Thank you to Marilyn, for the warm welcome and your work on behalf of the city.

Thanks to the color guard for taking part this evening.

And thank you to both Rabbi Scott White and Imam Sulaiman Salaam, Jr. for tonight's invocation.

First, let me take a moment to acknowledge those elected officials joining us tonight from the Greater Kansas City area.

Please stand so we can recognize your service.

To my colleagues on the city council, thank you for being here this evening, and thank you for the work you do everyday on behalf of the residents of your district and this city.

I would like to acknowledge any department directors and city staff here this evening. The work of these dedicated people can often go unnoticed, however your contributions are vital to our success.

And I'm always honored to have the chance to acknowledge and thank City Manager, Troy Schulte. I've said it before, but Troy's work has guided smart decision making, innovative management, and prudent stewardship of taxpayer dollars.

He wouldn't tell you, but early one morning, this winter, as we were all preparing for a blizzard that thankfully never hit - Troy was up before dawn, in a truck, prepping streets....Not only because the work needed to be done, but because Troy misses being on the farm.

Troy, on behalf of Kansas City, thank for your continued dedication and service.

My sincere thanks to Julian and his team here at the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art for welcoming us and hosting this event tonight. We're here at a truly iconic Kansas City institution. Home to world class art and sculpture.

I'd also like to recognize the work of Police Chief Darryl Forte. You may know, Darryl recently announced that he will be retiring next month. We are fortunate to have had

Darryl as our police chief during turbulent times, and I personally value the honest working relationship he and I have maintained.

I will always consider Darryl a friend.

And finally, to my family. Thank you for your continued love and support.

Lastly, I want to extend a special welcome to those watching or listening tonight. This year, in addition to broadcasting live on Channel 2, and streaming live at kcmo.gov, it's the first time residents can watch live on Facebook.

I do want to apologize to my friends in the twitter sphere, however....Tonight, I get more than 140 characters to make my case.

This marks the sixth time that I have had the humbling experience of delivering our city's annual address. This is an opportunity to celebrate, grieve, and honor those who have contributed so much.

And without fail when this speech ends, in the year that follows, I find myself even more committed to the success of our city.

I truly love this job.

Everyday I get to see the amazing work being done across our community. And my renewed commitment each year is certainly <u>not</u> because I've won every policy debate. It's not because I've avoided the hard choices in an effort to be liked all the time.

It's the people, and getting to see everyday what we are capable of - that is the source of my faith in our city and our potential. The bottom line is, we have <u>the best</u> people in <u>any city</u>; Anywhere. Period.

That's not platitude. I hear it from families who are new to town, I know you do too.

We can burst with pride without surrendering to hubris. We look out for each other. And we get things done. Now, for 6 years, I've made a promise that I would focus on providing leadership.

I aim to be optimistic yet frank about what we've accomplished and what needs to be done. No doubt, we have a lot to be proud of in our city right now. And, we have issues that we have to face, head on.

But I want to address all these things tonight with a clear purpose in mind: The passion and talent of our people <u>is</u> the source of our momentum. And our residents have the ability to <u>take on</u> the challenges we face, and succeed.

The key to our city's success isn't some secret sauce. It's us.

This shouldn't surprise you - it's a time honored tradition in Kansas City. In 1951, Kansas City was ravaged by a devastating flood. No, I don't remember the flood personally....

Not long after the waters quit rising, Joyce C. Hall, founder of Hallmark Cards, commissioned Norman Rockwell to create a painting that captured what he called the "Kansas City Spirit."

In Bruce Mathews' book by the same title, Hall shared his request of Rockwell - he wanted a painting that would: "Forever symbolize that certain something in good men's hearts that makes them put service above self and accomplish the impossible"

The Kansas City Spirit means we know that progress is only possible through action. So I'm calling on all of us tonight to renew this spirit of service. Because we know that all of our progress and momentum can vanish overnight - unless we commit to action.

And that is why I believe that because of YOU, the state of our city is strong.

...So let's talk about that momentum I mentioned just a second ago, and what it looked like last year:

Citizen satisfaction survey results are at an all-time high and 2016 brought with it a record number of tourists to Kansas City, more than 24 million visitors.

