

Transcript

2019 State of the City Address – City of Rochester, New York

Delivered by Mayor Lovely Warren

April 23, 2019 at Enrico Fermi School 17, 158 Orchard St.

Good evening and thank you all.

What a fantastic job by our School 17 students. Your warm welcome and your songs tonight were just awesome. We are all so inspired, and energized, by you and your enthusiasm. I'm so thankful to you and your families for joining us tonight. Let's give these students another big round of applause!

I want to acknowledge my makeup artist, Desmoni Meeks, a very talented 14-year-old student from the School of the Arts. Didn't she do a fabulous job?

And, thanks to Principal Caterina Mannino for your kind introduction. I'm so grateful to you and your tremendous team for hosting us.

Thanks also to my friends and colleagues on City Council, under the leadership of Council President Loretta Scott. I am grateful for our partnership as we chart our city's course together.

I would also like to thank our elected officials, members of my administration and other dignitaries who were introduced by our Deputy Mayor James Smith.

As always, I'm thankful for the love and support I get from my husband Tim and my daughter Taylor. Thank you both for putting up with the demands of my job.

And also thanks to both the McClary and Granison families, who've been so supportive. When they say "it takes a village" – you are my village.

I brought you together tonight to tell you all a story. It is a sad story. But it is a story of despair turned into hope. It is the story of Enrico Fermi School 17 and the creation of the JOSANA neighborhood. And when I'm done telling you this story, I hope you'll see why I brought you to this school, to this moment in time, to hear it. Just as it is the story of the JOSANA neighborhood, it is also a story of Rochester. It is the state of our city.

It is the story of these children – who are not just our future, but our right now. It begins with a young man who lived right here in this neighborhood. A young man full of hope and promise. A young man who was recognized as a model citizen because he wanted to make a difference in his community. A young man who was the apple of his family's eyes.

It happened right here, around the corner. On a hot July night. He would have started fourth grade that September. But, tragedy struck and he never did. Had this tragedy never happened, he would be turning 28, graduated from college or serving in the military, living his best life.

Unfortunately, we will never know the promise of Tyshaun Cauldwell's life because he was murdered at the age of ten -- shot down -- right in front of his home. Not too far from the watchful eye of his mother. Whose cries of pain and hurt motivated a community through its outrage.

Outrage is defined as an extremely strong reaction of shock, anger or indignation. This community was outraged. But they turned their outrage and shock into a spark for change. Turned their anger into action. Turned indignation into inspiration. It allowed them to see the fear, neglect and hopelessness through the eyes of their children.

From their despair, they created a beacon of hope that started right here at School 17, with the help of then-Principal Ralph Spezio. As Tyshaun's spirit watched over them, they started a movement. Tyshaun's mother Charlotte is here with us tonight.

Charlotte, I want you to know that Tyshaun's death, and the hope he inspired, was not in vain. He gave a gift from his very soul that our community will never forget. Charlotte, you gave the memory of your child, a child lost too soon, to this community – a community that would become known as the JOSANA neighborhood. And that's why, in his honor, I'm proposing that we rename the newly-renovated Campbell Street R-Center -- the Tyshaun Cauldwell R-Center for Hope.

JOSANA saw Tyshaun's death as their rock-bottom moment – and started a movement to transform a community through leadership. Through planning. Through activism. Through partnerships with the City and community organizations like Charles Settlement House. They demanded change, and together they developed the JOSANA Master Plan to guide that change. At the center of that plan, was School 17. And, now we are seeing the results.

Crime is down 30 percent in this neighborhood. Many of the old, lead-poisoned houses have been torn down and replaced. Almost 200 new homes are being built by our community partners at Cornerstone Development and Flower City Habitat for Humanity. Family incomes are going up. The poverty rate is going down. The vibrancy and vitality of this neighborhood is changing. But, most importantly, the students at School 17 have shown, with support, leadership and inclusion, they can and will rise.

