a hotbed of racial strife later to be infamously known worldwide as Howard Beach. Where several of my classmates would go on to lynch and murder a man named Michael Griffith.

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I still feel the pain of those skates striking my left cheek, but not because of the physical pain. But THAT BLOW wounded my soul.

It was my first experience with vivid racism, it stole my naiveté and innocence, and it made me a conscious race man for the first time in my young life

I live now in the American South, where painful images and family stories are shared regularly—I've been thankful for the support of these good men and women (point to council) to direct millions of dollars to telling the story of race in America, and I've committed myself to capturing those stories and telling how the pain and ignorance of racism, antisemitism, xenophobia, sexism, homophobia steals innocence, destroys childhoods and communities and how we can never allow that to happen again!!

I remember my matriculation at the University of South Carolina.

My first day on campus was my first day ever in Columbia, South Carolina. I'd worked all summer as a porter at the racetrack to buy brand new Air Jordans and sweat suits for the daytime and silk shirts for nighttime parties at the Russell House.

My first few weeks were difficult. All new acquaintances. No friends.

It was in the middle of the university's ecumenical year---religious leaders from across the globe converged on the University of South Carolina.

Three weeks in, I was a 17 years old --- I remember standing on the historic horseshoe just a few blocks away waiting for one of the most powerful men in the world to address ME. And trying to understand my journey in how I got there...

I'd Stumbled from high school into USC.

I'd gotten into USC based on the prayers of my parents and teachers and good SAT scores.

Great parents, Well read, hot headed. I'd been suspended from high school twice and had to attend night school to finish high school on time.

And there I stand in this historic space, being addressed by the person that over a billion Christians across the world believe to be the Apostle Peter's true successor---

"Thou art Peter and upon this rock, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

I watched Pope John Paul II's popemobile turn into the horseshoe and make its way around past the Caroliniana Library, past the faculty house, the residence halls and Mckissick museum and finally settling in front of the President's House.

Finally uttering in his Polish accent. "It is good to be young

It is good to be young and a student

It is good to be young and a student at the University of South Carolina." I decided that day that I'd make a change in my life.

“Get your act together,” and I’ve never looked back.

I found a community that loved me and empowered me. I found a compassionate community at my Alma Mater.

And now I stand before you as the Mayor of the City that I love that has given me a family, a career, a platform to make change, and I know the reason that I thrived is that the environment that I grew up in was full of love and compassion in my home.

The reason that I thrived at the University of South Carolina is because of a loving environment, steeped in the soil of that campus that opened the doors to freed enslaved men and women in the 19th century and kicked it open again in 1963—the love and compassion there embraced me and pushed me to be my best self.

The reason that I stand before you now is NOT because I’m a self-made man. I am not

I am God-made man. Everything that I am is because of the grace & unmerited mercy of God...and that Grace is manifested through the acts of each one of you and so many others.

We all are. It is our job. Our charge, our mandate is to build a Compassionate City that allows every child of God the opportunity to live up to his or her potential. Every child. There is no room, no space for bigotry, racism, antisemitism, islamophobia, xenophobia, homophobia or any other offensive behavior.

In my faith, we are all made in the image of God and children of God.

My childhood experiences MUCH I guess like so many of yours has directed what I believe to be my life’s work. Bringing our communities together, pushing the goodness of human potential by building a compassionate city.

But, I say all that to say that we should also be proud of this community in which we live. Our city. And tonight, we’ll talk about why.

You see, the essence of every State of the City address is for us to discuss where we’ve been, where we are and where we’re going. We’re going to do that this evening, but I hope that this address doesn’t merely brings you up-to-speed on all things Columbia but instead excites you and re-instills a sense of pride and zeal for this Columbia and a sense of action to make Your city better.

Because to be frank with you - a good deal of our collective efforts are for naught if the community doesn’t know about them, engage with them and talk about them with their friends and family members here and in other cities.

We are not THAT Greenville. We are not the Holy City.

We aren’t Charlotte’s got a lot.

We are Columbia. We are Columbia strong. We are The Real Southern Hot Spot. And yes to the chagrin of my professional brand marketers—we’re still famously hot!!

And this past year, we saw why Columbia was named the #2 City Where Millennials Are Moving by Smart Asset. We saw why Columbia was noted as a Top 10 destination for people moving between 2012-2016 – a popular destination for white, black, Hispanic and Asian individuals.

Our city makes a step toward becoming the world-class city we aspire it to be every, single day.

