Well, hello, Washington, DC!

Isn’t it lovely to be here at our University – the University of the District of Columbia.

I am proud to be here to deliver my fourth State of the District address.

So let us thank you, Ms. Thompson, three weeks from giving birth for that wonderful introduction.

And three weeks ago, when Kooper, her son, was just one day old, we recognized him and his family for helping Washington, DC become 700,000 residents strong.

And we haven’t been that big in Washington since around the time that I was born. Now I know that seems like just yesterday, but really it was just a little while ago.

And to meet Kooper, and to chat with his mom and dad, I was reminded of a simple truth:

Washingtonians across the city want very similar things.

We all want safe neighborhoods for our families, with schools and child care centers that will set our children and teens up for success.

We want housing that is safe and affordable.

And we want jobs that allow us to take care of ourselves and our family, with wages that allow us to enjoy life and to give back.

From Ward 1 to Ward 8, we share these hopes and dreams.

And something else we share: In every corner of our city, people are proud. They are proud to be Washingtonians.

And it’s no wonder why.

Our neighborhoods are strong.

We’ve come a long way since our Control Board days and the District’s finances are in the best shape they’ve ever been in.

And from sports and entertainment to restaurants and playgrounds – we are a city that has something for everyone.

We have accomplished a great deal together, and we have a great deal to be proud of.

So, tonight, my fellow Washingtonians, it is with great pride, that I tell you that the state of the District is strong.

In fact, the District is doing so well that I am the envy of many mayors across the United States of America.

They look at our talented workforce, our balanced budgets, our thriving nightlife, and vibrant neighborhoods – and they say, “That’s what we want for our city too.”

But I know, and all of you know, that we have worked hard for everything that we have.

And that’s why we stay focused on the day-to-day operations of our city– the trash pickup, the rat abatement, the pothole repairs…we’re also focused on exploring the big ideas that will keep Washington, DC moving forward and at the forefront of innovation and change.

So along with the Mayor of Metro, Jack Evans, and all of you, we’re going all-in and fully funding Metro for our future. At $178 millon – the amount the District needs to contribute to finally solve the dedicated revenue problem that has held our system back for years and years. And I’m proud that I’m the mayor and this is the government that will get it done.

But we’re also going to continue work on other big ideas like autonomous with Councilmember Cheh, and even bigger ideas like the Hyperloop.

We’re doubling down on workforce development and apprenticeship programs that train DC residents for the jobs available in DC right now.

We’re also going to stay focused on attracting fast-growing and innovative companies like Fiscal Note and Yelp that will provide good-paying jobs for years to come.

We’re doing this all this because we don’t take our growth and prosperity for granted…and because we want Washington, DC, the Washington, DC that Kooper will live in decades from now to even be more successful than the Washington, DC we live in today.

And of course, for all of our city’s growth and prosperity, we still have our challenges.

Some of our challenges are similar to those faced by other cities like ours across the country.

And other challenges are unique to us like our lack of representation both in Congress, our vote in the House of Representatives, and our representation in the Senate.

Sometimes our challenges are unique because we get over-the-top requests, like the unnecessary military parade that some people want to have in our city.

And, in a way, these unique challenges make us stronger, too.

So, when the Congress and White House have tested our values – which they do often – we have repeatedly stood up for our DC values. Chairman Mendelson and Attorney General Racine, and residents in all eight wards have been fighting back and we’re going to fight with them every single day.

Soon we will join Americans from across the country – led by a group of courageous teenagers from Parkland, Florida.

They are coming together to say enough is enough.

And for too long, gun violence has wreaked havoc on communities across our nation, and so-called leaders in Congress have accepted the status quo as the only way forward.

Many have blamed victims and accused entire neighborhoods of just not caring enough.

And all along, those with the power to make a change have falsely believed that sending condolences or pointing fingers is the same as taking action.

But now we are demanding action.