Average daily attendance is at 90 percent. Suspensions are down 89 percent. Violent and disruptive incidents have been reduced by 94 percent. The school is safer and academic performance is rising. After being placed on the State's receivership list, this school turned it around. And, met 83 percent of its improvement goals for NY State, including in math for grades 3 through 8. And in science and English and language arts for all grades, a fitting tribute to the school's namesake, renowned physicist Enrico Fermi.

By working with parents as true partners; by forging relationships with community organizations; with the support of the Farash Foundation and the support of the City of Rochester; with help for families from Charles Settlement House and CCSI. With everyone working together and focusing on the needs of students, under the leadership Principal Mannino and her team, School 17 will come off of the receivership list on July 1! My birthday!

Their success is an inspiration, not just for our schools, but for all of Rochester. For our entire community. School 17 and JOSANA are beacons of hope, showing us that we can come together and overcome any challenge we face.

Since I became Mayor, more than five years ago, I've strived to confront three challenges: creating more jobs, safer and more vibrant neighborhoods and better educational opportunities. Three goals to accomplish one mission: To give every person in our city. Every. Single. Person. An opportunity to succeed in life. An opportunity to achieve genuine equality through social and economic equality.

In my inauguration speech, I said that we would transform our city into a living example of the unfinished legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Rochester's own Joseph C. Wilson. As Dr. King said in one of his final speeches, "For we know now that it isn't enough to integrate lunch counters. What does it profit a man to be able to eat at an integrated lunch counter if he doesn't have enough money to buy a hamburger and a cup of coffee?"

Economic and social equality are the foundations of genuine equality. Genuine equality is the foundation of hope. And every man, woman and child in Rochester deserves to have hope. They deserve to believe that tomorrow will be better than today.

I understand that it is a difficult task. And that the mission of equality seems insurmountable when we have to overcome entrenched poverty, institutional racism, misogyny, bigotry and hate. But it can be accomplished. I know it can be done. I know we can change. We've seen it done before. Right here at this school. Right here in this neighborhood. Don't get me wrong. Our work in this neighborhood and this school is far from over.

But, they are a beacon of hope! The success we've seen here tells us that the community schools model is working, not just for this school but for the neighborhood that surrounds it and we must replicate this beacon in other parts of our city. It must be used as a model for other schools in our community.

This model of merging academic and social supports for families is working at every school that deploys these pillars of hope. Like East High, the RISE school, School of the Arts, School 58 and the work that Connected Communities is doing. They're bright spots throughout our entire city.

But a student's success should not be determined by what school they attend or what neighborhood they live in. Every school and every neighborhood should be designed to meet the needs of the children and their families regardless of their income. Just like School 17 and JOSANA, all of Rochester deserves change.

We are working hard to bring that change, to shine brightly so that everyone has a beacon to follow in our pursuit of genuine equality through more jobs, safer/more vibrant neighborhoods and better educational opportunities. I can't think of many things that create more hope than a good-paying job. And, we are making progress on this front.

Our annual unemployment rate in Rochester is at its lowest point in 10 years.

We recognize that our citizens want more than a job. They want careers that they can be proud of. Our young professionals are finding new life in the Downtown Innovation Zone, which is now home to more than 170 creative-class companies. Our Downtown is the largest employment center between New York City and Buffalo, attracting companies like Datto, Live Tiles and Brand

Networks. It is attracting the next generation of innovators from our 19 colleges and universities, including our budding video game industry. Like the RIT students who created the new video game called Crazy Platez, inspired by our very own Nick Tahou garbage plate.

Sparkling the entrepreneurial spirit and a small business ecosystem is at the forefront of helping our children and families succeed. With the help of our State and Congressional representatives, we will open The Commissary at Sibley Square as an incubator to create jobs in the food industry.

We created the Office of Community Wealth Building to help our citizens gain a better understanding of, and connect to the resources generated by the three pillars of our emerging knowledge economy: government, industry and higher education.

Just recently, MIT professors Jonathan Gruber and Simon Johnson wrote a book entitled “Jump-Starting America” that identifies Rochester out of 102 cities as the number one city for future job growth in science and technology. Professor Gruber said, “Rochester has a large and highly educated workforce, a fantastic university base and a high quality of life, making it an ideal candidate to become a next-generation technology hub.”

