



Mayor Jon Mitchell
State of the City Address
New Bedford High School
Thursday, March 28, 2019
[remarks as prepared]

Thank you to Rick Kidder and the Chamber of Commerce for another great job in organizing this annual event, and to Webster Bank for its continuing sponsorship.

We understand this to be the largest state-of-the-city event in Massachusetts after Boston, and it's a reflection of the commitment of the Chamber and the business community to the City's success.

Thank you Headmaster Bernadette Coelho for hosting us today, to Sue Richard for that first rate video, and the New Bedford High School Jazz Choir for that fabulous performance.

I want to acknowledge and thank City Council President Morad, city councilors, school committee members, our state legislative delegation, and Attorney General Healey for the work they do to support New Bedford every day.

I am so pleased that my wife Ann could be with me on this occasion, and I will seize this opportunity to proclaim for all to hear just how proud I am of the work she does to improve the lives of women diagnosed with breast cancer, through both her direct care of patients and her leading research. She inspires me to raise my game every day.

It's a treat to have my girls here, too: Grace and Natalie, who are students here at New Bedford High School, and Lauren who has come by from Keith Middle School across the street. Ann and I believe that, despite our hectic schedules, we should eat together as a family whenever possible, so that's what we're doing today, and we're pleased that we could have the five hundred or so of you over to join us.

Family meals often start off with the question, "How are things?" So, too, with state of the city addresses.

The answer is, New Bedford is on a roll.

As recently as 2012, the city was still reeling from the Great Recession, with an unemployment rate over 13%, a crime rate well above average among America's cities, precarious finances, absentee landlords ruining neighborhoods, a port stumbling as a result of the crash of the ground fish industry, a directionless school system that had been placed under state monitoring the year before, and neglected city buildings and roadways.

These challenges, and many more, were daunting. But we made a conscious decision not to recline in the false hope that the state or someone else would come to our rescue. We decided there was no room for being passive. We took control of our affairs, and we worked together to rebuild our city.

And it has made all the difference in the world. We can stand here today and take pride that through the collective efforts of our residents, businesses and city employees, New Bedford is staging one of America's most remarkable urban turnarounds.

We have witnessed eye-popping job growth across the board, so much so that twice in the last six years, New Bedford led all American cities in the annual drop in its unemployment rate – not once, but twice. There are some six thousand more city residents working today than in January of 2012, and an unemployment rate that stands today at 4.7%. Our business park is now full, the port is humming, and small businesses have sprung up everywhere.

More importantly, more of our residents are able to provide for their families, buy homes, and send their kids to college.

Job creation doesn't happen if a city isn't making headway on other fronts. While other cities have struggled to move the needle on crime, New Bedford is a palpably safer city now. According to FBI crime data, violent crime has fallen over fifty percent since 2014 – here, too, among the sharpest drops anywhere.

We've modernized the city's financial management system, and now New Bedford has the highest bond rating in its history.

At different points in the last few years, we've been number one in the continental U.S. in municipal solar capacity per capita, and had more municipal electric vehicles than anyone else in Massachusetts.

Last year, the state removed its monitor from our school system, and declared it to be “an extremely different school system than it was in 2011.”

All of these objective measures proclaim progress unambiguously. They are there in case you run into anyone who still clings to the old stereotypes about New Bedford -- you can tell them, “You don't have to believe me, just look at the numbers.”

But for me personally what's more compelling is our track record of tackling challenges that folks in some quarters had given up on or claimed we could do nothing about.

Nothing gets my motor running more than when someone tells me I can't do something. You know how that feels. Well in the last few years, together we in New Bedford have said, we'll show you.

People used to say, our harbor – the first marine Superfund site in America – was never going to be cleaned up after decades of industrial pollution. But thanks to the close working relationship of the city, the EPA and our federal delegation, the clean-up is well underway, and scheduled to be done thirty years before the original deadline.

It wasn't that long ago that people looked at the city's four-year high school graduation rate hovering around 60%, and said, that's just the way it'll always be. To my mind it was unconscionable to write off children like that; they deserved better from us. Thanks to the work of school administrators, the non-profit sector, and many adults in this building, the state announced that the graduation rate has now climbed to 76%, the highest ever recorded here.

