



Mayor Jon Mitchell

State of the City Address

Thursday, March 8, 2018

[remarks as prepared]

Thank you Joe Michaud, Rick Kidder and the Chamber of Commerce for another great job in organizing this annual event, to Webster Bank for its enduring sponsorship, and to Headmaster Bernadette Coelho and her team for their hospitality. It's great to be here at New Bedford High School.

In years past, I have begun my remarks on this occasion by welcoming my wife Ann, but unfortunately she cannot be with us today because she is traveling for work.

I want to let it be known in her absence, just how grateful I am for her love and support of me and the City.

But I am not without family today. It turns out that two of the students assembled in our midst are related to me, but I swore that I wouldn't draw attention to them while they are among their friends. Suffice to it say, their father is proud that they are here.

I want to welcome all of the students who are here. I plan on directing some of my comments today specifically to you. I want you to enjoy the occasion, and I hope you learn something as well, because after all you're getting to skip out on class.

For those students who've not attended a state of the city address before, it is, as the name implies, an occasion to take stock of how things are going in the city.

So let's take a moment to do just that.

Thanks to the hard work of residents, city employees and supporters of New Bedford, there is tremendous progress to report.

Not once, but twice in the last five years, New Bedford, Massachusetts, a city that has suffered from decades of chronically high unemployment, led the entire United States -- out of nearly four hundred cities -- in the year-over-year drop in its unemployment rate. There are over four thousand more people in the city working today than there were five years ago.

The growth has been across the board.

For the first time in its sixty year history, our business park is full, with every lot either occupied by, or under a purchase and sale agreement with a major business.

The volume of building permits is the highest in memory.

This year we secured approval from the FAA to run regional commercial air service at our airport.

And the port is growing and diversifying its industries. New Bedford has become the center of the fishing industry on the East Coast with a sixty-seven percent increase in out of state vessels landing here; while cargo tonnage and recreational boating activity has expanded faster than at any time in a decade. And the port is about to become the launching pad for the American offshore wind industry.

But the progress goes beyond business and job growth.

In the last three years, New Bedford has seen double-digit drops in crime.

We've become a national leader in renewable energy and energy efficiency, with one of America's most robust municipal solar programs, all of our street lights on LED technology, and more electric cars in our municipal fleet than any other community in Massachusetts.

Our schools were removed from state monitoring, and the four year graduation is now highest it's been since the state started tracking that figure.

New Bedford now has the highest Wall Street bond rating in its history.

I could go on. The list is longer. But the point is this:

By these objective measures, there's no denying that the city has been enormously successful.

And it's not just the data that proclaims progress. We can see it with our own eyes.

As residents and visitors consistently note, the City has become cleaner and neater, especially after we went to automated trash collection and became serious about street sweeping.

Graffiti is rare because we've been downright compulsive about removing it.

We've planted thousands of street trees.

We can now walk the fabulous new HarborWalk and CoveWalk, and can enjoy five new public parks.

We've built new zoo exhibits for the first time in a long time, and watched attendance soar.

We've built new schools and renovated many others, have a new \$50 million marine science facility, and new public safety centers on the waterfront and in the South End in the pipeline.

Our schools and our city buildings are getting makeovers, especially City Hall, which is being painstakingly restored by Ken Blanchard and his team.

The downtown of course has come alive as the center of the restaurant scene in the region. It has something for everyone now. The next restaurant to open, by the way, will be a noodle bowl restaurant, so if you're into noodles, the downtown will have that for you, too.

The persistent neglect of our roads is ending. Roads all over the city are now getting the investment they've long needed.

In fact, in a meeting last week, Manny Silva, our talented highway superintendent, said that in the coming months there will be more road work going on in the City than at any time in his nineteen years here.

There is no doubt about it, things are happening in New Bedford.

Now I walk through all of this not to pat ourselves on the back.

What we have accomplished together should instead be a source of confidence that we can accomplish more still.

This is especially important given our city's struggles in the past.

Because New Bedford, like many older industrial cities, had experienced persistent decline over several decades, it was natural in some quarters to assume that decline was inevitable, and that if anything, it was up to the state or someone else to turn things around for us. And what was worse, we allowed ourselves to believe that we deserved that help.

New Bedford is on the right track now because we took the important first step to self-improvement:

We, New Bedford, made the conscious decision to stop being a victim.

We chose not to passively hope someone else would bail us out.