We can be the next Silicon Valley, Boston or North Carolina’s Research Triangle, creating social and economic equality for all of our citizens.

And to make sure nobody gets left behind by that growth—that we have true economic equality—we will continue to build on the success of programs like Kiva. Kiva Rochester is our micro-lending program, one of the most successful in the country. If you’ve had coffee at Fuego or the Coffee Connection, gotten a table at James Brown’s Place on Culver, had a burger at Zoc’s or bought flowers from the Flower Girl Sophia Billotti, then you’ve seen our Kiva loans in action.

To date, Kiva Rochester has funded 76 loans, totaling nearly \$400,000 dollars. 50 percent of these loans have gone to women and 75 percent to people of color.

Our citizens are recognizing needs in the community and turning them into opportunities to start businesses and create jobs. Entrepreneurs, like Rosa Marie Curtis. Ms. Curtis is the owner of Marvelous Minds Academy and with the help of her Kiva loan, she is starting a venture to provide childcare to families that work evenings or overnight shifts. As a mother, I find comfort in

knowing that my daughter Taylor is safe while I'm at work. Other mothers and fathers that have to work late into the evening or overnight deserve that same peace of mind. Ms. Curtis is here tonight. Let's give her a big round of applause for seeing a need and stepping up.

At their heart, jobs change lives. Sadly, because we are now dealing with decades of a failed education system, too many of our residents are unemployed or underemployed. They are hungry for a second chance.

We are giving them a second chance through our efforts to fill the middle skills gap with programs like YAMTEP, Re-Job, and Green Visions, our continued fight to ensure adequate wages for our home health care workers and the many job fairs we host in partnership with our community providers.

We've also recognized that our new Americans need access to opportunity. Their children deserve to know that their city stands with them as a sanctuary. I am the child of an immigrant and I'm proud of companies like Quantum Sails and their partnership with Rochester Refugee Resettlement Services.

The company provides material for training programs so that our new Americans can gain the skills needed to one day be employed at Quantum Sails. Rochester Refugee Resettlement Services also launched its own brand of clothing and accessories, which are available at stores throughout our city. We look forward to having a New Americans Marketplace in Rochester where our local immigrants can sell a variety of their international products.

Mike Kelly from Rochester Refugee Resettlement, Kris Werner from Quantum Sails and Jamuna Gurung, a new American are here with us tonight. Let's give them a big round of applause.

The jobs we are creating are accessible to our residents because they are located in our neighborhoods and through programs like bike share, van pool, Uber and Lyft.

The Hawkeye Trade Center is a beacon of hope on the east bank of the Genesee River; Hickey Freeman is expanding on North Clinton Avenue; Bausch and Lomb is investing on Goodman Street; the Genesee Brewery is hiring on Saint Paul Street, Eastman Business Park is making tremendous progress at Lake and Ridge. And Netflix is even making a TV series there.

We've shown that when Rochester comes together, we can create jobs and deliver change. In fact, we have had so much change lately, the time has come

to create a plan to guide that change. To achieve this goal, our City will adopt Rochester 2034, our new comprehensive plan that will be our blueprint for growth over the next 15 years.

Why 2034 you may ask? Well it will be Rochester's 200th Birthday. Just like we celebrated 200 years of Frederick Douglass in 2018. Just like we will celebrate 200 years of Susan B. Anthony in 2020, we will celebrate 200 years of Rochester in 2034. My daughter Taylor and her classmates, Lord willing, will celebrate their 23rd birthdays in 2034.

I hope that they'll look back and say that we reduced childhood poverty. We decreased our infant mortality rates. Added playable, safe neighborhoods, Created jobs and new business opportunities. Let's give our children a city they can celebrate on its 200th birthday. A city where all of our citizens are proud to live, work and play. A city that is a beacon of hope and growth.

And we are already seeing the growth take shape. Our young professionals are returning home from all over the country. They tell me that they see the difference and they want to be a part of the change that we are creating here.