We were the first city in the nation to issue a green bond for standalone stormwater upgrades, certified by the Climate Bond Initiative. Our first-ever green bond of \$37.9 million bond is a major step in our bold effort to stop flooding in the top 20 flooding areas across the city -- we are not only funding stormwater improvements but also making an investment in sustainability. And if you're wondering how that affects the City's credit, the inaugural Stormwater Revenue Bond transaction received high grade ratings of Aa2 by Moody's and AA+ by S&P.

In other exciting news, Columbia was named...

One of the Best Small Cities in the U.S. by National Geographic Travel.

A Top Destination to Travel in the U.S. during the month of April by Expedia.

One of 8 American Cities Making Big Improvements in 2018 in the BullStreet District by Thrillest.

One of The 5 Best (and Most Affordable) Places to Travel in April by PureWow. The #56 of 125 Best Places to Live by US News.

The #7 Best Place to Start a Career by WalletHub.

One of America's 25 Cutest Main Streets in Small(er) Towns by Fodors.

The 11th in the 13 Best Cities in the US to Find a Job in 2018 by Business Insider. One of the Top 10 Markets and Neighborhoods to Watch in 2019 by Trulia.

And if this one doesn't make the books for most unique, the Congaree National Park in Hopkins was named the Best Place in North America to See Synchronous Fireflies.

[pause]

All of these items that we've been able to add to our already long brag list exhibit things our residents see about their own city, and they also show that people across the country hear about Columbia, too. And while it's these mentions in the media we like to add to our metaphorical trophy case, we still have even more to brag about because of the incredible things we are doing collectively here in Columbia, South Carolina.

I want to highlight the work of a few of our departments.

Our public safety has continued to be among the best police forces in the nation, leading the country in 21st century policing tactics.

In 2018...

CPD hired 67 new police officers and 15 new civilian support staff.

They made one of the biggest investments in police technology to date in acquiring “ShotSpotter” gunshot recognition technology, which will cover 6 square miles of each region where it’s deployed and will allow officers to respond immediately Mr. Duvall once a gun has been fired.

CPD completed 202 “Handle with Care” forms, which alert Richland One School officials when a child is exposed to police action in the home.

They completed 1,199 home visits with youthful and juvenile offenders, which allows officers to make daily contact with these young people to ensure their whereabouts and conditions are being held accountable.

CPD held 216 Front Porch Roll Calls, which allow officers to build relationships with members of the communities they protect literally right on folks’ front porches.

The department provided more than 5,000 hours of training to officers and non-sworn personnel as part of the One Mind Pledge, which trains officers to properly respond to people in mental crisis.

The Department hired a coordinator for its Project Safe Neighborhood program, which provides a space for individuals convicted of violent crimes to be introduced to a variety of service providers in our region. From financial management to help with substance abuse, the goal is to ensure the attendees recognize that there is help available to them in our city. Compassion

CPD knows the statistics, and those statistics indicate that these men and women will reoffend or will become victims of a violent crime if no one intervenes, and we don’t want that to happen– not for them nor for the people of this community.

All of this under the leadership of Chief Skip Holbrook and Deputy Chief Melron Kelly who each had noteworthy years as well. Chief Holbrook earned the 2018 Strom Thurmond Award for Excellence in Law Enforcement, and Deputy Chief Kelly was named to the Law Enforcement Congressional Badge of Bravery Board.

Our law enforcement stands out on its own, but having a force led by such talented and experienced leaders truly makes a difference.

This December will also mark the 5th anniversary of our Justice for All initiative, which outlined a strategy to strengthen the foundation of trust and accountability that exists between our communities and our law enforcement agencies. Over the past four years, Chief Holbrook and his team have been able to make measurable improvements in additional training, increased accountability, competitive pay, community engagement and increased diversity in the force.

Those efforts are amplified by the work done by so many in our community who also care deeply about the wellbeing of our neighborhoods across the city.

We’re grateful for amazing partners like Serve and Connect and their founder Kassy Alia who, despite incredible tragedy, use what was meant for evil for the good and betterment of the community. It’s these intentional decisions to wield compassion like a weapon that allow us to change the landscape of our community, not only for crime but for other areas as well.

The support rendered by partners throughout our city cannot be spoken more highly of. Reliable and resilient human infrastructure will always be among our cities most valuable and treasured assets.