We took control of our own affairs.

We decided to initiate the action.

And what we together have been able to accomplish is just the start.

A city is constantly being built, and that's what we are doing right now.

Shaping the Strategy

We have the will and the confidence, but we also need to be pointed in the right direction. Our success will depend on our ability to think strategically about the future of our city, and to work together to follow that strategy.

As we ask ourselves how we can continue our success, we have to take a good look at what's happening in cities across the country.

America today is enjoying a prolonged period of economic growth that

is disproportionately concentrated in its largest cities. America's big cities are living in a golden age right now, fueled by major research universities, international airports, and corporate headquarters. They are home to virtually all of America's venture capital, new office construction, and foreign investment.

Unemployment is negligible in these places, real estate prices are skyrocketing, and the gap between the haves and have-nots is widening. These places are marked by forests of construction cranes, fifty-dollar-a-plate entrees, and, very soon, driverless cars. Boston and New York are the two closest of many examples, and their seemingly unabated growth may have profound implications for the rest of America.

And these days talent tends to follow the flow of capital. The high school students who are here today are an accomplished group. If I asked them to raise their hands if they were interested in moving eventually to New York or Boston or some other big city, I suspect more than few hands would go up. [Keep your hands down, the answer is too painful]. But we shouldn't be surprised. The talent drain of young people from Greater New Bedford is nothing new; it's just that today the attraction of the big city is stronger than ever before.

So what does that mean for a mid-size city like us that is not part of a major metropolitan area, and doesn't have the all same cards to play?

One thing it means is that we still have to compete. After all we operate in the same global economy as the major cities. At the same time, we shouldn't see ourselves as trying to be like them or beat them at their own game. We can be something different, and indeed preferable. In an America where the biggest cities are becoming more congested, expensive and in some cases, more violent, a city like ours offers a more manageable alternative.

Here, and in other mid-size cities, one can have those things that people like in urban places -- the public spaces, walkable streets,

cultural amenities, interesting architecture, and so forth -- but without feeling crushed and disconnected at the same time.

We in New Bedford don't have what people hate about big cities: regular traffic jams, high levels of gun violence, and not knowing your neighbors. And here you can still get a good meal at a restaurant for under ten bucks.

My point is that a city doesn't have to be a major metropolis to be successful in offering its residents an opportunity for a good life. Portland, Maine and Charleston, South Carolina are noteworthy. They are great examples of port cities -- one a little smaller than us and the other little bigger -- that are succeeding.

So how do we make it happen here?

Quality of Life

First and foremost, we must continue to focus relentlessly on making New Bedford, quite simply, a really nice place to live. This might sound like I'm stating the obvious. Of course everyone wants to have safe neighborhoods, more pleasant parks, cleaner streets, and high performing schools. Local government after all is set up to facilitate such things. But the point I'm making is that enhancing the city's quality of life should be seen not simply as an end in itself, but also as a means of sustaining the city in the long run.

We will attract more business and excite greater civic participation the more people believe that this is a place they'd like to be in. A high quality of life is a great selling point for any city.

We are proud of how we've been able to elevate the city's quality of life these last few years. But there's more to do.

Let's talk about the key areas.

Public Safety

Successful cities protect the well-being of their residents, and we've made real strides on that front.

Despite a spike in homicides last year that didn't fit any particular pattern, the crime rate in New Bedford is down significantly over the last few years. The reality is that the crime rate in New Bedford

compares very favorably with that of other cities nationwide. That's a tribute to our officers, and the leadership of Chief Joe Cordeiro.

But not every neighborhood is as safe as it should be, and that is the challenge before us. We are going to make every neighborhood safe.

So we are concentrating our attention in those areas like never before. Chief Cordeiro has installed new energetic leadership in the North End and South End stations that have intensified community policing efforts in the handful of areas we need to get a better handle on. They're making their presence felt, and they're already making a difference.

We're putting cameras in those areas -- lots of them -- so that we have a better chance of catching criminals in the act. I appreciate the City Council's support for financing these useful tools for our police.

In the next year, the Police Department also will become far more sophisticated about analyzing crime trends. With my support, the chief will hire the department's first crime analyst and upgrade its crime mapping software so that it can be far better at predicting where crime may occur. That way our officers can be in the right place at the right time more often.