We demand action for Vivian Marrow, a grandmother, a beloved neighbor who was shot and killed in her wheelchair just last year.

We demand action for Stephen Slaughter, who was shot and killed in our city. He was only 14 years old.

And action for every member of our community who has been affected by gun violence.

A few weeks ago, I introduced a piece of legislation that will ban the sale and possession of bump stocks in Washington, DC.

And last week, our Congresswoman our champion on the Hill, Eleanor Holmes Norton, who is with us tonight – we called out Senator Marco Rubio for continuing to push legislation in Congress that would gut our local laws by legalizing assault weapons and high-capacity magazines and even allowing these guns in our schools.

It’s bad enough that Senator Rubio is the worst kind of example of saying one thing to his constituents at home and doing another thing when he comes here to Washington.

So what makes his legislation particularly egregious is that he continues to move it forward even as he calls for more sensible gun control nationwide.

That, my friends, is hypocrisy in action. And that, my friends, is what it looks like when you legislate without values.

How, how can you be for legalizing assault weapons and lowering the age to buy guns in DC and be for school safety in Florida?

With our partner on a Safer, Stronger DC, Councilmember Charles Allen and I say to Senator Rubio, leave us alone and keep your hands off of DC.

This is not the only way we will stand with and stand up for our young people and their families.

President Trump has eliminated funding for the DC Tuition Assistance Grant in his proposed budget.

So we are calling on Congress, and we know our congresswoman is on the job, to fully fund this program that has already given more than 26,000 young people the opportunity to pursue their dreams and attend college.

For many students and their families, DCTAG meant the difference between the end of the road and a new, extraordinary opportunity.

And if the federal government can spend $30 million on a military parade, we can certainly spend $40 million sending our kids to college.

We also call on Congress to end incessant attempts to repeal and dismantle the Affordable Care Act.

Americans need solutions on health care, and just fighting something for the sake of fighting just doesn’t make sense.

But we’re not just waiting on Congress to act. Locally, we are taking our own steps to ensure Washingtonians have the insurance they need by establishing a local DC Individual Responsibility Requirement.

Just as we did when I signed the Mayor’s order recommitting the District to the goals of the Paris Climate Accord, with this mandate, we will protect the legacy of President Barack Obama and the health of DC residents.

And also we call on Congress and the President to find a safe path forward for thousands of long-term residents who have legally lived, worked, and built their lives here in the United States of America under TPS.

I said four years ago that I wanted to get local DC back on the international map.

I never imagined back then that this work would involve defending our country’s reputation abroad and reminding foreign leaders that we are more than our President.

But here we are.

So, in July, I will travel to El Salvador to begin a Sister City relationship with San Salvador. As President Trump builds walls, we will continue to strengthen relationships.

But regardless of what the federal government decides to do or not do, I can promise you that Washington, DC will continue building a city that works for everyone.

We’re taking care of our growing families and young children by putting more money in the budget – an additional $12.5 million to be exact – will help us create more high-quality childcare options for parents.

This will include a $10 million increase for the rates we pay childcare providers to ensure that they stay open and create new seats for infants and toddlers.

You remember Kooper.

We also know that childcare is expensive. So in my upcoming budget, I am creating a new refundable tax credit to help lower the cost of childcare in Washington, DC.

If you don’t already receive a childcare subsidy from us, we’ll provide a $1,000 refundable tax credit, per child, for parents who enroll their children in one of our licensed childcare facilities.

And not to forget our senior, seasoned, residents as Councilmember Todd always reminds me: We’ve got to take care of our seniors, Mayor.

And, together, we’re doing just that by expanding our Safe at Home program. We’re going to also fund a new wellness center in Ward 8. We’ll increase funding for Transport DC. And fund new permanent supportive housing units for seniors.

For those seniors with a homestead deduction, we will also reduce by half the amount that their property tax assessment can go up in any given year.