Assets that, like our city budget - which has reduced our tax millage consistently, Mr. Rickenmann, over the past decade - allow us to perform the duties of a city that are most necessary and desired of you. We continue to aggressively seek ways to address the systemic tax challenges that this region faces.

With skilled public administrators, led by Teresa Wilson and her team Jeff, Clint, Missy, the whole staff -- we've been able to do a great deal throughout our city by being innovative and knowing the right alternative funding avenues to take.

Ask our Grants Administrator Chris Segars how many dollars of grant funding the city received in 2018, and she'll tell you it's more than \$3.8 million.

Ask our Director of the Office of Business Opportunities Melissa Lindler how much money has gone into Façade Improvement on Farrow Road and West Beltline Blvd. over the past year, and she'll tell you it was a combined investment of more than \$125,000 for five businesses.

Ask Councilman Sam Davis how much funding has gone to city parks in his district, and he'll tell you... not enough!!! Though he gets it all.

Hyatt Park is funded and on the way.

\*smiles\*

Ask our Assistant City Manager Clint Shealy how much we've planned to invest in replacing every residential water meter in the system with a new digital meter, and he'll tell you \$40 million. These meters will provide real-time water usage data and will improve accuracy, efficiency and conservation, ensuring water customers have the most precise readings for their water usage. The new meter system will also be able to assist customers with budgeting and leak investigation.

As one of our state's smartest cities - with 12 percent of residents holding a graduate or professional degree - we've begun matching our municipal intelligence with that of our residents.

In 2018, we introduced the MyColumbiaSC app, allowing residents to access City services via their smartphones. Perhaps the most significant and convenient feature, the app allows residents to report issues to the City's Customer Care Department all with just a few taps on their phones. Residents can describe their concern, mark the location on a map and send a photograph of the problem without having to do any cumbersome paperwork.

As we invest in infrastructure in our city, we see major capital improvements continue at the Metro Wastewater Treatment Plant that will improve operational efficiency and allow for beneficial reuse of biosolids and associated biogas. Columbia Water is also evaluating the potential for a solar farm at the Wastewater Plant to provide an alternate energy source.

Significant investments continue in the collection system, all geared toward rehabilitating and replacing infrastructure and providing increased capacity to support economic growth.

More importantly, these infrastructure improvements provide needed wastewater system capacity to enable high growth areas of the system's service area to accommodate development into the future. The continued economic impact of enabling commercial and residential growth dwarfs the implementation impacts at 900 jobs per year. This proves that these are wise investments in both our infrastructure and our economic vitality.

Our sustainability efforts in the city continue as Columbia is one of more than 100 cities pledged to be 100 percent clean energy by 2036. This past year, Columbia completed a goal of giving away 1,000 rain barrels, with dozens more being purchased by folks wanting to play a role in stormwater averment as well. Our public works department also sold more than 300 compost bins, helping to divert organic material and green waste from the landfill to combine to make nutrient-rich soil.

The City of Columbia is working with USC in their partnership with the federal government, CSX, and others to develop an app this year that monitors railroad crossings and communicates with trains. This technology communicates with our first responders to predict when trains will prevent or delay police, medical and fire services from getting to their destinations. We can then reroute these emergency vehicles and work with railroad

transportation to minimize (and hopefully eliminate) these issues and protect our citizens and property. We are excited to have university and railroads work with us to solve problems and what this does and can mean for the greater public good.

And, yes, we will continue our work aggressively on quiet zones this budget cycle.

We're encouraging green modes of transportation in launching the bike share project in partnership with BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina - the blue bike. With 135 bikes across 15 stations, and potentially more to come, we all have the option of ditching our car on the drive to lunch.

That's what each of these partnerships endeavor to do; make life better, more simply for the people of our great city.

And the good thing is that these programs don't exist in vacuums. Programmatically, we've been able to accomplish so much over the past year.

In 2017, The Aspen Institute partnered with Pew Research Center and LendUp to host the Finance Forward city tour, gauging each city's financial wellbeing based on residents' responsiveness to income volatility. Since then, the City of Columbia has spearheaded efforts to ensure that its employees are experiencing good financial health. After an initial pilot in 2018, the City's Office of Community Development has started the new Workforce Financial Wellness Program to offer budgeting, credit building and homeownership workshops during work hours for selected city departments. The workshops help employees deal with the burdens of financial stress, help employees practice good financial behaviors and understand the process of homeownership with an emphasis on covering banking, budgeting, savings, credit building and repair. In 2019, the program will be held for employees quarterly.