But our modernization of the police department doesn't end there. In the next several weeks, we will have the results of a year-long review of the department. It's been more than twenty years since the last review. That one was done in response to a lawsuit. This time the motivation is different. We're undertaking a thorough and candid self-assessment because we want our department go from good to great.

I expect many useful recommendations will come out of that report. One of them probably will be that we should continue to target recidivism. Most criminologists would tell you that in any city, even a big one, a disproportionate amount of crime is committed by a relatively tiny fraction of the population. It's true, too, in New Bedford. With that in mind, we will continue to work closely with DA Tom

Quinn's office to devote granular attention to repeat offenders, and to urge the judges in the district court to hold them accountable.

We will continue to address the roots of criminal activity. Chief among our efforts will be to increase the pressure on unscrupulous landlords. Despite much improvement in this area, we still have landlords who are all too willing to allow criminals to move into their rental properties. I have proposed to the city council a measure that will lower the threshold for a property to become designated a "problem property," and shift the costs of police response onto the property owner.

If they don't know by now, these landlords will eventually get the point; New Bedford will not permit them to neglect their properties and the interests of their neighbors.

All of our public safety departments have been in the thick of what I believe is the single most vexing public health challenge of our day: opiate addiction. Any discussion of the well-being of residents of our city has to begin here. The problem is not unique to New Bedford, but it has ended or ruined too many lives in our city.

Our EMS and Fire Departments do a terrific job at their core missions, and in fact stand out as among the very best in the state, but they, like the police, are consumed with this problem.

They will remain unwavering in their efforts, because every one of those addicts is someone's son or daughter, father or mother, brother or sister. And not a single one of them ever thought they'd be in the position they're in.

This is a complex, multi-faceted problem that affects people of every walk of life, so the only way we are going to turn the tide is through sustained, collective effort. Our Opioid Prevention Task Force has made great strides, and I can report that in 2017, overdoses in the city dropped some 19% over the previous year. And that is very encouraging.

But there's a long way to go. I want to thank all of our first responders, public health personnel, and everyone involved in this battle, now and in the days ahead.

Schools

To be successful, a city also must create pathways for its citizens to reach their full potential. More than anything else, that means we must offer our city's children a public school education that enables them to thrive as adults.

Our schools have come a long way these last few years, because we refused to sit idly by while our kids were losing out on the education they deserved.

We now have a school system that is clear in its academic goals, manages taxpayer dollars reliably, and has raised the standards for academic instruction. We have improved immensely the teaching of non-English speakers, upgraded technology, and revamped the curriculum.

The work has produced real results. Most notably, the state ended its monitoring of the district, noting that "it is a completely different district than it was in 2011." There has been a steady rise in test scores across the majority of schools, and a marked rise in the four year graduation rate.

New Bedford High School, in particular, under the leadership of Headmaster Coelho and the hard work of teachers, has been reaccredited, and has seen unmistakable improvement in instruction, millions of dollars in investments in the physical plant particularly to upgrade technology, and new programs like the AP Capstone that will enable high achieving students to be more competitive in college admissions.

But make no mistake, the work is not done. Among other steps, the quality of instruction must continue to improve, and support for ELL and other high needs students must be beefed up.

We must also address the glaring challenge of retaining students in the district, as more and more families have chosen to send their children to other schools.

It would be simplistic to chalk up the problem entirely to helicopter parenting. The district has to do far more in the areas that make schools attractive by investing more in facilities and managing them well, strengthening extracurricular offerings so that they become again a motivation for students to go to school, and creating an orderly but engaging culture that every student -- and parent -- wants to be part of.

As the school committee goes about selecting the next superintendent, let me be very clear: there will be no relaxing of our effort to improve our schools. We are looking for a superintendent who can lead the district most effectively toward its goals, namely to offer a high quality education to every child and to attract families to the school district.

Taking the school district to the proverbial next level will require energy and persistence. It will require the building and rebuilding of relationships that are necessary to support and nurture a strong school culture. It will require the ability to connect and establish trust.

For our kids and our city, we will build a school system where kids are eager to go to school in the morning, parents are proud to send them there, and teachers and principals derive personal satisfaction from the hard and important work they do.

The Built Environment

We will continue to invest in those qualities of place that make living in New Bedford pleasant, interesting and rewarding.

We will continue to invest wisely in our public spaces, and maintain our standards of excellence in the delivery of municipal services. New Bedford residents deserve nothing less.

To exalt New Bedford's glorious past, we will invest in historic preservation more than ever before. And it's happening now, with the

Community Preservation Committee poised to make it first round of funding for preservation projects.

