In case you missed it, I wanted to share our State of the City with you.

Thank you to our sponsors, and our host—the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce. It was a wonderful event.

Hope everyone enjoyed our entertainment by Grady Spencer and Abraham Alexander! I thought we should shake up another chamber luncheon to showcase our terrific talent in Fort Worth…

Today’s event is a success because of the awesome Chamber staff led by Bill Thornton—thank you!

This is my 7th state of the city. Time flies when you are having fun! Someone recently told me that my energy is exhausting! I think that someone might have been my husband Tom Price! Thank you Tom for your support and love couldn’t do this without you… And special thanks to my entire family, many of them here today. Paul and Katie, Phillip and Katie and Katherine and Matt—and most important my five grandkids represented here today by Chappel and Price.

We have a special guest with us today—my friend, Mayor of Dallas, Mike Rawlings. Fort Worth is truly blessed with outstanding regional partners—thank you for your friendship!

Also need to recognize David Cooke and the city staff here today… And, a very special thanks to your City Council … Please stand… Appreciate your service and dedication…

**2017 Accomplishments**

Last year, we set our vision for 2025, on the screen here. We continue to focus on this vision. It’s a vision that will define Fort Worth, not only regionally—but across the United States and around the world! Before talking about what’s ahead as we continue to strive toward this vision, let me briefly discuss our progress in 2017.

First, we focused on targeting city investments to improve neighborhood vitality. We began with a $2.5 million investment in the Stop-Six neighborhood. We listened to residents, and we took action to enhance safety and quality of life—and it’s working! Thank you Councilwoman Gyna Bivens and our Neighborhood Services staff who led this charge. I’m proud to say we are now on to the next neighborhood! We’re working with Councilwoman Kelly Allen Gray to focus on the Ash Crescent neighborhood. The city is coming in with $2.7 million commitment. We will again work with the residents to use these funds in the best way possible.

We’re engaged in neighborhood vitality across the city, and part of that includes an emphasis on outdoor space. In Fort Worth, the Trinity River trail system is at the center, and with our partners like Streams and Valleys and TRWD, we are making connectivity better. We opened the Airfield Falls trailhead next to Tarrant County’s only natural waterfall. We re-opened the Cross Timber Trails and a gorgeous new boardwalk for the Fort Worth Nature Center. And for you golfers out there, we re-opened our Historic Rockwood Park Golf Course after a complete renovation. There’s no excuse not to get outside!

Second, we unveiled the city’s new development strategy to bring new investment and jobs where they are needed most. We found partners, like Raider Express and NT Windows. These companies and others are investing in our inner city. The River District off of White Settlement has many exciting things happening. And the progress along Race Street continues with the new the Criterion River East development. We also have the Connex Office Park off Evans Ave. It’s a zero energy building built entirely out of 40 shipping containers! David maybe we should look at that for a future city hall!

And, to the chagrin of the men in the audience, Clear Fork continues to up its game in high-end retail. Let me give the gentlemen in the audience a warning—a Neiman’s next to a Louis Vuitton is a dangerous thing!

Near Southside continues to grow beyond Magnolia, closer to downtown, strengthened by the Hemphill-Lamar connection that will open this year. Councilwoman Ann Zadeh, thank you for your leadership to make that project possible. And I know Councilman Carlos Flores is proud to see the success in the Stockyards continue. Even bigger things happening there in 2018!

Outside the loop, we can’t neglect to mention continued growth at Alliance—a global hub for business, logistics and technology. We continue to see building momentum for expansions feeding off the success of Facebook at Alliance. We also can’t forget the remarkable Walsh Ranch project that is at the cusp of something incredible. You really have to see it to believe it! And, likewise, the new development accompanying Tarleton is spectacular!

Third, one of the most important promises made was a renewed focus on education. Our students today will be our workforce and professionals tomorrow. I’d like to share a brief video to show you what I’m talking about.

How about that for inspiring?! I’ve had the opportunity to fly co-pilot in an F-16—and “Brick” is right—he really does have the coolest job! The fact is, the students in our elementary schools today have dreams too—maybe even to be Lockheed’s next test pilot! They can reach those aspirations, or even reach beyond their own imagination, but we have to be engaged!