The KC Streetcar made its debut last May and as of today has carried an astounding 1.4 million passengers since its launch.

Just last month, doors opened to the Linwood YMCA/James B. Nutter, Sr. Community Center, a perfect example of what great things can take place when people join together for the common good.

Late last year, CVS announced plans for a new, 762,000 Sq. Ft. distribution center that will bring 350 jobs to the Skyport Industrial Park, and Costco will soon have a new location north of the river.

Just a few weeks ago, Cerner opened the doors to its Innovations campus, eventually home to more than 10,000 employees.

Kansas City was host to the annual conference of the National Institute of Standards and Technology, part of the US Commerce Department.

We welcomed mayors, technology and information officers, as well as private sector partners from across the country.

The conference served as the launch of our new Smart City Data platform, allowing residents to monitor available parking along the streetcar line, or to see patterns in traffic. This conference is a clear sign that Kansas City can stay ahead of the curve when it comes to using data to make smart decisions.

The Women's Empowerment Initiative, which my office founded in 2014, is the first of its kind in the nation. A collaboration with the Central Exchange, the Women's Foundation, and the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

This effort includes the Appointments Project, a public-private partnership that has facilitated the appointment of 20 women to city boards and commissions in just three years.

As a result, women's representation has increased to over 41%.

And this year, the WE initiative was named a semifinalist in the Innovation in American Government Awards, from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard.

However, I do want to mention quickly - - In 2017 - - creating a means by which to empower women in leadership should not have to be considered innovative or cutting edge. I don't believe we're a world class city IF we empower women. We're a world class city BECAUSE we empower women.

There's a lot to point to this past year as a sign of our momentum. So what makes momentum possible? Good timing? Good ideas? Sure. But I believe that momentum is what you get when good timing and good ideas meet people willing to take action. And if we want great people ready to take action, then I think as a city we should invest in our people.

And here's how we've done it.

It starts with our kids, and grandkids.

This year we're expanding our summer youth employment program, Hire KC Youth, from City Hall to city-wide. Under the leadership of the Kansas City Social Innovation Center and the Full Employment Council, more kids will have access to meaningful workplace experiences during the summer and beyond. The Kansas City Restaurant Association has already committed to providing 50 jobs this summer to kids from Manual Tech interested in the culinary arts.

The program is partnering with businesses across the city - - find out how you can become a Hire KC Youth partner and step up. <u>Tomorrow's</u> workforce needs internships <u>today</u>.

But some kids don't learn best at a desk or in an office. That's why the fields are taking shape at the Kansas City Major League Baseball Urban Youth Academy.

In the heart of the 18th & Vine District, planning is underway for the grand opening of the facility this fall. Through this \$19 million public / private partnership, kids have access to the fundamentals of the game, along with educational and career development opportunities.

Most important, this is a place that connects kids with adults who care about them and their success. That's why it means so much that kids in our urban core will have access to the Academy and its programs AT NO COST to families.

That's right, it's free.

Investing in kids means we have to invest in families as well. And no family should struggle because we fail to make equity a priority. That's why my office has advocated for - and implemented - paid family leave among city employees.

I believe it's essential that our city reflects the same commitment to employees that our city expects from them. I'm also glad to see that Governor Greitens has followed our lead and implemented a similar plan at the state level.

Sometimes, a family just needs an opportunity that opens the door to a new career.

Last year, I announced the arrival of LaunchCode in Kansas City. LaunchCode is a tech nonprofit that educates, trains and places aspiring computer developers with drive and talent into paid apprenticeships and jobs.

Charity Hibberd was a stay at home mom with a background in theater. When she heard about LaunchCode's free coding education from one of my tweets - She was inspired to apply and entered the program.

Eddie Burris, a UMKC professor running the course, recognized Charity as a stand out student and encouraged her. A year later, she's completed the program and landed an apprenticeship writing code for Commerce Bank.

Charity is here with us tonight. Charity, would you stand so we can recognize you. This is what our city is all about. Opportunities meeting people ready to take action.