And not to be left out, we were incredibly excited to pilot the Child Savings Account program, Mrs. Devine, at Watkins-Nance Elementary, providing bank accounts with an initial deposit of

\$50 from the city to K-5 students. The statistics tell us that students who have even as little as a dollar saved are three times as likely to attend college and four times as likely to graduate as those without any college savings. How encouraging is it to be able to set these children up for success by doing something as simple as providing them with a bank account?

We must realize that access is everything; these students will have capital to achieve their goals, big or small.



And depending on where they attend school, some students have had additional access granted as a part of our Books 2 Boys and Girls programming.

Launched in 2016, Books 2 Boys and Girls was created in partnership with Richland Library and City of Columbia Parks and Recreation. Over the span of two years, we've hosted 12 book fairs, giving away nearly 8,000 books to more than 2,000 boys and girls in our community. This program isn't just about giving kids in our neighborhoods books they can take home in fancy drawstring bags; it's about our commitment to changing the ratio of age-appropriate culturally relevant books per child in our communities. When children can read well and have access to literature, they succeed in life.

With increasing importance and significance, it is public-private partnerships that make programs like these possible, and we are grateful to our first partner Cigna and current partner AT&T for making it possible for us to provide these books to our children. It truly takes a village to raise a child, and these days, it takes collaboration among public, private and philanthropic interests to make sure the next generation has the resources they deserve.

And in the spirit of building a village for our youth, we were so excited to spend quality time working with Mr. McDowell with 15 children living in Public Housing in the first-ever Mayor's Summer Camp. Our staff took the kids to places that may be just five minutes up the road from their homes yet were still foreign to children who have historically been underserved and underexposed.

They made kale smoothies at City Roots. They climbed Eddie the biggest kid in the South at EdVenture. And they got to see K9 units in action at CPD headquarters.

In short, they got to be KIDS in Columbia - learning about a city that loves them. A city that's putting policies and programming in place so that they'll have opportunities in their futures that make room for their unique gifts and talents.

Each of our city departments and even boards and commissions are consistent with our strategic plan and are in some way working with this in mind.

Our Food Policy Committee ended 2018 with several hours worth of feedback from the community on how food insecurity affects their neighborhoods. This year, they'll host a town hall where they'll publish the data they've collected and strategize with neighborhood and city leaders the best route moving forward to ensuring everyone has access to fresh foods.

And speaking of routes, the COMET introduced the nation's first-ever partnership between a local transit station and ride share apps like Uber and Lyft that will provide a \$5 credit to riders who are riding to or from a fresh food market.

COMET to the Market will ensure that no one in our city is excluded from the option to go to a grocery store to purchase fresh food for their families.

We worked with our partners AARP to host the city's first-ever Mayor's Livability Summit, providing a space for residents to talk with city leaders and community partners about what matters most to the aging population. Our "perennials" as I've liked to call them represent the demographic in our country opening the most businesses and funneling the most money into our nation's economy. Conversations on livability don't just affect how well a city is prepared for an aging population; they discuss how a city can attract the experienced class as well.

It's innovative ideas and opportunities like these that make our city stand out not only in our state but across our nation. Innovation that exists because of our investment in our community, not just as a coincidental consequence.

Intentionality is seen as we celebrate the grand opening of the Busby Street Resource & Training Complex - a facility that not only features a community engagement center but one that also serves as a public safety recruitment and hiring office and recreational complex for the neighborhoods in this area. With a focus on job training, youth services, educational programming and neighborhood activities, the complex will serve as a cornerstone for economic growth and community engagement.

Investments like these are made possible through partnerships with our good friends like Congressman Jim Clyburn and regional collaborations like the ones we have with Richland, Lexington, Kershaw and Fairfield counties - entities that know the value of pursuing partnerships for the betterment of the region and the state.

We will bring that same focus and excitement to revitalizing Finlay Park in an exciting public private partnership.

As we welcome new innovation economy jobs with corporations like Ritedose, Jushi and Capgemini to the region, we've seen what happens when municipalities and different levels of government work together. It doesn't always happen in Washington, DC, but it does happen in South Carolina.

The Sumter-Columbia Empowerment Zone is South Carolina's only empowerment zone and one of only a handful still in existence in our country. From the new senior housing complex - Veranda at North Main - to the Busby Street Center, the Columbia Empowerment Zone's 10- year anniversary highlighted a decade of work that's been integral in advancing our community.