Recently, my cousin Whitney McClary returned to Rochester after living in Washington, D.C.; North Carolina and San Francisco. My cousin Haze and his wife Hannah returned after military service. RMAPI's Operations Associate Takiyah Butler returned home from Phoenix and the City's new Policy Director, Kelly Miterko, returned home from D.C.

Every day, our prodigal sons and daughters, who left Rochester, are returning home and they're bringing with them a new perspective—a clarity of contrast—that many of us overlook. They don't see a city in decline. They see a city poised for growth. They see a city that has a growing millennial population. They see one of the hippest cities in America. They see opportunity and hope. Opportunity that we will seize through investments like ROC the Riverway.

We will make the Genesee River the center of our economic growth once again, backed by an initial investment from Governor Andrew Cuomo and guided by the vision of our City planners. We will invest \$500 million dollars over the next 10 years in the ROC the Riverway program, generating billions of dollars in economic activity and creating thousands of construction jobs.

And, if you haven't noticed, we are well on our way. The Convention Center's north terrace is under construction. The Erie Harbor Promenade is complete. The Rundel Library Terrace and Play Walk will start this summer. We will

break ground on the Blue Cross Arena expansion, ROC City Skate Park and Charles Carroll Plaza by the end of the year. We're not just building on our riverway, we're playing on the river.

We launched ROC the Riverway Weekend last fall and the Genesee Brewery created its ROC the Falls Festival and next month, we're bringing Little Kids and Big Rigs, and the Twilight Criterium Downtown on our bridges for Play the Riverway. And there is much, much more to come! I haven't given up on the idea of putting a zip line over the High Falls either!

We're making our city a beacon of fun for all ages! And we're embracing our winter weather. That's why we brought the ROC Holiday Village to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Park. ROC Holiday Village will return bigger and better this year. Santa will be on deck. And Jenna and her crew of elves will make sure that no one receives coal in their stockings.

The Menorah will be lit, along with the Liberty Pole; and Kwanzaa will be ready for all to enjoy. The ice skating rink will be filled with kids and the tents will host restaurants, shops and the smell of hot chocolate will fill the brisk air. Thanks to Jenna and her sponsors, we were able to create a winter wonderland that no one could imagine. Jenna Knauf is here tonight. Let's give her and her team a big round of applause!

And these investments are not limited to our Downtown. We are ensuring that all of our neighborhoods are beacons of vitality by creating gathering spaces for children and families like the International Plaza at La Marketa, which will be going out to bid this summer. We have the money, the community accepted the design and now it's time to break ground, fulfilling a promise made to our Latino community thirty years ago.

And with our Revitalize Rochester Fund, we are ensuring that every neighborhood is filled with commerce and opportunity. This \$14 million dollar fund was created with the support of Governor Cuomo and local financial lenders and will be managed by the Rochester Economic Development Corporation. It will focus on our commercial corridors outside of Downtown like: Bulls Head, Genesee Street, Hudson Avenue, Jay Street and North Clinton Avenue, among others.

We are also redeveloping our beacons of play at Don Samuel Torres Park, Troup Street Park, Genesee Valley Park, the Campbell Street R-Center and at our schools because our children deserve to jump, learn, spin and play in quality environments.

Our neighborhood investments also include infrastructure upgrades. We fixed the intersection at Dewey and Driving Park. We're upgrading the round-about at Mount Read Boulevard and Buffalo Road. Our DES teams making streets safer and accessible for all, including our upcoming projects on East Main Street and Mount Hope Avenue, Lake Avenue and Upper Falls Boulevard.

When we do these projects, we are not doing them in silos. We look at everything -- our planned park improvements, façade replacements, lighting upgrades, potential demolitions and our community development projects – all of the tools we can bring together. So that we can deliver to the community projects that reflect the neighborhood, like we did on Park Avenue when we created our PRIDE crosswalks.

While we make these investments, quality of life begins and ends with a safe and healthy place to call home. No resident of our city should struggle to keep a roof over their head.

By working with Supreme Court Justice Craig Doran, our tenants, code enforcement agents, landlords and community partners, we are creating a clear understanding that quality housing is not a privilege, but a right. We are delivering this right by providing new safe, affordable housing opportunities at Upper Falls Square, Eastman Reserve, Union Square, Southeast Towers, Charlotte Square, Sibley Square, Warfield Square, Stadium Estates and our work to develop quality housing will continue in every quadrant of our city.