Kids and families are the core of our community - but committing to our people also means we commit to one another's success. That's why we support our homegrown innovators through the Innovation Partnership Program.

The program, in its third year, provides a unique opportunity for startups to develop and allows the City to explore how new technologies can improve City services. We want to be home to the best talent and minds in the world - so as a city we're willing to serve as an R&D partner, in order to give companies the boost they need to take off.

One of last year's participants, Redivus Health, is an app that aids response, treatment and care for health emergencies by better coordinating efforts across first responders, nurses, and doctors. In fact, Redivus helped the Fire Department in saving the life of a heart attack victim who went into cardiac arrest in the field.

Applications for IPP open in April for those aspiring innovators out there.

It's important, however, that we keep in mind access to technology can't be taken for granted. The fact of the matter is, equity is essential in the digital age too. After all, connectivity is the infrastructure of the future.

That's why our City has taken a lead in establishing the Digital Equity Strategic Plan.

But the City is just one part of the effort. Co-founders of the coalition include KC Digital Drive, the Kansas City Public Library, the Linwood YMCA, Connecting for Good - and others.

Examples include free public wifi on the streetcar line, our city's open data, or participation in national initiatives like ConnectHome, bringing high speed internet to houses in the urban core and TechHire, employing aspiring tech industry workers.

But that's not enough - the City will also continue its partnership with the Surplus Exchange, through the Digital Upcycling Program, providing hardware for people who need digital access but can't afford rising costs.

In a world-class city, seniors should never struggle to access health or social services because they lack an internet connection. And kids should never fall behind in class because they don't have the technology their peers have at home.

So, as a city, we can help validate the work of aspiring innovators, and make sure that everyone has an opportunity to participate in the digital age. But we also have an obligation to look out for those who have given so much while asking for very little.

That's why it makes me proud that just last week, the KCATA in partnership with the working men and women of the AFL-CIO, announced a new policy:

If you're a veteran of our military, you can access any of the KC transit services, anytime, at no cost.

Our commitment to each other is measured in no small part by the commitment we make to those who serve. You and I know - this is the right thing to do.

Investing in our people is the cornerstone of our city's success. And we've found solutions that empower opportunity. Sometimes, these solutions are clear.

Other times, solutions require more than a policy or program. Sometimes, we have to raise our hands and voices.

I believe this represents our best values. I believe our world-class character is on full display when our city stands up for those in the margins - threatened, or excluded, because of race, religion, gender, where we're from, or who we love.

Mayors are a reflection of the values of the city they serve. That's why I've said in recent months, when asked about rising protest and frustration: We can't surrender to bigotry or manufactured fear. We can't take action through anger. We can't enhance our community by violence.

Calling for tolerance and justice isn't about who we oppose or fear. It's about who we are as a city, and who we want to be.

So it's on us to speak out. We must commit to, and protect, the dignity of all our neighbors.

....Remember what I said earlier, that momentum can only occur when opportunity meets people ready to take action. We can't sit back and hope that our success continues. We also can't wait for our problems to solve themselves.

We have to make change, together.

I've said it before - mayor's don't create jobs. Mayors can't solve crimes. And a mayor can't pass a test for a kid in school. When these things occur it's the result of a collective effort.

But you and I know that in a community which invests in people, commits to each other, and aspires to take action - - obstacles are always present.

Obstacles like politics. Politics these days is built on fear, ideology, and suspicion - - incentivizing short term thinking - when what we need is a **deeper trust within our community**. We need long term vision. We need more leadership and less politics.

But I want to tell you tonight, in no uncertain terms...despite the times, the critics, or the difficult work involved - - these obstacles have NO place in our vision for this city.

We have work to do, and throwing our hands up and saying "it can't be done" simply isn't an option. That's why I want to talk about a few issues that aren't measured by catalytic momentum, but rather by methodical progress.

Some challenges are so complex and are affected by so many elements - that they simply can't be tackled all at once. Some challenges we inherit and take hold of in our moment. And when our moment is ended, our progress is real, and we provide the next generation of leadership a more achievable goal.

There are countless stories of this progress in our city's history. People who have taken hold of the challenge they face, and made progress towards the future for others to build on.