And while 2018 was an excellent year, we still have much to look forward to in 2019.

As the next generation of business owners, lawyers, non-profit leaders, researchers, activists, social workers and everything in between prepares for adulthood, it is imperative that we as the current leaders pave a way for them to assume their roles in society seamlessly.

As we've seen with movements such as the March for our Lives and local efforts like Every Black Girl, our nation's youth are no longer satisfied with learning about governmental processes - they want their voices heard and they want a seat at the table, regardless of their disqualification to vote under the age of 18.

It's our responsibility to not only remind them that their opinions matter but to also include them in our priorities and planning.

The Columbia Youth Commission will convene nine high school-aged teens from Richland and Lexington counties. And to make things even more exciting, the program will return with a

peer-based election for students to become part of this cohort of young minds. That's right - your 15-year-old neighbor might be an elected official.

We're excited to engage with Richland One, Richland Two, Lexington-Richland 5 and private schools as our youth practice civic engagement at an early age.

We've been national leaders in the establishment and proper grounding of Opportunity Zones. We will release Columbia's Opportunity Zone prospectus soon, and we anticipate these efforts will bring several millions of dollars of desired investment downtown and across North Columbia

Opportunity Zones aren't just great incentives for outside investment; they're economic engines for revitalizing and refreshing areas of our city that may have forgotten just how special they are.

And after introducing and passing with a nearly unanimous vote resolution in 2018 incentivizing more affordable housing in our city last year, it's also an opportunity for us to see more of exactly what we need in our city and across the country; housing for everyone that everyone can afford.

We look forward to working with Richland County Council as they reconvene next month on moving these affordable housing incentives forward. As a city, we've historically been creative with incentivizing investment, and this year will be no different. Working with partners like Habitat for Humanity, we want to be seen as leaders, not just in our state but across the nation.

The tragic deaths of Mr. Calvin Witherspoon, Jr. & Mr. Derrick Caldwell Roper only underscore the urgency and creativity with which we should be working together to pursue more public sector & private sector affordable housing in our city.

In planning to be the city we aspire to become, the plan itself is of utmost importance. That's why if you haven't participated in Columbia Compass, the city's process for updating its comprehensive plan, as well as the Amplify cultural planning process, we need you to get engaged. Columbia will celebrate its 250th year, or semiquincentennial, in 2036, so in preparation for a major birthday, our city planners are gathering input from the community to ensure every voice is heard and considered as plans for natural resources, land use, transportation, housing, community facilities, cultural resources, and economic development are made.

We can't plan properly without knowing what matters most to you as our residents.

And while we can take guesses on these, there are a few areas we know are of particular importance regardless of who you are or which side of the proverbial aisle you prefer to sit.

The housing crisis affects us all in different ways. Without adequate housing for every range of the area median income, cities are stressed in providing resources for people who are forced to pay more for housing and less on the other important costs of life. And that's a problem, particularly for the individuals and families that make up our community.

My law students in the room are not the only ones who recognize the importance of fairness in society - whether in law or in life itself. As we consider what is fair in 2019, we see such a discrepancy in opinions as we determine what is and is not fair.

But regardless of what you believe or where you come from, many of us can agree that getting a second chance is something of significant value.

But what if you never really got a first chance to begin with?

That's why I will support a Ban the Box ordinance that will require city contractors to remove the question regarding past criminal offenses from job applications city-wide. The City of Columbia already implements Ban the Box tactics in its hiring, but we also want people who work for small

businesses, for large corporations, for non-profit organizations and everything in between to have those same opportunities.

Data tells us that about the same number of Americans have criminal records as those who have college degrees, at about 70 million each. It's an imperative for us to ensure that those who have paid their debts to society are given an opportunity to make a life for themselves and their families upon returning.

We've recently partnered with Goodwill Industries to assist in the job placement and hiring of more returning citizens, and we're looking forward to not only City government but other companies and entities following suit. It is our prayer that government partners and corporate citizens following suit.

We will also be announcing a partnership with the SC Department of Corrections helping reconnect returning citizens with jobs and services as 60,000 jobs go unfilled across SC

[pause]

We will launch an innovative effort this year called Compassionate Columbia where we will enhance Gateways & Community beautification.

Jobs for homeless citizens paired with volunteers will beautify gateways into our city and abate litter from our street - our environment - a massive community cleanup & beautification effort.

