*Following is the text of Mayor Harp’s prepared remarks..*

Good evening, everybody. Thank you for attending tonight’s special occasion and thank you for making me feel so welcome in this chamber. I’m grateful for your interest in the state of the city we serve, and the community we share. It’s my pleasure to provide this annual assessment, in accordance with the City Charter.

Madam President, other leaders and members of the Board of Alders, members of New Haven’s legislative delegation, other distinguished city residents, special guests, friends, and neighbors: I’m once again honored by this opportunity to address you this evening.

Madam President, congratulations on your re-election last month to the board’s top leadership position. I join all residents with gratitude for your steadfast, ongoing service to the city, and the time you take attending to board business. Likewise, I congratulate the remainder of the board’s leadership team: Alders Morrison, Greenberg, Furlow, Reyes, Colon, and Clyburn.

Please know how much I appreciate the productive, working relationship my administration enjoys with all of you Alders – and how much the city and its residents depend upon it. Working together, we will continue moving New Haven forward.

With that said, it is difficult to understate the new challenges we face, through which New Haven is called upon to persevere.

One year ago, as this new landscape was just beginning to emerge, I described it as follows:

‘(This is) a time when the bedrock of the entire Republic is trembling, while the basic decency at the core of a society reliant upon the rule of law is shaken, when so many cherished American values, traditions, and *people* are being threatened.’

I’m not sure any of us could have predicted at that time the full extent to which we would be dealing with such a dramatically altered political, social, and economic landscape one year later.

In that context, tonight, I would describe the state of New Haven as *resistant* to these frightening trends in this nation toward what would be a new normal – a Republic, a state, and a civic life so different as to be unrecognizable to most of us.

New Haven is *resistant* to these would-be, new standards not for the sake of being contrary, and not because it’s stylish or politically correct to be, but because these new standards are contrary to the best interests of this city, its residents, and its future.

To begin with, consider New Haven’s resistance to a current trend toward isolation, both internally and externally. Last September, when Puerto Rico was literally demolished by Hurricane Maria, there was every indication the island would be left isolated, set adrift to flounder in its own debris.

Truth be told, after hearing recent debriefings from members of the state’s Congressional delegation, there is every indication that ‘hands off’ approach remains the preferred approach of this administration.

But last September New Haven went to work: throughout its public schools, through its police and fire departments, and through community groups concerned about the well-being of Puerto Rico’s residents – and the peace of mind of family members in both places.

Tens of thousands of dollars was raised, to go along with tons of medical supplies, household supplies, and clothing, all to reaffirm the connection between this city and that commonwealth – and the people of each.

And hundreds of hurricane evacuees have since come to New Haven for refuge.

All those involved in all these efforts are to be commended tonight for their kindness and generosity.

On another front, again, bound and determined to *resist*an inclination in Connecticut to pit one city against another, or to cast rural and suburban areas against the state’s urban centers, New Haven this year pooled its resources with Bridgeport and towns surrounding each city to prepare a competitive bid to become Amazon’s second North American headquarters.

Despite Amazon’s recent decision to exclude the New Haven – Bridgeport collaborative from a list of finalists, I remain willing to match greater New Haven’s talent pool, market accessibility, quality of life, and cultural amenities with literally any other American city. With cooperation, rather than isolation as a watchword, South-central Connecticut is going to lead the state and the region through the 21st century.

It’s just too bad it now seems Amazon won’t be part of that excitement.

With regard to development projects that ARE going forward, New Haven has proven *resistant* to bureaucratic red tape, delays, and favoritism in its permitting process to keep it transparent, timely, and consistent. The result is a favorable building climate in which more than 1,000 housing units have come online, with an additional 1,000 or so set to get started in the next few months.

This helps New Haven resist the population decline and brain drain so many other cities are up against. I would add: this productivity is underway while New Haven remains steadfastly resistant to providing subsidies or property tax giveaways in these projects. Private investment continues to fuel this city’s economic surge.

And not at the expense of residents of lesser means, either. The Hill, Dixwell, and Newhallville sections of town are also home to new and planned mixed-income and renovated housing. Elm City Communities continues a most impressive overhaul of its housing stock citywide, and my administration is making steady progress toward new development at Church Street South as well.

