

Remarks As Prepared for Delivery by Mayor Edwin M. Lee 2017 State of the City

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Good morning Board President London Breed, Supervisors, and fellow San Franciscans.

Now more than ever, I am grateful to be a San Franciscan, a City where we honor and love one another, and stand up for each other.

Every year, we gather to reflect on the accomplishments of the year past, and to set ambitious goals for the year ahead.

But this year is different, because our City's success stands against a backdrop of a vastly different America.

The election of this last year, and the fallout that continues, has shaken our understanding of our country.

I'm here with you today to say, I am confident that San Francisco will lead the way for the entire country.

Since November 8th, our City's compassion, and our heart, has been tested.

People say we live in our own world here in California and San Francisco. This, I have to say, is just an "Alternative Fact."

Let me tell you about our America, our City.

In our America, people are equal, no matter race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.

In our America, we embrace our differences and understand they make us stronger and more vibrant.

We are a sanctuary city, now, tomorrow, forever.

We refuse to accept that the status quo is the best we can do.

We do not wish for affordable housing. We build it.

We do not complain about health access. We provide it.

We do not talk about protecting immigrants. We stand shoulder to shoulder with them.

The late historian and San Francisco native Kevin Starr said that our state is the prism through which America sees its future.

The Republicans talk about "American Carnage." I say, come see San Francisco, come experience our celebration of diversity and our economic success.

Come see what the future of America looks like.

Now, it is time to fight back.

To guarantee that the progress we have gained in previous decades is not erased.

To protect hard-fought victories for civil rights, women's rights, disabled rights, gay rights, and the equality that our predecessors battled and bled for.

And to continue the progress on the challenges we face in our City – homelessness, housing, quality of life, and police reform.

Look how far we've come already.

When I took office, unemployment was near 10 percent. Our budget deficit reached well over half a billion dollars. Our pension and health care costs were unsustainable.

Fast-forward to today, and more than 140,000 people are working compared to 2010. Unemployment, we just learned this week, has dropped to 2.95 percent.

Market Street, where we are today, had the highest vacancy rates in the City, and housing sites sat undeveloped.

Today, we stand in the beautiful Hibernia Bank building, celebrating a resurgence of San Francisco's grand boulevard. Dozens of new businesses, arts organizations and large employers have brought new life to Market Street and the Tenderloin.

In this area, more than 2,000 units of housing have been built in the past few years, with more than 20 percent affordable.

Every day, we make progress toward a safer and more vibrant Market Street corridor. We certainly have not crossed the finish line yet, but look how far we have come.

When I took office, San Francisco was experiencing a housing crisis.

Long-time San Franciscans were struggling to afford homes due to the failure to build enough housing through the 90s and 2000s, and a surge in economic growth that put upward pressure on housing prices.

So we went to work. Reinvesting in affordable housing at all levels, from public housing, to low-income and middle-class.

We acted fast. In 2012 we secured the 1.3 billion dollar Housing Trust Fund and in 2015, a 310 million dollar affordable housing bond to build the housing our residents need.

We pledged to create 30,000 new and rehabilitated housing units, half of which would be affordable to low-income and middle-class families.

And we announced an unprecedented new program to completely rehabilitate our public housing stock.

Today I'm proud to say, we are on track, and 13,813 units closer to meeting our goal of 30,000, saving so many families from displacement.

Of this new housing, 42 percent is affordable to low-income and middle-class San Franciscans.

I am especially proud that in October we began the second of two phases to rebuild and rehabilitate public housing.

And as a child who grew up in public housing, this is personal to me.

11,000 low-income people will now live in new and refurbished homes, after decades of living in neglected poverty housing.

When the federal government failed us, I chose not to make excuses.

We called together decision-makers both locally and in the Obama Administration to find an innovative solution. Today, thousands of the City's most low-income families have beautiful new homes, where they can deepen their roots, and their children can blossom.

We are now a national model for how other cities can improve public housing.

Years ago, this was just a dream. Today, it's a total transformation.

To Supervisor Malia Cohen and President Breed and every person and department who worked hand-in-hand on this effort; thank you.

This is a true testament to what can be accomplished when we unite around our values and push toward a common goal.

We need to make these moments possible for more and more residents.

People across the City are struggling to afford rent. Homeownership feels completely unattainable.

Together, we have a responsibility to take care of every working family struggling to keep their heads above water, and a foothold in the city.

Because a strong middle class is a strong city.

Some of the most impactful ideas to build middle-class housing have been met with strong political opposition in years past. I hear the concerns, and I commit to work through them. We have no other option.

We must work harder to find common ground and focus on programs that we know will make the biggest difference for families.

Together, we can incentivize the construction of new homes dedicated to middle class families and create certainty within the process of building new housing.

We already have some programs that work well.

Our Small Sites Program, for example, where the City purchases and permanently preserves rent-controlled units, has kept struggling families in the City.