A compassionate City realizes that the past is well-organized, but the future doesn't have a constituency—that we must fight for the future.

We are struggling as a nation to handle many issues that we thought we put to bed decades ago.

Flags & swastikas that brave young men stormed the battlefield at Gettysburg and beaches of Normandy to defeat are being flown again.

Actual debates about the morality of human chattel slavery and the tragedy of the Holocaust are being waged by Americans.

Divisive ethnic, racial & religious rhetoric every day on social media. Babies separated from their mothers breasts. Hate speech normalized.

Not only hate speech but deadly violence often cosigned from the highest levels of the republic.

This endless barrage of bitterness we watch on the news every night, the hate and vitriol flowing from what should be the world's first and greatest temple of democracy...that is not the America we know and love.

I refuse to believe that this is a dark reflection of who we are.

This is a time when America needs leaders (POINT) needs love, and I would submit to you that we have it in abundance.

We will establish a 25 member Commission on Compassion & Inclusion that will be appointed by City Council and host its first meeting in March.

One of the first acts will be working with leaders in the Jewish Community in establishing a community leaders Sedar---the energy, passion and compassion that we saw at Beth Shalom Synagogue after the Pittsburgh Tree of Life anti-semitic massacre must inspire change in Columbia and the dialogue of America.

we must celebrate diversity, promote inclusivity and challenge bias we must denounce all acts of hate wherever they occur we must ensure public safety while protecting free speech and other constitutional rights we must encourage residents to report incidents and crimes we must bring people together to build trust

I remind you to feel compassion for those whose stories tug at your heart. Feel empathy for those who are going through difficult times and need all of the love and support they can get. Feel righteous anger for those who have been mistreated or disenfranchised.

And to even feel sympathy for those who - regardless of how grossly obvious an issue is – never feel anything for others.

You see, it's not more information, more innovation or more ideology that's going to change our city, our state and our nation. It's compassion.

Compassion will be the fuel to the fire that burns with fervor to save this great democracy. A fire that allows those who have rarely or never taken into consideration how a law may impact someone's life in a tremendous way will do so, and will do so thoughtfully.

Compassionate cities will provide a platform for human potential to flourish.

Wear compassion. Speak compassion. Infuse it into every conversation, every exchange you have with another individual. Allow compassion to not be a simple gesture each day but to be a lifestyle for you and particularly for your children.

This focus will allow us to become the city we aspire to be - to become the most talented, educated and entrepreneurial city in America.

We have seen the power of compassion in action.

From men and women who have inspired those who sit in these classrooms each day in Ernest Finney, J. Waites Waring, Matthew Perry & Jean Toal.

The compassion in action that removed the flag from our state capitol, and now as a direct result, our city will host both a NAACP conference & NCAA March Madness tournament.

The compassion in action that fed federal workers during the shutdown. The compassion in action that we saw during the flood of 2015.

The compassion in action that we see in serving the displaced residents of Allen Benedict Court--thank you, Reverend McDowell.

The compassion in action at that gathering at the synagogue.

The compassion in action that passed the first bump stock ban that is now the law of the land.

This great city of Columbia was born March 17, 1786 by an act of the General Assembly of SC to be the first planned capital city in America, where the mighty Broad & Saluda Rivers met to form the Congaree— Birthed indeed in the original sins of American slavery, Native American genocide on the John Taylor Plantation.

State senator John Gervais' quote made his most prescient Proclamation on "Inclusion"

Several considerations were made in deciding on the name Columbia. During the planning of the new capital, Senator Gervais said it would be a place, "where the oppressed of every land might find refuge, under the wings of Columbia."

"And from the fertile silt and sediment washed upon these banks our fair city was born -- named for Liberty's personification so that victims of tyranny and oppression the world over might know: Here you will be welcome.

Here you will be free.

Here you will find refuge under the wings of Columbia." Compassion and inclusion are in our DNA.

Compassion extends itself to others without the necessitation of reciprocation. Let it be our response, our choice.

Let it be what makes us an undefeatable, indivisible body. One Columbia. It is THIS city that I want children to be able to be children in.

I want them to be able to fall from fences, have failed science experiments, I want them to feel the warm hug and the quiet whisper of a caring & compassionate adult saying, "I love you."

I want them to know that when they have their experience at the roller rink, that their encounter with the Pope is just around the corner.

Together, I want us to build a compassionate city where "bad Stevie" will be allowed to be a child again.

God bless you, God bless Columbia and God bless the United States of America.