That's a whole lot of New Bedford kids who have a much better shot to make it in the world. This is an achievement that should fill everyone in this room with pride.

Countless people said for decades, "I don't why the term of mayor is only two years long." Many of you in this room, along with the Chamber, and indomitable volunteers like Leslie Lawrence, said it should be four years, and you made it happen. (Now don't get any ideas, I have no announcements about my future today).

Years ago, some, including Councilor Brian Gomes, said, wouldn't it be great if we put a walkway on the hurricane dike? Most just assumed it was too crazy an idea and would never happen. Well we got that done, too.

What about the restoration of the First Baptist Church, where Robert's Rules of Order originated, one of the city's most important landmarks? That's underway as we speak.

Here's another one people assumed would never happen: a full day of school on Fridays for elementary students? Done.

What about restoring City Hall's façade after decades of deterioration? Done.

So many other things people said we should do, but for whatever reason would never go anywhere: the filtration of Sassaquin Pond, a new fleet of fire trucks, public concerts on the water. Done, done, done.

If this there is one lesson to draw from our work these last few years, it is this: decline is not inevitable. For a city that suffered job loss and capital flight for

decades after the Great Depression, and all the challenges that came with them, it had been tempting to assume that the fate of one's city is like the weather – it just happens to us, and there's nothing you can do about it. In the last few years, we've proven to ourselves – and everyone else – that it's just not true.

Richard Florida, one of the leading observers of the life of America's cities and the author of the celebrated treatise *The Rise of the Creative Class*, wrote recently that "After years of study, I've concluded that the key thing that distinguishes the thriving places of any and all sizes is surprisingly simple. Successful places are intentional." I could not imagine a more encouraging and validating observation. The implication is that despite the global forces that affect a city's ability to move forward, if you have a common vision and work together to pursue it, you have in your hands the ability to shape your own future.

The good news is that we in New Bedford have been doing just that. We've understood where we want to go – to solidify New Bedford as the economic and cultural center of the region, with a diversified, resilient economic base. And we have worked together toward that common vision.

We have to continue to do that. For all the success we've had in Greater New Bedford, in the years ahead we will have our work cut out for us.

To say that the world is changing rapidly is an understatement. Globalization and new technology are transforming America's economy and its cities at an accelerating rate. Businesses can locate just about anywhere, and they are tending to gravitate to the major metropolitan areas such as Boston and New York, which are established centers of innovation and capital. That's why you see forests of construction cranes in these places nowadays, and it's why these places are magnets for young people.

Technological development is unfolding so rapidly that it's nearly impossible to predict where things will be in twenty years, maybe less than that. Just think about your smart phone. When they arrived on the scene a mere twelve years ago, no one could have predicted that within a few short years, virtually everyone would have one, we would use it to manage much of our life's

affairs, and that it would establish a platform on which whole new industries would be built.

There is a growing consensus among leaders in economic forecasting – the likes of McKinsey, Deloitte, the World Economic Forum and others, that within the next decade more than half of today’s jobs will be automated away. It’s been going on for a while, and it’s starting to become more visible. We’ve seen it here in certain factories and warehouses. You see it even in the grocery store. Automated checkout counters and robotic floor cleaners have replaced jobs once occupied by real people.

Automation will most directly affect those metropolitan economies that are heavily dependent on lower-skilled service or traditional manufacturing jobs.

Because we are one of those places, in the years ahead, we have to be on our game. We need to be taking steps now to get out ahead of these trends to ensure that we can continue to sustain our city and make opportunity available for our residents.

To my mind, there are three related elements of our city-building work, all of which require sustained collective effort.

First, we must make the most of our competitive advantages to build a more diversified economy.

Second, we must nurture a high quality of life, both as an end itself, as we want everyone in New Bedford to thrive, and as a means of attracting investment.

Third, we must reinforce our connection to place – the part of our personal identity associated with our city – so that we have a cause to rallying around.

Let’s look at each one.