In other, more routine housing news, New Haven remains resistant to absentee property owners and predatory landlords. Literally, hundreds of thousands of dollars were made available last year through down payment, energy efficiency, and elderly and disabled loan programs to encourage local home ownership, owner occupancy, and to help vulnerable residents keep and stay in their homes.

Also in terms of economic development, this city continues to resist any notion that big ideas are too much to handle in challenging times. The new Boathouse at Canal Dock, a major redesign for the rest of Long Wharf, and continuing progress on Downtown Crossing reaffirm this. Phase 2 of Downtown Crossing will get started this year, continuing the process of stitching back together parts of town that were unduly separated generations ago.

In terms of contract compliance on all these big-ticket projects, my administration *resisted* any temptation to abandon the Commission on Equal Opportunities and chose re-staffing and revitalizing its operation instead. The result is a 21st century, Web-based compliance system in which transparency, efficiency, consistency, and adherence to the law characterize its robust operation.

To give you a better idea: in 2017, 52 construction projects and their 109 contracts came under CEO jurisdiction – combined, they’re worth some 142 million dollars. With renewed, fortified oversight, those 52 projects hired a workforce that was 51.3 percent African-American and Hispanic, and 5.5 percent female.

And along these lines, this might be the right time to share how New Haven is*resistant* to big-picture employment trends that have the potential to put other communities back on their heels. Just so you know, according to the state Department of Labor, New Haven’s unemployment rate when I first took office was 10.3%. It now stands at 5.1%.

Small business development continues at the city’s Opportunity Center on Dixwell Avenue, where my administration encourages start-up owners and entrepreneurs to resist going it alone, providing instead strategic, practical, and financial advice and guidance.

And in this, the city won’t go it alone, either. Powerhouse firms like Goldman Sachs and Bloomberg Philanthropies help underwrite financial empowerment classes and a new executive training program for city residents. In fact, on March first, representatives from Goldman Sachs will be in town to introduce that MBA-type training to several dozen business owners already cleared for its first phase.

For other small and fledgling local businesses, New Haven helps owners resist a daunting consumer trend toward online shopping and e-commerce. For example, a pop-up, Holiday Village on Orange Street gave local artisans and others a bricks ‘n’ mortar retail presence this past shopping season, providing them the extra value of New Haven’s unassailable, seasonal appeal.

New Haven offers a helping hand to residents who aren’t necessarily in business, too, resisting a trend in some government circles to neglect or abandon the aged, the vulnerable, and those who simply can’t keep up. Social services for veterans, the elderly, the formerly incarcerated, the homeless, the disabled, the addicted, and the mentally ill seem to fall increasingly on the shoulders of local providers, as federal and state support dwindles.

Going forward, New Haven must resist the temptation to follow suit: in my opinion, a community is measured by the care it provides for those who cannot provide – or speak up – for themselves. Tonight, I’m pleased to say that in this regard, New Haven continues to measure up.

The same is true more broadly in terms of healthcare. In the face of recurrent efforts to undermine the nation’s healthcare system and isolate its services among the well-financed or well-connected, the City of New Haven stands resistant.

This year, the city’s health department provided services to nearly 23,000 students in New Haven Public Schools’ 53 facilities. For the general public, more than 2,000 flu shots have been administered in the face of this year’s, particularly onerous strain.

And at the risk of abandoning another nearly forgotten, vulnerable population, health outcomes for nearly 2,500 HIV-positive patients in the area remain among the best of any service area in the nation.

The city’s Department of Elderly Services continues its good work, resisting society’s trend to disregard and overlook its clients: the aged and infirm among us. Renovations are ongoing at three senior centers, special grants were received to provide meals and other assistance, and the department continues its vigorous advocacy for thousands of seniors, administering popular rent rebate and tax relief programs.

At the other end of the age spectrum, New Haven Public Schools continues providing for the academic needs of its students, and to an ever-increasing extent, for the social and emotional needs of students as well. This again flies in the face of national trends to undermine public education and isolate among the elite its potential, and its proven benefits.

Higher enrollment and attendance, dramatically improved graduation rates and improving SBAC scores make New Haven Public Schools an urban school district on the rise. Likewise, School Change 2.0 is bearing fruit with more Advanced Placement opportunities and participation, higher college enrollment rates, and improved college retention rates.