To help ensure we have more success stories to talk about, we created Read Fort Worth in 2016, and it has taken off! Read Fort Worth is the collective impact effort – led with Superintendent Dr. Kent Scribner and BNSF Chairman Matt Rose and the Mayor’s office. It’s a public-private partnership with the mission to have 100 percent of third graders reading on grade level by 2025. We’re now have roughly 1,000 adult volunteers reading with our students. We’ve already seen a 4% gain in third grade reading.

Sounds great, right? It should! But y’all aren’t off the hook, folks! We still need you!

Outside of our reading initiative, Dr. Kent Scribner and his leadership team and the FWISD board have made huge system changes at FWISD with positive impact. This includes the successful turnaround underway at the 5 new Leadership Academies. The work at these academies is made possible through a grant from the Rainwater Foundation, showing just how important our private sector is to our public gains. Positive change is happening right now!

Two things I want this audience to remember: Kids spend a majority of their time outside of school …what we do as a community is critical! And we have MUST provide every child with a quality early learning environment. It is absolutely vital for child development … and Quality accessible childcare is a critical workforce issue. Statistics show that 62% of Texas moms are in the paid labor force, and their salary is often the sole source of income for their families. We have made great progress with FWISD’s Universal pre-k—this past fall, 95% of the available pre-k seats were filled.

But we can do more. Thanks to the Tarrant County Workforce Solutions and my friend Kara Waddell at Child Care Associates. We are expanding access to high-quality programs across Tarrant County. And we are also seeing the business community stepping up! UNT Health Science Center and Lena Pope Home recently announced a partnership to create onsite high-quality childcare for students and employees and the community. Dr. Williams and Todd, I can’t wait to come visit your school.

Many of you here are business owners or have significant influence in your companies. I call on each of you here today to think seriously about how your business is offering childcare for your employees. Supporting our public school students – along with early childhood development and higher education opportunities – has been and will remain a top priority for me. If you have a passion for our children—our future—I hope you will seek out ways to roll up your sleeves with us and get involved!

**2018 Priorities**

As you can see—we made great progress on our 2017 objectives, and this year we remain committed to our 2025 vision. So, let’s talk about what that means for 2018…

This year will continue to build on our momentum, with a particular focus on building on those things that help drive business and job opportunities. If you’ve paid attention to recent headlines you’ll remember the commentary about the risk of Fort Worth becoming a bedroom community to Dallas.

These headlines are not fake news—the threat is real.

But the threats outlined in this 500-page report doesn’t mean Fort Worth is doomed—far from it! I can stand here and confidently report to you that the state of our great city is STRONG!

People continue to flock to Fort Worth—we’re closing in on 900,000 residents fast! There’s an abundance of jobs in our region and outstanding education opportunities. Downtown Fort Worth continues to grow—with the Frost Tower being completed this spring. Trinity Park and Trail Drivers expansion is underway. Our world-class Fort Worth Zoo is undergoing a $100 million expansion.

Fort Worth remains a hot tourism destination—and the construction of our new Dickie’s Arena in the Cultural District will only add to the lure of Cowtown. A very special thanks to Event Facilities, Beck Construction, Councilman Dennis Shingleton, and Susan Alanis—for making this Arena possible!

And, our Trinity River Vision – Panther Island is truly taking shape – thank you Kay and TRWD!

Friends—there is so much to be thankful for…

On the other hand, while we have such great pride in our city — we have to also demonstrate the courage to look in the mirror and face those challenges that threaten our continued prosperity. In 2018, our focus will be addressing the challenges before us by:

* Executing our comprehensive strategy to attract and retain businesses of all sizes.
* Expanding transit options.
* Maintaining the safety of all Fort Worth neighborhoods.
* Addressing lingering fiscal challenges.
* And, very important to me—overcoming racial divides that threaten the very heart of what makes Fort Worth strong—it’s diversity.

First, let’s talk about our efforts to attract and retain businesses and create jobs. As our recent economic report noted—60% of residents in Fort Worth work outside the city limits. This is a problem, and we simply have to do a better job attracting businesses, and retaining those businesses.