The District is getting more expensive, especially for those on fixed incomes. This is an important step in ensuring that longtime homeowners can age with dignity in their homes. I hope, too, that it is one small way to acknowledge the investment they have made in creating the place we all love to call home.

Aging well means living well, and we’re committed to making sure Washingtonians age well in the best city in the world.

We also know that for people of every age, living well means staying healthy.

So, this year, we will announce a partnership to build a new hospital on the St. Elizabeths campus. With this partnership, once and for all, we will create a self-sustaining, state-of-the-art health facility that will provide residents with a hospital they can be proud of with every level of care that they deserve. Councilmember Gray and I won’t accept anything less.

I will also introduce legislation that will help ensure every pregnant woman in Washington, DC receives patient-centered, high-quality prenatal care and every newborn receives high-quality neonatal care.

This legislation, we call the BABIES Bill.

It will allow us to invest in programs that reduce the number of babies who are born too soon, set up measures to track prenatal care and newborn health outcomes at each of the District's birthing centers, form a single advisory board of experts, tasked with informing how we care for moms and babies in Washington, DC, and make sure all the DC Government buildings are baby-friendly for our employees and visitors alike.

These efforts, coupled with the Council’s legislation to address maternal mortality, are moving us in the right direction and helping us build a safer, stronger and healthier DC.

And make no mistake – Washington, DC is getting safer.

Our streets are safer than ever. Crime is at record lows, with violent crime down 26 percent since 2014.

But still – we all know this. Any homicide is too many. Any robbery, burglary on your block – to your neighbor, to your friend – is one too many. And we have to drive it all down.

And so for all of our communities and neighborhoods that continued to be harmed by violence, we know we have more work to do.

By taking a smart, holistic approach to public safety – we build on our progress.

By expanding our MPD cadet program from 70 cadets to 100 cadets, we will bolster our community policing efforts and we will ensure that DC residents become MPD police officers.

The cadet program helps high school graduates become MPD recruits by coming right here to the University of the District of Columbia on a full scholarship while also working for MPD.

It allows us to recruit and retain high-quality officers, like Officer Pamela Garay, that already know DC and are invested in bettering the neighborhoods they come from and live in.

But no matter how talented our officers are, public safety is about more than just policing.

We know that, often times, violence has roots in trauma, addiction, and access to opportunity.

So my administration is committed to finding solutions to violence in tools that we used to reserve just for public health.

In October, we opened the new Safer Stronger DC Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement – affectionately known as the ONSE office. It is an outgrowth of Kenyan McDuffie’s NEAR Act.

Let’s give Kenyan McDuffie a hand.

Through this office, we are engaging directly with residents, who are caught up in violence, and meeting them wherever they are, whether they’re in their homes, on the streets, whether it’s night, or day or on the weekend, and whether they are ready for change, we go to them wherever they are to help them get a new start.

This team uses restorative justice principles to diffuse tensions and redirect violence before it ends in tragedy.

In my upcoming budget we will expand the office’s reach by funding partnerships with community-based non-profits that know our neighborhoods and know how violence in our neighborhoods can be prevented.

In just a few weeks, we will launch a partnership between MPD and the Department of Behavioral Health.

When police are called to respond to someone experiencing a mental health crisis, they will be able to respond with a mental health clinician.

And through this program, individuals in crisis will be treated and diverted, rather than arrested and detained.

And this is what public safety in 2018 should look like.

And we are proud to be at forefront of expanding how big cities think about and invest in keeping residents safe.

And it is not just public safety where we are leading the way on smarter solutions and more inclusive policies. We are also leading through our efforts to end chronic homelessness.

I ran for Mayor in 2014, the same year our city faced an immeasurable tragedy in the disappearance of young Relisha Rudd.

There are many unanswered questions about what happened to Relisha, but one thing we know for sure is that, today, she should doing things that little girls do in our city.

But she is not, because the system failed Relisha and we must never let a child fall through the cracks again.