Rene Yañez, an artist who lives in the Mission, was facing an Ellis Act eviction. Because of Small Sites, he no longer has to worry.

I'm excited to announce that we will grow this program, and in the next three years, give 240 more households like Rene's a chance to remain in San Francisco.

And to help middle class families buy a house, we will expand the Downpayment Assistance Loan program. Bridget Early and her family were able to buy a home in the Sunset when the down payment roadblock was removed for them.

We are building another 20,000 units along the Southern Bayfront, a third of which will be affordable, including as much middle-class housing as possible.

All of this production is having an impact and we are starting to see rents stabilize, even as they continue to surge elsewhere in California. The evidence is in, building more housing does help more people afford San Francisco.

As we accelerate the building of more housing for our nurses, teachers and first responders, we cannot lose sight of our responsibility to care for our most vulnerable population, our homeless.

Until last summer, our City did not have a streamlined approach to homelessness.

Different City departments each owned a part of the solution, and despite our best efforts, the current system was not working.

Now, five months later, The Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing has helped thousands find safer, healthier lives.

Since I took office, my Administration has helped 9,789 people out of homelessness.

Tonight we will conduct our biennial homeless count, when we are reminded that even as we resolve homelessness for thousands, there is a need to serve thousands more.

We will not solve homelessness with the cookie-cutter programs of the past.

Our new end-to-end Navigation System, built on the concept of Navigation Centers that I initiated in 2014, provides the individual support and resources to help a person off the streets and into a situation best suited for their needs, a shelter, a Navigation Center, housing or back at home with loved ones.

We know that very few solutions are one size fits all. To successfully intervene and help, we need to understand the root cause of an individual's homelessness, whether it be economic, behavioral or medical.

The Navigation System allows the flexibility to do that, by working with each individual to meet them where they are. Then we can connect them directly to the services they need to treat the root cause of their homelessness.

Next month, we will open the third Navigation Center, thanks to the Dogpatch community and Supervisor Cohen, who have welcomed this with compassion and empathy. I am pleased many districts and Supervisors are stepping up to welcome homeless service sites in areas all across the City.

We know the Navigation Center model is working. In the past two years it has helped more than 1,100 people off the streets, just like Terry Quinn, who is here with us today.

To help thousands more people just like Terry, today I am pleased to announce the fourth and fifth navigation centers: Hummingbird Place and the SoMa Navigation Center.

The fourth center, Hummingbird Place, will be on the campus of Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and will exclusively serve people with mental health and addiction challenges.

The fifth, the SoMa Navigation Center, will be a triage resource and pathway off the streets for long-term homeless and people living in encampments. Thank you Google for your generous support for this.

Expanding Navigation Centers is not our only step.

We are also creating a complimentary new pathway to move 320 formerly homeless people into more stable housing through a partnership with the San Francisco Housing Authority.

Placements will begin next month, and by moving people up the housing ladder, we create space in permanent supportive housing.

We also have a population of people who time and again have cycled through the system, picked up by the police, taken to the emergency room, held for several days, and released back onto the streets.

These patients average nearly four visits per year to the psych emergency ward. This does not solve the issue, because it does not address the root causes.

It's our moral responsibility to do better, and we will.

For people like Tahani Ibrahim, who is here with us today, and her family, who struggled with their mentally ill brother for years, worrying about him day and night.

Through our Laura's Law program, Tahani's brother is now getting the help he needs to stay safe and recover. In this case, the program literally saved a life.

As Tahani's story proves, Laura's Law works. Thank you Supervisor Mark Farrell and the Board for adopting it. We have helped more than 100 families since it began.

Now, let us help hundreds more people like Tahani's brother.

We must improve our conservatorship process.

It's time to put the person first, to treat underlying mental health challenges. The cycling has to stop. I commit to put the resources forward to provide people the intensive care they need. I hope the Courts will match our commitment.

This can happen – with our justice partners, our health department, and the courts all working together on behalf of the patient. We know these collaborative courts work, such as the Behavioral Health and Drug Courts, which are so successful.

We have to apply this same ingenuity and compassion to conservatorships, with a 360-degree health assessment, better coordinating our health and legal systems.

Decisions about treatment should include an individual's complete medical history. We want people on the most successful and least restrictive path to recovery.

I will forward a proposal to the Courts to implement this partnership, and I anticipate spirited discussion in the weeks to come.

As we improve our compassionate assistance for the mentally ill and drug dependent, we must also look at the impact this is having on our neighborhoods. We will meet this problem at its source, on the streets of our City.

To start, we will double our medical respite capacity this year.

More beds means more very sick people finding refuge from the street corner, with access to the support they need.

Our goal must be helping people to reduce their use of dangerous and debilitating drugs, through whatever means necessary.

Our street medicine teams are dispensing a special medication that reduces the cravings intravenous drug users' experience, and in turn, reduces their usage.