Trauma-informed, wraparound services for New Haven students help address other needs beyond academic instruction, and Restorative Practices are now engaged in disciplinary matters. Again, the positive results are extraordinary: absenteeism is lower across-the-board in grades K – 12, suspensions have been greatly reduced, and expulsions, which had been averaging around 85/year, have now become a rarely implemented option.

Going forward, new members on the board of education, new board leadership, and a new district superintendent signal a new day absent the rancor and upheaval that seemed to characterize board-level operations this past couple of years.

The city’s public library system continues providing educational opportunities of its own, seizing the opportunity to expand the ‘bookish’ aspect of its mission. More than a half-million guests physically visited its five branches last year, and more than 200,000 additional ‘visits’ were logged through the broadband and wi-fi access it sends into the five nearby neighborhoods.

Successful library initiatives like ‘Build a Better World’ and ‘The Big Read’ encourage community not just in a literal sense, but lend themselves to communities of thought, and ideas, and action. In this way, the New Haven Free Public Library helps resist a trend in our culture away from intellectual pursuits, and we should all be very proud of that.

If you’ll allow this brief, ‘commercial’ reminder: the NHFPL Foundation’s Stetson Campaign is ongoing, through which philanthropic support for the new Stetson Branch is encouraged – and necessary – to ensure first-rate library facilities after it is built and open for patrons.

Aspirations toward more lofty pursuits are evident throughout the city’s Arts, Culture, and Tourism Department as well, lending credence to an institutional resistance in New Haven to the crassness and vulgarity of reality TV, some current pop culture – and some national leaders, for that matter.

The cultivation of a cultured community is a time-honored process, steadfastly honored here in New Haven throughout the city’s history. A few months ago, a mutually respectful, productive relationship of more than 100 years was celebrated when a delegation from Changsha-Hunan, China visited, and a formal, Sister City signing ceremony took place. In another vein, later this year, the New Haven Symphony Orchestra will celebrate 125 years of its stirring performances of classically timeless music.

And New Haven is active on the cutting edge of the creative arts, as well.

This week, Long Wharf Theater will host the final performances in its collaboration with Sandy Hook Promise to explore – through a high-impact, high-drama play – the grim reality of gun violence in America. And in April, New Haven will host the world premiere of a feature-length, animated film about ‘Sergeant Stubby,’ a New Haven dog smuggled to Europe in World War I, who became a real-life battlefield hero and the mascot for 26th Division troops.

As an aside, a formal ceremony on the New Haven Green is planned this fall to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the start of World War I, and New Haven’s considerable role in that conflict.

In terms of New Haven’s modern-day, ‘para’ military operations, the city’s police and fire departments continue to shine, generating in me – and in each of us, I’m sure – as much pride in New Haven as their respective uniforms do in the men and women who wear them.

The police department gets high marks and rave reviews for another year of steadily decreasing crime rates. The seven reported homicides in 2017 were the fewest in more than 50 years; all other major crime statistics for 2017 reflect comparably favorable trends.

I would also commend the police department for its launch of a comprehensive body-camera and video recording program, resisting the temptation to be anything but forthright and forthcoming about its operations. I’ll also credit the Board of Alders for its part in the $779,000 grant the city received to underwrite the purchase of the 800 cameras necessary to implement this modern-day policing program.

In the Fire Department, a couple dozen timely promotions filled upper-level command positions and contributed to an estimated 75 percent reduction in fire department overtime costs this year. The staff changes also allowed for the subsequent promotion of 35 firefighters to those vacated, first-rung officer positions.

And I would commend the fire department for its 155th anniversary awards ceremony last fall, at which awards and honors were presented for outstanding performance of duty for the first time since 2002.

Can we pause for a moment to appreciate the dedication, training, and professionalism the city’s police officers and firefighters bring to the job 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year? It’s an extraordinary commitment – one we must absolutely resist taking for granted.

Transitioning from protecting life and property to maintaining and upgrading the city’s infrastructure, once again New Haven is resistant to the status quo, and any temptation to be satisfied with it. The city’s Department of Public Works has engaged more and more Web-based, text, and e-mail interactions with residents to streamline its service and improve accountability.