To beautify our streets, clean our air, and slow down traffic, we will continue the city's most ambitious tree planting program in our lifetime.

We will make the most of our access to the water by working to connect the downtown and the waterfront, and begin constructing the RiverWalk with the goal of wrapping the Blue Lane around the entire City.

As the city's built environment is shaped, we'll need robust citizenship input. It's your city, you get to say how it should look. You of course can do that in public hearings concerning particular projects.

You can use the SeeClickFix app to let us know about matters that need attention in your neighborhood like pot holes or graffiti. As the folks in DPI will tell you, I use it incessantly.

Being able to connect constructively with city government is an important element of a city's quality of life. That's why I've held monthly office hours at neighborhood libraries where people can come to talk to me about whatever is on their mind.

Now I have to say that, of late, attendance at these sessions has been underwhelming. I'm not sure why that is, but I really want to hear from folks. So I'm going to try something new.

My plan is to draw people in the old fashioned way: with food! In the months ahead, I'll hold our office hours at various restaurants around the city, where, yes, there will be food available on my personal tab (and don't get any ideas, I'm not buying drinks). As many of you know, free food is an enticement that would work on me personally, and if it heightens civic engagement just a little bit, it'll have been worth it. So the message is, join me for a bite, and tell me what's on your mind.

Finances

I also want to talk for a moment about one of everyone's favorite subjects: money. All of our efforts to improve our city will depend on

our ability to manage our finances. Our heightened bond rating reflects that we have been effective at it, but it has not been easy.

You've heard me say it before, the reality is that money is tight -- very tight. We might all agree on our financial priorities, namely to sustain and improve the level of services our residents expect, invest in the city's physical plant, attract talent to city government by offering competitive salaries, fully fund our schools, and ease the burden on tax payers. Under our current fiscal conditions, however, not all of these can be achieved. None of them can be achieved as much as we'd like.

We have made significant cuts to city government, and city government is considerably smaller and more efficient than it was ten years ago, yet the pressure on taxpayers, especially small businesses, has only increased. I don't need to remind this audience that high commercial tax rates do not exactly strengthen the city's competitiveness.

And this is during a time of relative growth. What will happen when the national economy turns downward, as it inevitably will at some point, and state and local tax receipts start to fall?

We need to be really careful not to allow ourselves to be squeezed financially. And we can't wait for a crisis to make hard decisions. I want to make very clear that I will not allow our city to be put in a precarious financial position.

There aren't many painless options. We will continue to reorganize city government to increase efficiency, as we have done with considerable success. We will make every effort to expand the tax base by encouraging the development of underutilized parcels of public property. This is why the municipal golf course redevelopment project is important.

Unfortunately, these steps alone won't do the trick. Spending has to be reined in.

The budget busters are pension, health care and charter schools costs. And you have heard me criticize the state for making it difficult for municipalities to control these costs because the expenses are

largely dictated by state policy. The state can fairly be said to have tied our hands.

I look forward to working with the City Council and the state on these matters. I appreciate the thoughtful discussions we've had of late. It is a discussion this City must have.

Economic Competitiveness

A high quality of life is not possible if we are not otherwise economically competitive. It bears emphasizing that we are competing in a global economy for investment and jobs, and if we don't compete effectively, they will go elsewhere, as our city has come to realize the hard way over the years.

Growing our regional economy and the jobs that would come with it requires us to focus on our competitive advantages -- that is to say, we need to double down on the things we're already good at.

In New Bedford, more than anything else, that means our maritime economy. The Port is the primary economic driver of the region because it offers competitive advantages to the various industries that call it home, including commercial fishing, recreational boating, ferry service, certain lines of international cargo, and soon, offshore wind.

The Port generates a full two percent of the state's gross domestic product and supports nearly seven thousand jobs. And as reflected in the port's strategic plan that we released yesterday, there is potential for significant growth in the years ahead.

In light of the growth and increased complexity of the Port of New Bedford, yesterday we also announced that the New Bedford Harbor Development Commission, the city's port management agency under the highly effective leadership of Ed Washburn, has changed its name to the New Bedford Port Authority.

The new name signals the leadership role New Bedford must continue to play on the East Coast, especially in fishing and offshore wind.