Dorothy Davis Johnson earned her Master's degree in social work in 1960. An educated black woman with a deep commitment to service, Johnson was the first director of the Jackson County Department of health and welfare. She also served as a consultant for local social welfare projects and was an assistant professor at the UMKC school of medicine.

In the late 1970's, Johnson and and a group of female colleagues shared their frustration with barriers they faced to the business community. Their involvement and development was often limited to their husband's organizations.

In their mind, something needed to change. She and that group of women began to meet regularly, providing the network and resources of a business club all their own.

Two years later, Johnson was one of the 12 originating members of the Central Exchange. Today, the Central Exchange offers more than 500 programs dedicated to empowering women in the business community, and it's membership is more than 1,000 Kansas City area women.

So what are our challenges, today, to take hold of?

During an interview a few months ago, I was asked why as Mayor, I felt education was a policy priority. After all, the city Charter doesn't even mention the word education. So I asked them to identify one aspect of life in Kansas City that is NOT affected by education?

Our city's very lifeblood is the talent, creativity, and work ethic of our citizens. That means we need well educated people. And no indicator is more critical to success in education than reading.

That's why, in 2011, I established Turn the Page KC, a project dedicated to pairing volunteer reading partners with students, in order to address the crisis of 3rd grade reading proficiency.

When we started Turn the Page, 3rd grade reading proficiency in Kansas City stood at 33%. We just wrapped up the fifth full year of the organization's work and I am proud to say that proficiency among Kansas City 3rd grades in 2016 was 55%, and rising.

We've still got a lot of work to do, but these are exciting results.

Another focus of Turn the Page KC is school attendance. We know many factors can impact a child's attendance at school, including suspensions. Studies show that boys of color, specifically African-American boys, are much more likely to be suspended.

That's why in May, my office along with the Health Department and Turn the Page will be hosting a School Suspension Summit. We will support schools and provide resources that help them change mindsets, policies and practices around discipline.

And - just last week, we opened Turn the Page KC's Early Learning Hub, a place for parents to connect with the resources they need to provide their children with the best possible early childhood experiences. The Hub is a collaborative space where Kansas City's early childhood education community will collaborate to design innovative tools for parents with young kids.

For Turn the Page, the core mission remains the same 6 years later - mobilize our community to ensure all Kansas City students read at - or above - proficiency by the time they finish third grade.

This cannot be a task for the schools or teachers alone. We need <u>YOU</u> to take part. Volunteer to read, just an hour a week over lunch. This isn't charity work. It's the Kansas City Spirit.

However, some challenges are more subtle than reading scores and word gaps. They are often out of sight to most of us.

Since taking office, I've been a vocal advocate for diversity in our business community. In particular, in real estate development. Too many times, I've looked around in boardrooms discussing our city's future development and I've been the only minority in the room. Something has to change.

That's why this year's launch of Project REAP in Kansas City is a step in the right direction.

The Real Estate Associate Program, has the support of Alt-Cap, the Economic Development Corporation, the Local Investment Support Corporation, and commercial real estate leaders right here in our city. It focuses on connecting minority residents to careers in real estate development through education and training from local experts in the field.

This March, the inaugural class of more than 20 began the intensive training and education program. We're just the 9th market in the United States to spearhead the program. I firmly believe our city will benefit from a more diverse development industry guiding economic growth for decades to come.

Making progress in areas like education and economic development are essential. But you and I know we have to acknowledge what cannot be ignored: Violence is a corrosive force that can break down our community - halting progress in its tracks and wiping out any chance for collective opportunity.

I take no comfort in acknowledging that 2016 represented a year marked by way too many deaths and way too much violence in our city. I carry the weight of this with me every single day - and I am not satisfied.

It takes only a few seconds for someone to decide to resolve a conflict through violence and only fractions of a second to solve it with a gun.

So what do we do to change the course of those few seconds? We must affect the days, the weeks, the months, and the years that lead up to it. That's the focus of the collaborative project, KC No Violence Alliance, or KC NoVA.