To put numbers on this, more than half of 4,200 special issues logged last year were recorded through See, Click, Fix or on the city’s Web site; routine matters like street sweeping and paving schedules, and refuse collection changes are now more efficiently handled by text, e-mail, and automated phone calls as well.

The Information Technology Department finalized its Wi-Fi on the Green project last year, and also completed a comprehensive, years-in-the-making overhaul of the city’s Web site. Now thousands of people have convenient use of Wi-Fi on the Green, especially useful during special events, and during just one week last month, a quick review of the city’s new Web site documented nearly 8,000 Website users in that one week span.

The parks ‘n’ rec department is also resistant to business as usual, upgrading favorite sites around town with a new, portable stage for summer events, a new pier under construction at Fort Nathan Hale Park, a refurbished Coogan Pavilion, and plans for a new ice rink, to the delight, next year, of skaters citywide.

The engineering department gets credit for completing the Q River Seawall in Fairhaven, bridge work on the Grand Avenue, Chapel Street, and Wilmot Road spans, and imminent completion of a new, long-awaited, indoor, police department firing range on Wintergreen Avenue.

Beyond that, ongoing traffic calming, bioswale, and energy efficiency improvements enhance public safety, quality of life, and other amenities across town.

And no assessment of the state of ‘this’ city would be complete without acknowledging the city’s Office of Corporation Counsel, for protecting the city’s legal flank in general, and more specifically, for keeping the owner’s feet to the fire regarding clean-up of the former English Station power plant property.

Corporation Counsel also helped resist a major setback after unfortunate circumstances prompted a mid-stream transition of architectural services for the development of the new Q House. I’m delighted to say the city remains on schedule for that Q House construction to begin this spring.

There’s one last element of New Haven’s resistance I want to describe to you tonight: a resistance across all city departments to operate in silos, as they say – to work insularly and independently on projects in their purview – at the expense of moving the city forward with a larger, more comprehensive effort.

You might recall the first interdepartmental neighborhood sweep last fall – through Newhallville, as it happened. That two-day, exhaustive inspection helped document issues of public safety, public health, code violation, infrastructure improvement, and a list of other things that crossed departmental jurisdiction, and instead called for mitigation of these issues through interdepartmental cooperation.

I’m so grateful to the city’s department heads for embracing the strategy; I’m pleased to say that trial was a tremendous success.

Going forward, once the weather breaks, more neighborhoods will host these sweeps, and New Haven will continue resisting the temptation to compartmentalize issues – instead focusing on the matter to be addressed rather than simply assigning another department’s responsibility for it.

All of what I’ve described here tonight, and so much additional progress we’re making, reflects an undeniable spirit of collaboration in New Haven that makes us resistant to the petty, parochial gamesmanship and defensiveness that undermines progress in other communities – and has the potential to do so here.

In New Haven, elected officials, city workers, residents, volunteers, students, immigrants, and a host of other city partners make this a vibrant, attractive city, committed to its better days ahead. New Haven is resistant – and will continue to resist – a laundry list of frightful trends in America.

Perhaps most frightening among them is a deliberate attempt by some in this nation to deny benefits of the American dream – safety, security, education, healthcare, opportunity – to any number of Americans for completely arbitrary and unjustifiable reasons.

As I complete my assessment of New Haven this year, and as I assess the state of other cities nearby and frankly, across the nation, there isn’t a city I envy, there isn’t a city I’d rather serve as mayor, and there isn’t a community of people I’d rather be with as we tackle a daunting agenda under these current, challenging circumstances.

I’ll close now with thoughts I shared last year, because they remain true in my heart and to my way of thinking, and because they remain apropos a full year later.

‘Never more so than tonight, I am honored and blessed to be mayor of this great city. I am proud and grateful to lead a government and city staff that serves residents, businesses, colleges, universities, non-profit organizations, visitors, and others, regardless of skin tone, national heritage, cultural background, language spoken, economic standing, religious affiliation, or sexual preference.’

And now may God *continue* to bless this great city with the strength and perseverance necessary to resist popular trends, human frailty, and individual weaknesses that would otherwise undermine its continuing collaboration, productivity, and progress.

Thank you very much.