When it comes to fishing, we will continue to assert ourselves. This past year I testified twice before Congress on fisheries related issues and had countless conversations with federal fisheries regulators about the closure of Sector 9 and other matters. In the last two Presidential administrations we have been in the thick of the discussions about the dedication of marine monuments.

Two years ago we led the way in establishing the National Coalition of Fishing Communities, whose mission is to be a national voice for America's fishing communities. When it comes to the discussion around commercial fishing, New Bedford is at the table, right where it should be.

We've also worked hard to position the port as a home for the offshore wind industry. Just a few years ago, there was no shortage of critics who claimed that we were putting too many eggs in one basket by spending so much time on offshore wind, and many thought it would never materialize.

Well, it is happening, and in no small part because of the political support for offshore wind we have worked hard to build. In the last few months, the state's three major offshore wind developers -- all of whom now have offices in the city -- made public bids to invest billions of dollars in wind farms off our coast, staged from our waterfront.

We continue to gear up for the industry's arrival along many fronts, not the least of which are the preparations Laura Douglas is making at Bristol Community College to train those who might work in offshore wind. Thank you, Laura, for jumping in with both feet.

As encouraging as these developments are, we need to continue playing our cards right. We are entering a key phase in our long cultivation of the offshore wind industry here. We will assist the industry however we can to settle into the port and city as seamlessly as possible.

We want them to succeed, and to be here for a long time.

It'll be incumbent upon us to anticipate the industry's needs, and, among other efforts, to pursue wise investments in port infrastructure to support it.

At the same time, it'll be important to do everything possible to ensure that the commercial fishing and offshore wind industries co-exist successfully.

Fishermen have raised legitimate concerns about safe navigation and other issues. I believe that these concerns can and must be addressed effectively so that both industries can prosper alongside one another in New Bedford.

But it will require the offshore wind industry to be committed to an open and candid dialogue about their plans. Fishermen understand that offshore wind farms are coming, but it is fair for them to expect that wind farms be developed the right way. And the right way here may not be the same way it was done in Northern Europe, where the fishing industry is not nearly as large or complex as it is here.

Federal regulations require that offshore wind developers engage in a dialogue with the fishing industry. New Bedford will be the epicenter of where the two industries will interact in the United States. There is no entity better situated to promote that dialogue between the two industries than the New Bedford Port Authority.

As the management agency for America's largest fishing port, which happens also to have a strong record of promoting the offshore wind industry, no one has more relevant knowledge about, and credibility with, both industries, than the Port Authority.

So today I call upon the offshore wind developers to embrace this opportunity to work with the Port Authority to facilitate this dialogue. It will be critical to have a process in place that allows for all of the issues to be worked out. Getting it right now is critical. Let's work out the issues so that everyone who goes to sea from New Bedford can do so safely and successfully.

If both of these industries expand in New Bedford, not only will we see more direct jobs, but there will be more opportunities for

related innovation and entrepreneurship. This an area to which we are devoting considerably more energy and attention. With appropriate support, marine science industries, including those associated with the expanded SMAST facility, will enable our city to attract and retain talent, and further diversify our economy.

And our work to grow the economy is hardly limited to the waterfront. As you've heard me say before, every successful city has a vibrant downtown, and now that is becoming true here in New Bedford. The downtown itself, and its cultural centers like the Whaling Museum and the Zeiterion are enormously important economic assets, and are doing very well. We will continue to cultivate residential development in the downtown to support these institutions and allow for more restaurants and retail to appear.

And the downtown and the rest of the city will benefit from the work being done now on the city's first cultural plan. Having established the state's only municipal arts fund, we will soon have a cultural plan that will enable the city's art scene to come alive like never before.

Like any other city, our downtown must have strong anchor institutions. We will support our existing anchors, and seize every opportunity to develop or recruit new ones, whether they are government, higher education, or corporate institutions.

In the years ahead, Greater New Bedford's economy can and should benefit from improved transportation connections with other cities. Every elected official throughout Southeastern Massachusetts over the past twenty years has advocated for the Southcoast Rail project, and now it appears that the alternate approach through Middleboro is gaining traction. By and large this is a positive development.

While we in Greater New Bedford have come to appreciate that the project will not represent the economic salvation of the region as it has long been portrayed to be, the connection would offer one more reason to live or invest here.

Another important set of connections will come through our airport. Now that we can offer commercial air service, there is the potential in the years ahead to conveniently fly from New Bedford into the nation's airways, and it indeed is starting to happen. If we are to make the most of this opportunity we have to recognize that we are running a very different airport. We need to plan well.