So, coming into office, I promised we would close DC General and replace it with smaller, dignified programs throughout all eight wards that do more to support our most vulnerable families.

This year, we will make good on that commitment – DC General will close forever.

I know some people think that we’re moving too quickly, or that we’re only trying to free up land.

But let me say this and let me be clear, when it comes to closing DC General, we cannot move fast enough. That shelter is an embarrassment to our city, and I will not be the mayor who passes up on the opportunity to demolish it. That has been my plan since Day One and that is my plan still.

Our plan to make homelessness rare, brief, and nonrecurring is working.

Over the past three years we have prevented a shelter stay for more than 5,000 families. We increased investments in permanent supportive housing programs by nearly 60 percent. And we have connected 3,900 single adults to permanent supportive housing, including 1,700 Veterans.

Now this is good progress, but Councilmember Nadeau tells me always, it’s not enough, and we can and must do more to end chronic homelessness is our city. We know there is more work to do.

And at the end of the day, we know that the best way to end homelessness is by building and preserving affordable housing.

This year alone, we allocated $1 billion – and I repeat, $1 billion – to programs and efforts that will make living in the District more affordable for everyone.

From turning vacant properties into workforce housing and to providing property tax relief that will allow more of our seniors to age in place, we are laser-focused on housing.

Since 2015, we have delivered more than 5,300 units of affordable housing. And over the next five years we plan to deliver at least 10,000 more.

In the coming weeks, you will learn more about Roots to Roofs DC, a follow up to my African American prosperity initiatives and a renewed effort to connect residents new and old to the many housing programs we have available.

The idea behind this initiative is simple: As Washington, DC grows, we’re going to make room for everyone, especially our residents who put down roots long ago.

Councilmember Bonds has been a true, true champion of these efforts; and I want to thank you, Anita, for being the council member at-large for housing.

We all know that in a hot city like ours – one that encompasses a mere 68 square miles – solving the affordable housing challenge will require more thinking outside the box and more working together as a community.

While we continue to make unprecedented investments and design stronger policies, DC is going to continue to grow, so there is more work for all of us to do.

When we talk about housing, we also must talk about jobs.

Because, for most people, there is no one pathway to the middle class. There are many things that have to come together, and they must come together at the right time.

It’s not jobs or housing we’re talking about– it’s jobs and housing.

So we’re making sure Washingtonians have the skills and knowledge they need to fill the jobs our city’s growth is creating.

We are doing this by creating great programs like LEAP, and Career Connections, and ASPIRE.

We’re also improving Project Empowerment so it does a better job of giving our residents a second chance. That’s what Robert White and I talked about – how we give more DC residents a second chance.

And, as of this week, we are doing it through our new DC Infrastructure Academy.

Coming into office, I said we would launch a Public Works Academy in DC to prepare residents for jobs in infrastructure, one of the fastest growing industries in the nation. In Washington, DC, the average wage of someone working in infrastructure is $50 an hour or about $100,000 a year.

Unfortunately, what we saw in the past was about half of these jobs were going unfilled in our city.

So we moved forward with our plan to create a dedicated training facility to put DC residents in these DC jobs.

This week, Councilmember Silverman and Councilmember Trayon White, were with me in Ward 8, where we cut the ribbon on the DC Infrastructure Academy.

The Infrastructure Academy is a pathway to the middle class. An opportunity not to just get a job, but to build a career. Because that’s what we want for Washingtonians – not odd jobs, not sometimes jobs, but sustainable careers.

So I want to thank all the councilmembers for their support of this bold initiative.

We’re on the right track, but until every resident has a fair shot, there’s more work to do.

And while workforce development is a powerful tool to prepare Washingtonians for a successful career, we know that the most effective method for building a strong workforce is by developing a first-class public education system.

So in recent months, we know there have been bumps in the roads—frankly, there have been some pretty significant bumps in the road.

But now the band aid has been ripped off, and we understand – better than ever – the challenges we face.