We recognized that there is more to do. That is why we have redefined affordable housing standards to ensure that new housing projects benefit all of our residents and families regardless of their income.

We must never forget our veterans. If anybody deserves the attention of our housing programs, it is those who served. They are returning from wars few of us think about in our daily lives. Many struggle with wounds we cannot see, including PTSD. They need our support, and the foundation of that support is housing.

This is an issue close to my heart. I recently lost a family member, who was a veteran, to PTSD, Briuex Dash. He was in my heart and on my mind a few weeks ago when I stood with the Veterans Outreach Center and Conifer Realty and broke ground on Liberty Landing—a development on Scio Street that will meet the needs of our veterans not only with housing, but services.

I am also grateful to all our state and local agencies who made this development possible, including our own Department of Neighborhood and Business Development. It is a small measure of how we honor those who serve. Bruiex's mother Shenita Simmons and brother Brett are also members of the U.S. Navy. Ms. Simmons joins us here tonight. Please join me in thanking her and our other members of the armed forces past and present for their service and remember them in your prayers.

We know that many citizens face unique challenges. And, it is our job to meet them where they are. Right here in the home of Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass, it is a legacy we build upon. After our most vulnerable citizens were shuffled from place to place for almost 20 years, I finally asked them what they wanted. I didn't tell them what they needed to do.

When I met with them, they took me back to a place when I was young. When I would see homeless men and women and my grandmother would tell me not to laugh, but to always help them, because they were someone's child.

Despite opposition, together, we created Peace Village—a space where homeless men and women who choose to live outdoors can live peacefully. So I want to thank City Council, my staff, especially Commissioner Jones, St. Joe's House of Hospitality, the House of Mercy, the Community Land Trust and Spectrum for stepping up to give our most vulnerable citizens dignity and hope; but most of all a place they can call home – a beacon of peace.

A peace that should be felt in every neighborhood, in every school and in every business. And that is why we treat our citizens as partners and not adversaries. That is why we take community policing seriously.

That is why we moved our police officers back into our neighborhoods. That is why we introduced body worn cameras. That is why we are working with City Council to develop a successful Police Accountability Board. So that our officers can continue to build relationships with the people they serve. That's what they did. That's what they're still doing. And we can see the results.

Crime in Rochester is down 27 percent in the past five years and is now at its lowest point in 34 years. Murders are down. Shootings are down. Robberies, rapes and other violent crimes are all at, or near, record lows. Property crimes are also at historic lows. And we know the community is playing a role because our homicide clearance rate is 88 percent, outpacing the most recent national average by more than 25 percent.

Our streets are safer than at any point in my memory, which goes back to the second grade, when I was brought from school to St. Mary's Hospital to pray for my grandfather, Cecil McClary, who had been shot while working as a security guard.

However, I am not satisfied. My heart continues to go out to all the victims of crime.

But our community policing model – like our community schools model - is showing progress in creating beacons of hope. That is why we are doubling down on that success. We are building police section offices in every quadrant of our city: on East Main Street to serve the Southeast; on Lake Avenue to serve the Northwest; the Upper Falls Plaza office will stay where it is in the Northeast; and our Downtown office will remain at Sibley Square.

And tonight, I propose to City Council and our community that we build the Genesee Section office in the soon-to-be transformed Bulls Head area to serve the Southwest. Once this last station is built, we will have fulfilled the promise of community policing—returning our officers to the neighborhoods that they serve. These neighborhood police offices will be beacons of hope for the future of community policing in Rochester.

Our officers risk their lives every time they put on their uniform. I understand that community policing is not easy. I appreciate their brave and dedicated service. We are one city. We are one community. And we are in this together to provide safer, more vibrant neighborhoods.

And, that's why I nominated a police chief who not only understands Rochester, but understands community policing, La'Ron Singletary.