Thanks to our Economic Development staff, and the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce—we are now clearly aligned with stretch goals to take us Fort Worth to the next level. Combined—these strategies are the blueprints to fortify Fort Worth’s corporate strategy and job market.

A lot goes into these blueprints, but a very significant piece is to ensure Fort Worth is top of mind for CEOs who are looking to relocate. We simply have to be proactive marketing campaign. Those of you who’ve started a business here, or got here as fast as you could—you understand the opportunity that abounds in Fort Worth.

Whether you’re American Airlines, or Red Productions that stated over at TechFW, who produced today’s videos—Fort Worth is a city where people turn passionate ideas into tangible business success!

I want to share a few of those stories with you…

Don’t we wish it was happy hour! In the words of Jimmy Buffet—it’s five o’ clock somewhere! Seriously, whether we’re talking about a small brewery or something as large as Miller—all of these businesses are important to Fort Worth’s long-term vitality. Looking at this year and beyond—Fort Worth is going to be clearly focused on attracting new businesses.

Along with our focused effort to attract good paying jobs, we must be better at attracting and developing our talent pool. In doing so, we have to think hard about attracting the next generation of workers. What’s important to millennials and Gen-Zs? These talented men and women are looking for cities that have:

* A sense of place – check!
* A high-energy urban lifestyle – check!
* A strong arts scene and a thriving creative class – check!
* A healthy city – check!

Fort Worth is a City Coming of Age—It’s a city that has seen remarkable change and evolution in the past several decades. I’m inspired by so many stories in Fort Worth from household names to emerging artists who turn their creativity into a thriving business. Let’s take a look at some of those stories…

Great stuff, right!? These creative businesses and organizations are an important part of the character of Fort Worth. The artists we invited to be a part of today’s luncheon represent the creative entrepreneurs who are daily waving the Fort Worth flag!

Next month, we are taking this show on the road, heading to South by Southwest in Austin! We’ve teamed up with the CVB, FW Chamber and Hillwood, to increase Fort Worth’s visibility. We are even taking Bell Helicopter’s prototype for Uber Elevate with us. South by Southwest is the perfect forum to showcase our creative talents and promote Funky Town — That’s Cowtown y’all — to a younger crowd.

This is Fort Worth … NOW!

Along with a thriving arts scene, I mentioned the importance of a healthy and active city. You’ve heard me go on and on about the success of our FitWorth and Blue Zone programs. These initiatives are working. This year, we had 1,500 teachers join the FitWorth fun… in addition to the 23,000 students who completed the challenge. We even added a reading component — and the students added 9 million minutes of reading!

Our healthy city initiatives are truly impacting lives and families for the better. And, this is not just about being skinny or completing an Ironman. Although you could always jump out there and join the 2nd Annual Tri Fort Worth May 20! … Or the Mayor’s Tri in July! Truly—it’s about making the choice to live a healthier life the easy choice.

And we had one missing piece to become a Blue Zones community, which we took care of at the end of 2017. Fort Worth finally became a fully smoke-free community! A huge thanks to Barclay Berdan, THR and business owners for their leadership on this issue.

Now, let’s talk about mobility in Fort Worth. This is an issue not only important to millennials—but to all of us! It’s obviously an important consideration for any business leader looking to relocate. As you know, giving citizens more transportation options has been one of my top priorities since being elected—and it still is!

We’ve made great progress. We have new major highways, and I-35 north of downtown is getting very close. A new Active Transportation Plan is currently under development that will help make it more convenient and safer to walk and bike throughout the city. Our efforts are even getting noticed by organizations like AARP, which recently designated Fort Worth as an “Age Friendly Community.” The first in Texas—I might add!

But, truly addressing the gridlock on our streets and highways will require better public transit! I’m very excited that our partners at Trinity Metro expect to have TexRail running by the end of this year. Remember, I promised to be riding the rails with you on New Year’s Eve for a champagne toast!

TexRail is a great start for commuter rail. But we must be more innovative… We must be more creative… We must think bigger… We must be thinking about how to design the multi-modal, fixed-route transit system of the future. A more comprehensive and convenient bus transit service is part of that—but that’s only part of the solution. We also need to be thinking well into the future. And we need to be thinking about things like on-demand transit, smart ride-share or even autonomous vehicles!