We're utilizing better and coordinated intelligence to focus resources on the very small population causing <u>most</u> of the violent crime in Kansas City. We're identifying individuals prone to group-related crime, and our message is simple: "We know who you are. We know what you are doing. If you don't stop what you are doing, we're

gonna lock you up." We're actually going to these people - at their homes or on the street - and relaying this message face to face.

We know that we can't combat this problem by simply locking everyone up. That's why we also offer them access to social services like job training, substance abuse support, anger management, and others. We currently have about 135 people who are taking advantage of this option. Our latest numbers show a 10 percent reduction in group-related violence in our city since NoVA's inception in 2013.

And I want to take just a moment to acknowledge one of the leaders who helped make this effort possible, outgoing U.S. Attorney, Tammy Dickinson. Tammy, would you stand and be recognized for your work not only on this project, but the service you have provided to our community and region.

So, we know our long-term success in reducing violence is impacted by how early we identify and engage people susceptible to violent crime. That's why our Teens in Transition summer program, for youth on the verge of, or in trouble, is expanding from a summer-only to a year-long, in-school program.

These are concrete steps aimed at steering kids away from crime, and reducing the chance someone chooses violence out of desperation. But we know that despite a reduction in group-related crime, drive by shootings are increasing. And we know that domestic violence is on the rise, as well. These threats require us to stand up and speak out. This doesn't have to be that hard.

Report the people in our community who feel they can get away with terrorizing neighborhoods. Contact police if you know someone who is a victim in a violent relationship. There's no <u>pride</u> in staying silent. There's no <u>glory</u> in allowing these things to happen. There's no <u>courage</u> in turning a blind eye to injustice.

And I know it can be easy for me to say. But some of this is happening already and we need to encourage others to speak out. Groups like Mothers in Charge, who show up at every single murder scene to comfort the survivors, organizations of all sizes, neighborhood councils, community centers and churches. There is so much work being done right now at the ground level.

But, we all have to be part of this solution. Because staying silent in the face of these threats means surrendering our future, and that is simply not an option we can accept.

That's why last year I set up an Anti Violence Task Force, chaired by Councilwoman Jolie Justus, comprised of people at the grassroots level who know what violence does to communities. And in two weeks, I will join Councilwoman Justus in putting forward the task force's recommendations AND action steps.

Prevention and deterrence can be a powerful force for change. But we need to remember that violence and murder have lasting effects. Last fall, we opened the doors to the Kansas City Assessment & Triage Center. The center helps Kansas Citians wrestling with mental illness and struggling with trauma in their lives. And this is a great thing for our city, no question about it.

But what keeps me up at night - is the reality that for kids who live through violence and murder - - they can't wait until they're adults to address the effects. The triage center is too late for them.

That's why I want us to commit, as a city, to the mental health and care of kids who have experienced violent crime and murder. Sure, we can teach kids to read, or help them become workforce ready - but how can we expect someone to take those steps when they can't understand why a loved one was taken by some thoughtless murder?

So, I believe more *must* be done to combat violence in Kansas City. But every one of us should recognize that more **CAN** be done.

Finally, I want to bring up a challenge we face that affects each of us every single day.

The infrastructure around us is one of our most vital assets. That's why it is so important that we make good on our commitment to our city's foundation. I want to acknowledge the work of my colleagues on the council in taking action on this issue this year. Like me, they know we can't afford to ignore it any longer.

When I entered office in 2011, our city faced a six billion dollar maintenance backlog. That's billion, with a B. Why?

Because it's not sexy to talk about infrastructure - and more to the point: It's not the politically easy route to propose shared investment and long term results. But remember what I said about leadership and politics.

I believe that the 20 year, \$800 million General Obligation Bond Package put forward this spring is the right thing to do for our city. And I believe that because it's composed of the projects and needs that rank at the top of citizen satisfaction surveys.

For years, you've said you want city hall to address streets, sidewalks, flooding and infrastructure. So we got to work last year putting a plan together. It takes a comprehensive, responsible approach to addressing our basic infrastructure needs.

Each year, the city will produce a report card that residents can view - an accounting of where the money went and what projects were addressed, along with projects for the coming year and the projected costs.