Economic Competitiveness

When it comes to economic competitiveness, municipal government and the business community must continue to work collaboratively to build a

diversified and inclusive regional economy centered around the city. The Regeneration Committee under the leadership of Tony Sapienza and Gerry Kavanaugh has been critical in this effort. The committee has brought together the business leadership of Greater New Bedford and has worked closely with my administration to develop and execute an economic development plan. Few cities in America have this kind of formal mechanism to collaborate with business.

The plan makes clear what we've been saying all along – we must make the most of our competitive advantages – that is, we focus on what we do really well and build on it. While the economies of other cities are founded on assets like research universities, international airports, or tourist meccas, here in New Bedford, our greatest competitive advantages in the global economy lies in our connection to the water.

On the Waterfront

The Port of New Bedford is extremely successful. According to a recent analysis funded by the state, the Port generates some \$11 billion in direct and induced economic activity, and supports nearly seven thousand jobs. Its strong suit of course is in fishing, as it's both the top commercial fishing port and the largest seafood processing center in America.

Now New Bedford has had a history of being Number One in other industries, only to see its fortunes dashed as it relied too much on them. We're all familiar with our city's global dominance in whaling, and its calamitous fall after the discovery of oil in Pennsylvania and the outbreak of the Civil War. The city was brimming again at the end of WWI as America's leader in cotton textile manufacturing, only to see that end abruptly ten years later in the wake of labor strife, the lifting of protective tariffs, and rising Southern competition. Both times, the city had no other thriving industry to fall back on.

Recently I was given a copy of a Saturday Evening Post profile of New Bedford published in June 1948, which had this to say about our city's fortunes: "Few cities have known a more turbulent past than New Bedford. It has played the part of the reckless gambler . . . betting his bank roll on the turn of a single economic card."

Successful cities are ones that hedge their bets, so that they can absorb economic shocks and be able to seize new opportunities.

I'm here to tell you today that we in New Bedford have learned our lesson.

Perhaps for the first time in our city's history, we now have in our sights the opportunity to diversify our economic base in a major way and put the city and region on firmer footing for the long run.

Much of what makes fishing so successful here, such as geographic proximity to valuable natural resources, modern port infrastructure, highway and rail connections, a constellation of supporting port businesses, and the most skillful seafaring workforce in America – can also support the development of other industries. Our job is to make the most of these advantages, both to bolster our strength in fishing, and to nurture the development of new maritime businesses that can complement the fishing industry and flourish alongside it.

There are a number of pieces coming together now – partially through good fortune, as well as through careful strategic planning and determination -- that I believe will hasten the diversification of our maritime industries.

The most significant development of course is the arrival of the offshore wind industry, something we have been working on for a long time. The Vineyard Wind project is scheduled to begin late next year, and it will be the largest private-sector project in the state's history – bigger than the state's casinos or even Gillette Stadium. And it is the first of what will be many similar projects, not just in the next couple of years, but quite possibly over the next few decades.

It has been our goal all along to capture as much of the investment as possible. Toward that end, it will be imperative that the state improve the procurement process for offshore wind projects so that the companies have a stronger incentive to invest in New Bedford and set up a permanent presence here.

In the meantime, we have been getting the port ready. On that front, I can report that we are in the midst of a physical remaking of the port the likes of which the city has not seen perhaps since the whaling era.

As I noted earlier, as part of one the largest environmental cleanups in the country, the removal of contaminated sediment from the harbor is well-underway. Soon, thanks to funding from the Baker-Polito administration, the deeper dredging of channels and berths will bring the harbor to its authorized depth for the first time since the 1950's, freeing up room for larger vessels to pass.

At the same time, up and down the waterfront, port facilities are being added or re-built. The New Bedford Marine Commerce Terminal is now on line of course, and is America's first purpose-built facility for offshore wind staging. In the last two years, we've restored all the municipally owned piers to good working condition. Next year the EPA is scheduled to turn over to the Port Authority a major pier north of the bridge that the EPA had used for the harbor clean up, which now can be used instead to support fishing, offshore wind, or other maritime activities. Right next door we will build a new major port facility thanks to a \$15 million federal grant that Senator Ed Markey helped us secure a few months ago, which will give us even more room to expand.

There are other key developments. Through the leadership of Bristol Community College and the Workforce Investment Board, programs are now being put together that will position New Bedford as a center for maritime workforce training.