Not only does this system need to serve our most underserved communities — but it needs to also be a quality, convenient and reliable service for everyone. I recently had the opportunity to attend meetings at the White House related to the Administration’s plans for infrastructure. I’m energized by the opportunities to leverage both public and private dollars to support a new vision for infrastructure and mobility options.

But, we can’t fix our transit issues with a blank check. We have to think strategically — not just considering the needs of Fort Worth — but the needs of Tarrant County and the needs of our region. A successful fixed-route transit system is one that spans our region—ignoring city limit signs. Quality infrastructure greatly impacts quality of life.

In May, we’ll be asking voters to support a $400 million bond package. Although 65% of the bond package will support streets and mobility improvements—it will also include community centers, libraries, parks and trail improvements. It’s a carefully planned package, and just like we promised with the 2014 bond, we will deliver these projects on time and on budget.

Another significant factor in attracting and retaining businesses is reliable public safety services…

Today, Fort Worth is one of the safest large cities in the U.S. I’m very proud that we’ve now completed the Patrol Division realignment. This will help us maintain optimal police coverage and improve response times. This realignment included the groundbreaking for our new North Division police station. Councilmember Moon, I know you and the citizens of far north Fort Worth were especially excited about this opening.

Police Chief Fitzgerald and his team continue to work hard to strengthen relationships between his officers and the communities they have sworn to protect. And the new crisis intervention team to hopefully prevent tragedies like Parkland Florida. Our hearts and prayers are with our friends in Florida today.

This is very important work, and we will continue to stay engaged and watch this closely. Our police department also has stepped up its efforts to be a strong partner in neighborhood revitalization – like those efforts in the Las Vegas Trail area, being led by Councilman Brian Bird.

Fire safety is just as important as police protection to our businesses and our citizens. Thanks to Chief Rudy Jackson’s leadership, Fort Worth Fire was recently classified as a Class 1 department because of its excellent and consistent response times. This means our residents enjoy lower home insurance rates. And we just opened Fire Station #42 at Spinks Airport in Councilmember Jungus Jordan’s district.

I’m sad to say that Chief Jackson retires next month after 35 years with Fort Worth Fire. Rudy is a tireless champion for this community … he leads with humility and respect for the men and women who protect us every day. Rudy, please stand and be recognized…

Rudy, we will dearly miss you at the helm, but we are also incredibly thankful for your service to the people and businesses of our great city!

Now, to change gears here, businesses are also looking to move to a fiscally healthy city. And, the financial health of Fort Worth is just as important to us as taxpayers. We’ve made such remarkable progress on the financial front over the last several years.

Thanks to the leadership of your City Council and with David Cooke’s relentless focus, we’ve lowered the property tax rate by 5 cents in two years! We can be very proud of that! However, while City Hall is doing a great job of stretching every tax dollar—there is still more we can do. Fort Worth must have a competitive tax policy that is attractive for businesses, both large and small.

Here’s what’s concerning me…Our current tax base is 60% residential and 40% commercial.

Residential uses dominate the tax base—that gets to the heart of us becoming a bedroom community. This must change.

I believe our new economic strategies will help to continue to turn the tides and alleviate the burden on homeowners. With the right tax policy, Fort Worth will be more competitive with our friends in Frisco and Plano as companies relocate to DFW.

Another significant obstacle on the financial front is the city’s pension fund. We didn’t create this problem — but we’re sure going to fix it — and we’re going to fix it locally!

Six years ago, we made some tough decisions to help improve the pension’s financial position. Those were good decisions, but as the years have passed, it’s clear that more must be done. Currently, the pension’s unfunded liability stands at $1.6 billion. What that means is that, without action, this fund runs out of money by 2050.

This is not just about protecting our employees’ future retirement plans—it’s also about protecting taxpayers and maintaining critical city services. We’ve established a new Pension Task Force, led by David Cooke with representation from all employee stakeholder groups. But we have to be honest — solving this issue and protecting the long-term sustainability of the city’s pension fund will require sacrifice. That means employees contributing more to their retirement and potentially the city contributing more also. That means adjustments to current benefit structure. And, we will be very focused on protecting taxpayers, who already contribute greatly to the pension.