Like other cities across the nation, Rochester continues to deal with issues of racial profiling, the school-to-prison pipeline, a historic culture of mutual disrespect and mistrust. But the difference here is that these are not things we choose to run from.

We know our problems and we are facing them head on by working together. The RPD and the community are working together to make a safer place for all of our citizens. And, I do want to recognize interim Chief Mark Simmons, the entire command staff and the rest of the RPD for working together to ensure a smooth transition. They have shown that with faith, hard work and sacrifice, Rochester can rise to any occasion and shift the paradigm from despair to hope.

Our police officers are not alone in their bravery and dedication to our community. The Rochester Fire Department is second to none when it comes to protecting the lives and property of our citizens and visitors.

This year, they have achieved national accreditation and Rochester is recognized as a Class 1 ISO city. Our Fire Department is among the top one percent nationally for fire protection. Our citizens are safer and our insurance premiums are lower for our homeowners, renters and businesses.

We are thankful for Fire Chief Will Jackson and all of our Firefighters for their selflessness and standing up for those in need. They put themselves at risk day in and day out for the lives and property of others.

They are the best trained. They are the best equipped. They are the best in the nation.

Our firefighters and police officers, along with the men and women of the Emergency Communications Department and Pathways to Peace, are role models in this community and ambassadors for the entire city. They are beacons of light when many times, all we see is darkness. Let's give them all a round of applause.

My friends, anyone who knows me knows that one of my favorite quotes comes from Frederick Douglass, who said, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

As I have shown you tonight, we are building a stronger Rochester, together. And, we are also repairing parts of our city that have been broken for decades.

But tonight, let us remember another quote from Douglass: "If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."

We must speak truth to power. So let me speak a bit of truth to you who have the power to change the outcomes for our children: the voters, parents and leaders of our city.

My daughter Taylor started pre-school at a city school. Imagine your three-year-old getting off the bus and telling her grandmother that an older kid exposed himself to her. What would you do as a parent? Probably the same thing I did, if you could.

I spoke to the young man's teacher and principal and learned he had challenges at school and at home. The teacher told me she could not get him the help he needed. The "red tape" and "bureaucracy" made it impossible. So, my husband and I decided to send her to another school.

I'm not alone in this. Just this past year, my friend told me her frustrations with the school district's special education program. Her son's Individual Education Plan was not being followed. It was difficult to fight the system to get her child the resources that he needs. I asked her, "Can you afford to send him to another school?" She said, yes. I said, "Why are you sacrificing your son to a system that you know is failing him?" She sent her son to a different school.

Her son's former city school teacher, who loved him but could not help him, said it was the best decision she could have made. Just this past week, my friend sent me a picture of her son's Honor Roll Certificate from his new school.

Today, we know that half of our city's children are being lost to a broken system. Just like the government of Flint knew that something was wrong with the water. They continued to allow their residents to drink it. They knew that the system and the water was full of lead and they did nothing until children were sick, until the community became outraged.

At the beginning of this evening, a group of beautiful children sang to us. I want you to picture two of those children. Any two. Remember their faces. Remember their smiles. Now ask yourself, "Which one of those children are you willing to sacrifice to a broken system?"

I'll say it again, just like Flint, we know that our current system is failing at least half of our kids. And we are allowing it to happen. We are saying that half is good enough. How can we consciously do that?

I know why and you know why. Because we're talking about other people's children. The debate over city schools is almost always about "other people's children." Not my daughter Taylor, not my friend's child. Not the children of many people sitting in this room. Other people's children.

And let's be clear, by "other people," I mean poor parents. Impoverished parents. Those parents who cannot afford to live in more affluent areas of our community. Other people, whose children are not in the urban suburban program, or attend more stable city or charter schools. The parents of children who have nowhere else to go, who have no alternative.

We need to value other people's children the way we value our own. What I want for my daughter, I want for every child in Rochester. And I believe you do as well. Or you wouldn't be here tonight.

The policymakers, pundits and community leaders and yes, the politicians too, are quick to ask "other people" and their children to be patient while we fix our schools. We are quick to ask "other parents" to be patient with schools that we won't send our own children to.