This is happening while existing industries are growing. Much of the East Coast's fishing industry is gravitating to New Bedford, with over a hundred out-of-state vessels landing here each year. We've seen several processing plants relocate here or undergo multi-million dollar expansions. The island ferries carried a record number of passengers this year, and the recreational marinas are full and have waiting lists.

One of the reasons why the port has been successful is that it has always been a center of innovation. The fishing industry has figured out time and again how to keep up with changing regulations and fish stocks, by nimbly adapting its methods, business models, and equipment.

Through the work of the New Bedford Ocean Cluster, which was established a few years ago by our Port Director Ed Washburn, we are helping to

create new platforms on which innovation can occur, by developing a marine test bed, establishing a comprehensive aquaculture program, and creating a marine data bank using internet-of-things technology that will be valuable to a whole array of ocean industries.

A lot is happening on the waterfront, and our goal, simply stated, is to establish New Bedford as the top ocean economy city on the East Coast.

We will lead in fishing, we will lead in offshore wind, and when it comes to marine innovation, we will lead there, too.

Off the Waterfront

Our effort to support a vibrant, diversified and inclusive economy is hardly limited to the waterfront. The downtown continues to grow. We are seeing more residential development, with several projects in the pipeline. The New Bedford Harbor Hotel got off to a fast start last summer, and there are more restaurants in the pipeline.

We believe that with the completion of major infrastructure upgrades like the long-awaited renovation of the Elm Street garage and the rebuilding of Union Street, we'll usher in more restaurants, shops, and other development still. The resurgence of the downtown could not have happened without the work of Derek Santos and his team at the Economic Development Council, and I'd like to thank them for their unrelenting commitment.

Downtown has become so popular that parking isn't exactly easy. Believe me, I get it, I drive around looking for a space all the time, and yes, I get tickets, too. And we're doing something about it. Last year we launched the first comprehensive parking study of the downtown. In the coming weeks, we will have the results of that study, and will have some proposals to make parking easier and restaurants and shops more accessible. Parking will get easier.

And the downtown and the rest of the city will benefit from the city's first cultural plan, which was the product of considerable effort this year by our arts community. Having established the state's first dedicated municipal arts fund, we are about to witness the city taking its arts scene to the proverbial next level.

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.

I think most people have come to appreciate that the project does not represent the economic salvation of Southeastern Massachusetts, but the connection would offer one more reason to live or invest here, and that's a positive development.

Another important set of connections will come through our airport. We are winding down a year-long review of the airport's operation that was headed up by Dave Slutz, that will yield a strategic plan. With the recent reconstruction of both runways, the FAA's authorization of commercial air service, and our ongoing partnership with Bridgewater State University's flight school, it is mightily important that the airport have a comprehensive strategic plan to live up to its full potential, and soon it will.

And finally, we need to remain a place that supports small business. We've seen increased small business formation and growth across many sectors, ranging from new restaurants in the downtown and on the Ave., to small retailers and service providers. With the speeding up of permitting, the stabilization of commercial property tax rates, and the work of small business lending programs like the one run by the EDC, we're setting the stage for more to come.

Quality of Life

Successful cities provide services that enable the well-being of their residents. The starting point of course is to secure their physical safety.

Public Safety

The decrease in crime in our city is extremely encouraging, not simply because New Bedford doesn't appear on those least-safe-cities lists anymore, but because when I talk to people in neighborhoods where crime had taken hold, it has improved their everyday lives.

There are a number of reasons for the decline, including the growth in our economy. But much credit should go to the work of the police department, which under Joe Cordeiro's leadership has intensified community policing efforts and made better use of data to make decisions. They have made their presence felt in the right places and at the right times.

The work of the neighborhood task force under John Flor has neutralized many of the sources of crime by eradicating blight and forcing absentee landlords to manage their properties more responsibly. And we've been able to rely on the responsiveness of District Attorney Tom Quinn's office to prosecute violent offenders successfully.

Our goal is to get to the point when residents of not just most, but all neighborhoods can take their safety for granted, so that parents even in our historically struggling neighborhoods can let their kids out to play, and seniors can sit on a park bench, without thinking twice about it.