So I am announcing today that I have asked former Precix CEO, David Slutz, to head up a review panel that will advise the city and the airport commission on how our airport can reach its full potential. The panel will work directly with a consultant to establish a long term strategic plan, which will shape the airport's operations and investments in the years ahead. It's a major undertaking, but given the potential of our airport, it's high time that we take it on.

The Imperatives of Citizenship

We in city government will continue to work hard to help make New Bedford a stronger, more vibrant, and sustainable city. I am eager to work with our City Council to advance the City's long term interests, and I know that they feel the same.

I emphasize that in building a city, municipal government has a *role* to play. Government cannot do it all, and maybe not even most of it. City Hall should not be seen as the default source of the solution to every problem, however minor. It will take the collective efforts of our community to make New Bedford a city that lives up to our collective aspirations. Something is expected of each of us.

The notion of citizenship is rooted in the idea that we have obligations to others. It requires more than simply expressing an opinion about what someone else should do.

Being a responsible citizen requires actual action in service of our collective challenges -- even when it's not perfectly convenient, even when it's not easy, and even when you think someone else should be doing it.

It recognizes the difference between posting a picture of a littered sidewalk on Facebook and lamenting the mess, and instead picking the trash and throwing it away.

What's expected may vary from person to person, but everyone has something to offer. If you are a business leader -- and we are in the midst of many business people -- chances are that you have more to offer than most. Successful cities are invariably ones where business leaders take responsibility for urban renewal, and work collaboratively with government toward that end.

They recognize that the long term prosperity of the city is in their personal interest and that of their organizations. They have not only expertise and leadership skills to offer, but the resources and prestige of their organizations as well.

I'm not talking about charity, although that is always welcomed. I mean rather that if you profess a devotion to the city, there are ways to act on your devotion without unduly compromising the bottom line.

Great examples are not hard to find.

There are business leaders like Lynn Mastera, the CFO of Precix, who books all of her company's business visitors at New Bedford hotels unless they are full. With a new hotel opening up soon downtown, there will be more opportunities for businesses to do the same.

There are those like Henry Wainer, who decided to expand his business quite substantially in the middle of the City, instead of in nearby communities where it would have been a little less expensive.

It is someone like Tony Sapienza who spends countless hours pulling together business leadership through the Regeneration Committee to support the City's strategic priorities.

It was you -- many in this room -- including the leadership of the Chamber, who spent time campaigning for the four year mayoral term last year because you recognized that it was in the long term interest of the City and the region. Now give yourselves a hearty round of applause, because you deserve it.

And then there are two people who went the extra mile about which I cannot say enough. Victor and Christine Fernandes recognized that the City should have a playground for children with severe disabilities like their son Noah. They knew as well as anybody that every child should have the opportunity to play outside with their peers.

When we started talking about the idea, it was clear that there were various sites across Southeastern Massachusetts where it could go. But Victor said to me, "We really want this to be in the City."

So we found a beautiful spot on Pope's Island in full view of the harbor. And we had a groundbreaking ceremony with Noah himself the star of the show.

Then Victor and Christine, and the mass movement known as Team Noah got down to work. They raised \$1.3 million dollars, and rallied numerous businesses to contribute in kind donations, and Victor's own company, Fernandes Masonry, devoted countless hours to the construction this past Fall.

Unfortunately, Noah passed away before the opening of the playground that now bears his name. But what his parents and their team built for him and untold numbers of children who struggle with severe disabilities is a testament to their devotion to those children and the City. It is the finest playground of its kind in the Northeast, if not beyond, and it will put smiles on the faces of children and their families for years to come.

I ask you to join me in thanking Victor and Christine for what they have done for these kids, their families, and the City.

Everybody has something to contribute to New Bedford. You don't need to move proverbial mountains like Victor and Christine, but cities are built by people who recognize a collective need, take it upon themselves to address it, and rally others to the cause.

My point is that if you've been sitting on the sidelines, I want you to know that your city -- our city -- needs you.

You will find that it is well worth the effort. A city is more than a place on a map. The city shapes and frames our relationships with one another, and is woven into our individual identity. It is part of who we are -- past, present and future. When you devote your talent and energy to make your city a better place, you've committed to improving yourself.

I look forward to the work ahead with all of you.

Thank you, and God Bless the City of New Bedford.