David Cooke and the task force expects to bring the council a resolution this spring to bring final resolution to our pension shortfalls.

Now, let’s talk inclusivity. As you know, Fort Worth is an extremely diverse city. We are a city of different backgrounds, experiences, and ideas that makes a city stronger! However, when portions of our community don’t believe they have a voice. If they feel opportunity has passed them by, a divide can begin to grow.

We’d be fooling ourselves to ignore the fact that disparities still exist across our country—and Fort Worth is not immune. I know this Council is committed to doing whatever it takes to heal those divides. These challenges aren’t solved with a top-down approach — This is a community issue that requires community-driven solutions.

To that end, we formed the Race and Culture Task Force to host this dialogue. I greatly appreciate our friend Estrus Tucker agreeing to facilitate these conversations, along with our four co-chairs: Rabbi Andrew Bloom, Lillie Biggins, Bob Ray Sanders and Rosa Navejar. These chairs appointed another 21 task force members to help lead the discussion.

The task Force is taking significant public input and working with subject matter experts to assess ethnic disparities from criminal justice…to jobs…to housing and more… We are not trying to solve the world’s problems here – but I believe we can make progress to close divides by listening with open hearts and minds. I’ll be looking for a report with actionable solutions for Fort Worth.

Apart from the deliverables from our task force, it’s my prayer that our Country’s leaders will truly open their hearts and minds to compromise, collaboration — and most of all — compassion. I’m especially concerned about serving the needs of our Hispanic and other immigrant communities. I know our police department is taking steps to alleviate fear in these communities. But I hope that all of you will join me in expressing support for national immigration reform at the national level that prioritizes families, and works to find a responsible solution for DACA residents who deserve legal status.

These are incredibly difficult issues, but I — and our entire City Council — remain committed to seeing things change for the better. Speaking of compassion, we also remain committed to addressing the growing issue of homelessness in Fort Worth. Each night, there are hundreds living in our emergency shelters, under bridges or other locations across Fort Worth. Even more difficult to imagine is that 20 percent of those homeless in Fort Worth are children.

Over the past decade we’ve kept homeless numbers stable despite the population boom. But we haven’t achieved our goal to make homelessness rare, short term and non-recurring in Fort Worth. Over the past several months, we’ve taken important action on a number of fronts.

First, we’re reorganized the Continuum of Care Board to give local elected officials more input on homeless system funding and priorities. Secondly, we restructured the City’s Direction’s Home funds to include a Permanent Supportive Housing Investment Fund and dedicated $170,000 to move homeless veterans into housing.

We will continue to watch this issue closely and remain committed to extending a helping hand to lift up those less fortunate.

Let me say one more thing here before I close. VOTE. Early voting started TODAY … and Election Day is March 6. We must be educated and engaged, folks. We must be a part of the process! The primaries are incredibly important!

**Closing**

Accomplishing our 2025 vision depends on the hard work we do in 2018. We will:

* Execute our strategy to attract and retain businesses
* Continue to push hard for expanded transit options
* Protect the safety of our neighborhoods
* Overcome those tough fiscal challenges
* Achieve greater unity across our diverse communities
* Partner with our legislative delegation so they understand the importance of local control

Friends, Fort Worth is still a city full of dreams and opportunity—a City Coming of Age. Our responsibility and our focus must be to ensure that opportunity is available across every ZIP code, ever race and every gender.

I’m very excited about the promise of Fort Worth’s future, and I’m humbled by your trust in me to continue serving our city as your Mayor.

Since being elected, I’ve traveled far and wide — often with my good friend Mayor Rawlings — to spread the good news about Fort Worth and our region. We’ve seen a lot of innovative things and brought back a lot of ideas and opportunities for our cities. But no matter where I go — I’m always looking back to returning to Fort Worth — my home town. You heard it in Grady’s lyrics … and I think he had it right — “So bless my Soul, and take me back to Fort Worth!”

Thank you everyone!

Full video of the 2018 Fort Worth State of the City address.