This is a high bar, but the residents of our city, in every neighborhood, deserve our best effort. Looking forward, we will continue to modernize our police department. The recently completed review of the department, which was undertaken on our own initiative specifically to find ways to improve, will guide much of this work. Among other steps, we will continue to supply officers with modern equipment, and bolster our capacity to make decisions based on data, and to enhance training.

We want to put every officer in a position to be as effective as he or she can be.

And we will keep up the battle against the opioid epidemic, which is at once the most challenging public health problem of our time, but also a cause of

criminal activity. The problem is not unique to New Bedford, but it has ended or ruined many lives here.

As I've said before, it 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 effort at every level of government. Our Opioid Prevention Task Force and the Health Department under Damon Chaplin, along with our EMS and fire departments, have made great strides, and I can report that in the last two years, we've seen a 35% drop in overdose deaths. As encouraging as that is, we can't let up.

The work at the municipal level has been greatly aided by the leadership of Attorney General Maura Healey, who has made the combating of the opioid epidemic a centerpiece of her administration. Whether using the legal authority of her office to hold the manufacturers of synthetic opioids accountable, prosecuting dealers of fentanyl, or bringing to light the plight of families wrecked by addiction, she has been with us all the way. I'd ask you to join me in thanking her personally for her skillful and determined support.

Physical Condition and Appearance of the City

Just the other day, one of my neighbors who had just run the half-marathon mentioned to me that she overheard some runner along the route, apparently from out of town, who audibly said, "New Bedford really looks great." And my neighbor added, "I was so proud to hear that, and you know what, I've lived here my whole life, that's exactly right. It's never looked better."

I love hearing these types of comments because it's so validating of the work our city employees, and everyone else who does a little extra to clean up their neighborhoods, or make their houses look just so. The efforts proclaim to everyone that this is a city that cares about itself.

These improvements don't happen by accident. A few years ago, we made a conscious decision to seize responsibility for the physical condition and appearance of the city. For too long the city neglected its built environment: buildings, sidewalks, cemeteries, parks, water and waste water systems, roads, and the general cleanliness of the city.

I believe our residents deserve to live in a clean city with well-designed and visually appealing public spaces and effective infrastructure.

And we've followed through. We've planted nearly 4,000 trees, restored City Hall and numerous other buildings, revamped the trash system, enforced the trash laws, wiped out graffiti, and built five new neighborhood parks. The Harborwalk and Covewalk have not only become enormously popular neighborhood amenities, but regional destinations. When the weather is warm you'll see constant activity and enjoyment – people running, biking, walking a dog, or even taking a wedding photo.

As much as we want our city to look good, we also want it to work well. That's why, with the city council's support, we've increased annual road maintenance funding by nearly 75%. We've spent millions in fixing up city buildings, of which there are some 96, and retrofitted them to be more energy efficient.

It's also why we're investing tens of millions of dollars to make sure that the city's drinking water is safe and affordable, and that our waste water system will continue to function as expected. I want to thank Jamie Ponte and his team for their thoughtful and diligent management of these major infrastructure investments, above and below ground.

Schools

Central to our city's quality of life, as well as our economic competitiveness, is our ability to offer our city's children pathways to opportunity through our public schools.

The New Bedford Public Schools have come a long way in the last few years. The days when the needs of adults were put before children have receded in the rearview mirror. 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. There have been long-needed changes to collective bargaining agreements, a revamped curriculum, performance accountability established through teacher and administrator evaluations, and major facilities upgrades. In lifting the state monitor from the school district a year-and-a-half

ago, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education stated explicitly that the New Bedford Public Schools have “made a huge, huge step forward.”

And the improvements in student outcomes are evident. Besides the graduation rate, attendance is up, suspensions are down. Enrollment is coming back up, including three hundred more students in the district this year. Most notably, in the last two years, we’ve seen significant gains at the elementary level. You’ve probably heard by now about the work of principal Darcie Aungst and the staff at the Congdon School in the South End, where the school leapt to the 85th percentile among state elementary schools, making it the highest performing elementary in Southeastern Massachusetts. But what you may not have known is that the majority of elementaries in New Bedford also saw significant gains.