And over 20 years, at approximately 40 million dollars per year - it asks you to invest through an annual property tax increase.

It's the lowest, slowest payment method we could put forward. The average residential property owner, someone who owns a 140k house and a 15k car would see an increase in their property taxes each year for 20 years. That property would see an average of \$8 added to their property tax each year.

Bottom line, when it comes to sharing the investment, this is the lowest, slowest tax increase we could put forward that still ensures the resources needed to tackle long-standing needs in all corners of the city.

I can tell you stories of businesses who loved being here but ended up leaving town because repeated flooding made their staying impossible. We have buildings built in the 20's, that people in wheelchairs simply can't access because they are not ADA compliant - - which by the way is a federal mandate and law.

And, The GO Bonds will establish a city-wide systematic sidewalk repair program - - - and property owners will NO LONGER have to cover the costs out of pocket. This sidewalk program can amount to thousands of dollars in savings to property owners.

These are the kinds of things a world-class city commits to. And they are the kind of things that might not be good <u>politics</u>, but they are very good <u>policy</u>.

So I've been willing to make the case directly to you, the residents. I have taken part in dozens of public forums since January and answered questions from hundreds of residents. And you know what? Sometimes the days get a little long. 90 minutes of Q&A

on dark winter nights talking bridges and flood control. Like I said, it ain't sexy, but it's critical.

The thing is, I love doing it. And I love doing it - because the rooms were full. The questions were sincere. I love doing it because you deserve to know how your dollars will be spent, and what the city would do to make progress each year. I know we have the will and the ability to do what's best for our future.

Investing in our future is fundamental to progress. If you don't believe me, just remember how far we've come.

And what changed? We created momentum. Opportunity ran head-first into a city full of people, willing to take action. This has to continue - and we need a new generation of Kansas Citians to step up.

Not just young people - but also folks who have been hesitant to get involved. Let's engage in the hard work of progress; and honor the mission of making our city greater. Community doesn't operate separate of it's citizens - we succeed when we get involved. So, how do you do this?

There are a few easy ways. Learn more about the GO Bonds, you can go online and read the questions that will be on the ballot just one week from now.

Find the details of the projects, costs, and lots more information at kcmo.gov.

Second, keep telling our story. Aspire to show the world our music, art, food, technology, medicine, engineering, manufacturing...our heart & our passion.

Third, don't give in to naysayers or small thinking, and never compromise our character.

In short: Get involved. Today.

For those at home - - you can take action in all the programs and projects I've discussed tonight - and more. It's all at: kcmayor.org. For those in the room here tonight, when you walk out the doors of the auditorium, there are volunteers waiting to tell you about these programs, the people they serve and the real and lasting change you can make in our city.

If we renew our commitment to service, and take action, in the end it won't really matter which came first, the feeling of confidence or the feeling of momentum.

When I took office in 2011, our city felt stuck in neutral. We lacked a cohesive vision. And I took seriously the challenge of setting a new tone - and pushing all of us to recognize what this city is capable of. This is a tradition as old as our city itself.

In the book I mentioned earlier, Joyce Hall recalls a story from more than a century ago. In it, Thomas Hart Benton - whose art lines the walls of this auditorium tonight - stood along the bluffs overlooking what is our downtown today, and said:

"Here, where the Missouri turns eastward to the Mississippi, a large commercial and manufacturing community will congregate and in less than a generation we will see a great city on those hills."

See, our potential ultimately becomes our reality - the question is whether we live up to it or not. I think that a few years ago, all we needed was to be reminded of what we are capable of, what it takes to make progress.

We have reignited that tradition, that spirit of service that calls us to take part, and asks "What if?" As a result, we are writing a new chapter in our city's history. And I want each of us to have a role in it.

So I say - let's make <u>OUR</u> mark on the years ahead. Because ultimately, that's our test. Our kids and grandkids won't judge us by the ideals we hoped for them. They're going judge us by the reality we leave for them. They will be the beneficiaries of our renewed Spirit of Kansas City.

Thank you so much. Goodnight. God Bless you all - and the God Bless the City of Kansas City.