And, as I said earlier this month, I will continue to learn about the effectiveness of safe injection services. We must thoroughly assess whether the public health and safety benefits outweigh any negative impacts.

We are now dealing with a public health hazard regarding the disposal of needles, and we're stepping up our efforts to get syringes off our streets.

Public Works and the Department of Public Health will install new needle deposit boxes in hotspots around the City. We've seen great success at our 17 pit stops. These boxes work – drug users do in fact deposit needles.

We are also increasing the number of trained clean-up workers to pick up needles that litter our streets and neighborhoods.

Our neighborhoods are our greatest source of pride in San Francisco.

We want the simple quality-of-life issues fixed, and fixed quickly. From the streetlight that is out, to the crosswalk that needs repainting, and the tree that needs trimming, we respond to these requests through our new Mayor's Fix-It teams.

Meeting with neighbors and understanding needs unique to that neighborhood, we are working together, fixing problems proactively, and making our neighborhood corridors cleaner, safer, better places to live.

Residents, such as Castro neighbor Carolyn Thomas, partner with the Fix-It team to improve their neighborhoods.

The response has been amazing from neighbors and small businesses, so we are quadrupling our efforts and fixing 20 additional neighborhoods in 2017.

A big thank you to Mohammed Nuru, Sandra Zuniga, and all the City partners who work every day to fix-it for our neighborhoods.

However, our Fix-It work is just one part of keeping our neighborhoods safe and clean. A strong crime prevention plan and increased community policing are also keys to having neighborhoods we can call home.

I want to thank our newest Supervisor Jeff Sheehy who has already begun work on a neighborhood crime prevention plan, which will compliment Fix-It and homeless outreach efforts, and the continued work of our dedicated police department.

Last year certainly challenged our City to be honest with ourselves about police-community relations.

We always hoped we were different. And I believe we are.

We recognized that reforms were needed, and we invited the United States Department of Justice to complete a top-to-bottom review of our police department.

Community policing does not happen because of words on a page. Safety and reform happen because of the thousands of men and women in uniform in San Francisco.

To all our sworn law enforcement: we appreciate you. I appreciate you. You put yourself in danger every day in the name of protecting our City. You are heroes. Thank you.

And to Chief Bill Scott, who just days ago took his oath of office, Welcome.

I know you will make SFPD into the model 21st century police department.

We are completely committed to implementing all 272 of the reforms recommended by the Department of Justice. We are well underway, as new use-of-force trainings begin next week.

But reforms are about more than just new rules and tactics, it is having officers deeply connected to the neighborhoods they serve. Cops that know the heartbeat of the diverse communities they protect.

We have just hired 600 new officers and pushed to have the faces of our diverse communities represented. In the last three police academy classes, 56 percent of new recruits were people of color.

These recruits and officers come from the communities they serve, and strive every day to earn the trust and to protect the safety of those very communities.

Like officers Rodney and Ronney Freeman, who grew up in Sunnydale, who are here with us today.

This is the future of our police force. And the future is keeping the public safe in a manner that respects civil rights for all people. Placing the sanctity of life above all else. And always thinking de-escalation before force.

It is time we move forward with full implementation of body cameras. It is time to adopt a policy for electronic control devices to give officers options between a baton and a gun.

Chief, you and I have discussed this a lot: It will not be easy, but our responsibility is to simultaneously achieve reform and to keep San Francisco safe. I know you are up for the job, and the City family welcomes you.

There are challenges ahead, but we're in a strong position to stand up for ourselves, for our neighbors and for our values.

For the immigrant laborer trying to support a family. The union janitor fighting to afford San Francisco rent. The teacher who wants to own a home. The mentally ill who need a support system that works for them. And the HIV survivor who depends on health care.

This is who we are fighting for.

We will not see eye to eye on every issue. We must continue to have fierce debates and a battle of ideas.

Constructive disagreement – and the consensus we reach – is what makes us so strong.

But we also need to ask ourselves if division at home makes us more vulnerable to attacks from outside.

We need to consider whether the local fights we pick are for power or policy.

Are we making fiscal decisions impulsively or strategically, in preparation for what could be a very long four years.

Because in the end, we all believe in the right to health care, right to housing, right to live your life free of oppression or bigotry.

We will face challenges from those who do not share our views, challenges the likes of which none of us have witnessed in the last eight years.

These challenges will test us. And in order for us to meet these challenges, we must be united.

When looking back on the year that has passed, we acknowledge the progress that has been made by working together instead of against each other.

So I stand before you, asking for all of you to stand with me, and together we can move our City forward and continue to be the shining light for our country. Our America.

Because if and when the Federal cuts come, we will be united behind our promises and our values.

We are ready.

The State of Our City is ready.

Ready to finish implementing solutions on housing, homelessness, and police reform.

Ready to defend ourselves against cynical attacks from Washington, DC.

Ready to stand up for what we believe in.

And ready to fight for those who need us.

We are San Francisco. Ready for what is to come.

Thank you.