The trick now is to extend those gains to the remaining elementaries, and to the middle schools, where considerable attention is now being devoted.

We are proud of the work being done at our two major public high schools, NBHS and Voc-Tech. Here at the High School, under Headmaster Coelho’s leadership, considerable progress has been made in student performance. The passing rate on Advanced Placement tests has doubled, and the establishment of the Honors Academy and the AP Capstone programs will lead to still more students being admitted to America’s top colleges.

And speaking of achievement, I wanted to give a shout out to one particular senior, of whom I am especially proud. When Janice Leao was an eighth grader, her gym teacher at Roosevelt Middle School, Rachel Lassey, suggested that she go out for volleyball, a sport Janice hadn’t played before and otherwise had no interest in. After repeated but gentle urging over time, Janice decided to give it a shot. Now, some four years later, and after leading a volleyball team that hardly lost a game along the way, Janice is heading to the University of Miami on a full volleyball scholarship. So when you turn on ESPN and see Janice playing for the “U”, remember that she is an example of a student who made the most of an opportunity, in a school system where the adults were looking to make that happen.

Over at Voc-Tech, we’ve seen tremendous work in preparing students for tomorrow’s workforce, and collaborating with the business community to keep their programs relevant and competitive. [On the subject of Voc-Tech, by the

way, I wanted to give a shout out to Voc-Tech softball coach Mark Collins, whose team won the state championship in dramatic fashion this past Spring. He and his staff put in the time all year long that is necessary to develop a strong sports program, and the work certainly has paid off].

I am highly optimistic about the prospects of our schools. They've made considerable progress despite the headwinds of demographic change and tight budgets. I'm encouraged by the work of teachers and administrators under often intense pressure to perform. And I'm tremendously confident in our school leadership. Superintendent Thomas Anderson has set the right tone from the start. His standards are appropriately high, but the focus of his work is to enable administrators and teachers to develop the capacity to reach those standards. He has everyone working together.

Toward that end, I believe it is imperative that we as a city articulate a clear vision for our schools, and then devote ourselves in full pursuit of that vision. For many years, our school system was unable to change with the times. When performance suffered, no one owned the problem. Even when the district made progress while the state had its monitor in place, there was always a sense that we were doing what we were told to do by the state; that is, the work was more about compliance, than about building the kinds of schools we wanted to see.

With new school leadership in place, and the monitoring having ended, it's time now for us to fly the plane on our own.

In the coming weeks, the superintendent will lead a series of discussions to hear from the stakeholders in our schools – which is pretty much everybody who lives or works in Greater New Bedford – about the kind of school system they'd like to see. We want to build a school system that cultivates in students a capacity and a desire for life-long learning, especially in a time of rapid economic change, that reinforces our city's collective values, and that unlocks the full potential of every student.

I encourage everyone to weigh in. I don't mean to suggest that the state, which provides funding for the lion's share of our school budget, doesn't have a say in our school system.

Rather, the process is an opportunity for our city to affirm the notion that our children's future is primarily our responsibility.

Finances

None of the work we do is possible if we are not effective stewards of tax dollars. Our bond rating, which compares very favorably to the industrial cities in the Northeast, shows that we've been pretty good at it, but it hasn't been easy.

You've heard me say it before: money is tight. We have made cuts to city government, and it 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?

I want to make very clear that I will not allow our city to be put in a precarious financial position, and we are taking affirmative steps to protect ourselves. The City Council, I know, sees it the same way.

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. The project was put on pause because of a state supreme court decision that complicated the land transfer, but it is now moving forward again.

Meanwhile, I will continue to fight for more school funding as I did last week when I testified at the state house to change the state's school funding formula. This is an important discussion happening at the state level, and New Bedford will continue to be in that fight because our kids deserve the same

chance at a great education as children in affluent school districts. Our state legislative delegation has made it clear that they feel the same way, too.