You see, those "other people" are my cousins, my friends, my in-laws, my family. People I hold near and dear to my heart. People who I see at church, who I see on Jefferson Avenue and at the store. It doesn't matter who they are, what they look like, or who they choose to love. They are my people. My citizens whom I love. So they're not "other people" to me.

That's why I invited you here to tell you the story of this school, of this neighborhood. To show you that we can improve outcomes for our kids. That it is being done. That it can be done. I invited you here to show you, that the system can be fixed and to let you know that without your outrage this beacon of hope—that was created out of despair—is at risk of being extinguished.

The solution to our failing schools is right here before us and if we do nothing, it can all be taken away. I'm asking you to join me in not allowing that to happen. I'm asking you to get off the sidelines, to seize this opportunity to make every school a true beacon of hope, a true community school or we will risk repeating past examples of lost opportunity.

When our businesses failed to seize the opportunity of the digital camera, tens of thousands of people lost their jobs. And we are still seeing the effects of that decision today. When our businesses failed to seize the opportunity of the computer mouse and the interface for every modern computer, tens of thousands of people lost their jobs. And we are still seeing the effects of those decisions today. Our legacy businesses faded into the background because of those decisions. They became shells of what they once were, because they failed to seize on the opportunity. Because they looked at everything they had to lose instead of what they had to gain.

Even though we are making a comeback from our failures—and we've seen and seized opportunity after opportunity and come together to create success. And we are building a stronger Rochester. And repairing what was broken. But it will all be undone if we don't demand change when it comes to our schools and speak truth to power.

In truth, as your Mayor there is very little I can do legally to impact our schools. Despite my every effort of trying. For decades, Rochester's mayors have tried to impact schools. They have always been met with fierce opposition. Fortunately, here at School 17, I was invited in to help. To work with Principal Mannino. To work with our parents and teachers. To work with the community partners who you met tonight. To work with funders like the Farash Foundation and many others to change the trajectory for students here at School 17.

But this is only one school. This is only one neighborhood. I have been your Mayor for five years and in those five years I have worked with five different superintendents with five different visions for our district. Who can follow a path like that? We cannot continue to go down this path.

Some adults are fighting tooth and nail to keep a system that we know doesn't work. The Bible teaches us that if you are blind to a problem, you are without guilt for it. But when you can see the problem and you fail to act, your sin, your guilt, will remain. I can think of no greater sin than to consciously continue to fail our children generation after generation. To consciously allow this system to fail half of our children.

Children like Trevyan Rowe.

So tonight, after seeing the school district's proposed budget. After working for over a year with the previous superintendent and hoping for increased funding for community schools and seeing none. After seeing the report from the Attorney General and the State Education Commissioner on the district's special education program.

You and I have no choice but to demand action, so we no longer lose half of our children. To definitively step up, to become outraged and demand that the system be changed, so that we can seize the solution in front of us, so that every school and every neighborhood can be a beacon of hope.

This is a crisis that has gone on far too long. The expert reports are clear. We must do something, and we must do it now. Therefore, I will work with all stakeholders: parents, the community, city and state to find a real solution. Everything should be on the table, because our children's future is at stake.

I am calling on this community to support the findings of the distinguished educator, to work with State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia and our

State Legislature to introduce a system that allows our children to thrive, a system that provides equality for all.

Like the people of JOSANA did, we must recognize our rock-bottom moment and come together as a community. My friends, I am asking this city to look into the eyes of our children tonight. The eyes of your child, your niece, your nephew, your grandchild—and yes—the eyes of other people’s children and see the hope in their eyes and pledge to fight for their future.

We are it. It is up to us. It is up to you. We must embrace our outrage. We must turn our anger into action. We must turn our indignation into inspiration. We must turn our despair into hope. It is time for action and not words. It is time to fight for our children. Look them in their eyes and tell them they are worth fighting for.

As President Obama told us, “Let it be said to our children's children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we didn't turn our back nor did we falter.”

Join me Rochester. Join me in the fight for our children. Join me in the fight for our future. Join me in the fight for justice and the fight for their right now!

Thank you and God Bless You All!