Ten years ago we weren’t prepared to take on those challenges.

Back then, our city still struggled to open schools on time; our teachers had to create their own curricula, and students in DC struggled to keep up with their peers in other big cities.

But, today, things are different.

National assessments no longer show our students lagging behind their peers.

Our teachers have the tools and resources they need to teach.

We have thoughtful programs in place for supporting and developing educators at every level.

Family engagement is a top priority of teachers participating in home visits every summer.

And, when you visit classrooms across the city – you see engaged students, challenging content, and educators who are teaching with the passion and love that our students need and deserve.

In just the past year, we have launched Thrive by Five, MyChildcareDC, ensured that all of our neighborhood middle schools offer algebra and robust programming, added a new cohort at the Ron Brown College Preparatory High School, launched Reign: Empowering Young Women as Leaders, which will be able to expand next school year to take over a school for our girls called Excel.

And after five years with no contract, we finally reached an agreement with the Washington Teachers Union that significantly increases compensation for our educators.

So Councilmember David Grosso will tell you our teachers have one of the most challenging jobs in the city, and this new contract recognizes that and their great contributions to our young people.

Certainly, none of us are satisfied with where we are now, but because we have made this progress, we are better positioned to take on the tough challenges we face today.

I recognize that there is trust that needs to be rebuilt between our school system and parents, and systems of accountability and oversight that need to be reinforced and reviewed.

And under the leadership of interim Chancellor Amanda Alexander, who is with us tonight, we will finish this year strong and be ready to start the next one.

And, it’s not just our elementary, middle, and high schools that we’re looking out for.

As President Mason likes to say, Washington, DC doesn’t just have a pre-k3 through 12th grade public education system – but we have a pre-k3 through 16 and even law school and graduate school public education system.

In the upcoming budget, we are making our first installment in the UDC Equity Imperative, investing an additional $9.5 million in the University of the District of Columbia. We know that this additional investment will help President Mason, right size salaries, improve IT, but not just that.

We also know that the university needs to make a significant investment in its infrastructure, so that the air conditioning is on not when it’s cold, but when it’s hot.

So we will be providing an additional $132 million in capital funds to upgrade the facilities right here at UDC.

So remember Kooper?

Kooper has only three years until it’s time to enroll in prek3, and we were proud to present Kooper with a full ride to UDC when we met him at the hospital. So we’re looking forward to ensuring that all of our schools continue to improve for his family and the thousands of families who depend on our public schools each and every year.

When I ran for office in 2014, I knew that this job came with great responsibility.

But I ran because I wanted that responsibility. I didn’t run to warm this seat or to avoid tough decisions. I ran because I know the spirit of our city.

You know the spirit.

The spirit is the one that means we fight for what’s right.

It means we look out for our neighbors.

It means we believe in sometimes we fall down but we get back up – just like our Mayor for Life taught us.

And of calling out injustice when we see it, but never letting it stop us from achieving our dreams.

And to be able to represent these values, embodied in the people of Washington, DC.

I truly believe I have the best job in the world.

As I look at where Washington, DC stands – at our many successes and the work that is left to do, I am reminded of what Dr. King taught us:

He said that if you can’t fly then you must run. And if you can’t run then you must walk. And if you can’t walk then you must crawl.

But whatever you do, he said – keep moving. You have to keep moving forward.

I know that there are some days when it feels like we are crawling and days when we are flying. But, together, in all we do, we are moving forward.

So I want to thank President Ronald Mason and everybody here at UDC.

I want to thank the 30,000 people who work for all of us in DC Government.

They get up every single day. They deliver high quality services. And they take their jobs very seriously. And they take pride in what they do.

I want to thank all the Washingtonians who make Washington, DC the greatest city in the world.

There is no doubt about it – DC is doing well.

But, together, we are capable of so much more.

So, let’s stay focused, let’s keep moving forward, because if we all stick together, the best is yet to come.

May God bless you, and the District of Columbia.