In addition, we will work to ensure that New Bedford gets every federal dollar we are entitled by making sure the U.S. census counts everyone in our city. I happen to share the belief held by many that not everyone in New Bedford was counted in the last census, and that we've lost out on state and federal program dollars as a result. To make sure we get it right, we will hire a census facilitator to work with our complete count committee. This is a necessary step because the federal government has made it even harder this time. The administration in Washington has reduced the resources available to cities, and has added the politically-motivated citizenship question to the census form, whose only practical effect will be to scare off participation in places with large immigrant populations, that is, cities like New Bedford. Despite these impediments, we will get an accurate count, and I encourage everyone to spread the word about just how important the census is.

When it comes to our finances, we will hustle for every last dollar, and spend it carefully as we always have, that is, as through it were our own personal money.

The Importance of Local Media

I will add one more thing about the city's quality of life. It's not something that city government has any formal control over, but it is so important to the vitality of any city.

All across America, cities are struggling with the decline in local news coverage. The explanation for the problem is generally understood to be that the internet offers advertisers the ability to reach more prospective customers at lower cost than traditional print newspapers. As advertisers have decamped to on-line platforms, newspapers have seen their revenue plummet, and their capacity to cover news contract. At the same time, the proliferation of on-line media has fragmented the news market, which now rewards speed to publish, at the further expense of the breadth and depth of coverage. As a result, Americans know less now about what matters in their cities now than ever before.

These developments should alarm everyone. Local newspapers of course play an indispensable role in not only holding public officials accountable – and maybe that’s why so few have spoken up about the problem – but more fundamentally, they establish a bulwark of trust in a community. Especially in our rapidly changing world, people need a credible source of information about matters that, because they are happening right around the corner, are of immediate relevance to their lives. When misleading information in the public realm is allowed to become the gospel truth, public trust further erodes, and renders society less able to tackle its collective challenges. City newspapers have long filled the role of the indispensable arbiter of factual disputes, a role that the Framers of the Constitution well appreciated when they enshrined the freedom of the press in the First Amendment.

With these concerns in mind, I want to thank in particular the staff at the Standard Times for soldiering on, despite the pressures in their organization to do less than they would like. We may not agree all the time, but I am so glad they do what they do.

I acknowledge that I don’t have the definitive answer to the problem, but I believe that this is something our city needs to be talking about. I also want to use this occasion before members of the business community and others listening or watching, to urge you to support your local paper. Your city needs it to function effectively, and in the long run, your support would be good for business, too.

Connection to Place

In administering city government, we strive to base our decisions on a careful evaluation of available information, and in light of our best judgment of the city’s interest. In a time when trust in government institutions is waning, and resources are scarce, this deliberate, evidence-based approach to governing is what I believe our city needs and deserves.

At the same time, we can’t lose sight of what also keeps cities going and makes life in them worth living there: which is love of the place itself.

I do what I do because I love New Bedford, and if you are here today, for certain you do, too.

A city of course is more than a place on a map. It shapes and frames our relationships with one another, and is woven into each of us.

And when you love where you live, you'll commit acts of love on its behalf, and make it an even better place, and improve yourself in some small way.

That's exactly what two North End residents did recently.

As perhaps all of you know, since my last state of the city address a police officer in the town of Yarmouth on Cape Cod named Sean Gannon, was shot and killed by a career criminal he was trying to apprehend. Sean was a New Bedford guy. He grew up off of Morton Avenue in the North End, went to Bishop Stang, and came from a terrific loving family. He was just an all-around great guy.

Sean's family home is right across the street from the Campbell School. That's where Sandy Douglas and Carla Mourao sends their children to school. At the time of the tragedy, they were heading up a fundraising drive for a new school playground.

Carla and Sandy immediately stepped up. They embraced the idea that the playground not only should be named in Sean's honor, but that it should be first rate to befit the honoree. That meant slowing down the project, and a whole lot more work to raise funds. To date, they have raised over \$200,000 from private and public sources. And the project is on track. It will open up at the beginning of the next school year. Perhaps even better, Sean's parents will be able to look out their front window at that playground, and behold their son's legacy of service in the joyful faces of children at play.

Please join me in thanking Sandy and Carla (and by the way, they are still taking donations!).

Thank you Sandy and Carla for reminding us all that New Bedford is still one of those very special places that is defined by love, and the acts of generosity and selflessness that love inspires.

Thank you, and God Bless New Bedford.