

Good evening, and healthy holidays. Our City's Charter requires that every year, I speak with our community about the "current status of City affairs." Well, we postponed our spring "State of the City" event until we could all safely convene, and since that hasn't happened yet, here we are in the final hours of 2020. Amid a year of pandemic, wildfires, civil unrest, and painful recession, our Charter's mandate "to address the current state of City affairs" seems something of an absurd legal formality.

On February 6<sup>th</sup> of this year, a 57-year-old member of our San Jose community, Patricia Dowd, became the first casualty of Coronavirus on American soil. Hundreds of our families have since suffered the loss of their own loved ones. Thousands more have huddled anxiously in socially distanced circles outside of hospitals. Tens of thousands more of our neighbors have endured sleepless nights over lost jobs, an inability to pay rent, or mounting bills. Parents have wrestled with the wrenching choice between going back to work to support their children and staying home to care for those same homebound children. Hundreds of small business owners have shuttered their doors, watching their dreams evaporate with their life savings.

What is the "State of our City?" Our city is suffering, as it has never suffered before. Between days filled with wildfire smoke, nights of civil unrest, weeks of rising hospitalization rates, and months of unpaid bills, we have been bruised and we have been battered.

But we remain unbowed.

San Jose is a resilient city. Boundless hearts and creative spirits have enabled us to endure, to adapt, and to innovate. We still have a long, difficult road ahead, and the steepest and most perilous climb likely still awaits us—through months of contagion, of vaccinations, and of persistent economic adversity. Through this, we must abide a range of negative emotions-- of frustration, exhaustion, anxiety, anger, and, yes, outrage.

But just as vaccines hold the promise of ending our pandemic, there is an antidote to the despair of our day as well.

That antidote came to mind several weeks ago, when I visited the parking lot of a Goodwill office on 7<sup>th</sup> Street. We'd recently funded pre-apprenticeship construction trades classes for residents trying to get back on their feet after their release from jail, or after living on the street—or both.

When I showed up, all of the students were bundled in winter jackets, because the classes are held outside in tents, and they begin at 7:30 in the morning in the cold air. I asked them how they were holding up. A couple of men spoke up and talked, and after them, a young woman named Celina timidly raised her hand. Celina volunteered how grateful she was for the electrician training class, and for her County alcohol rehabilitation program, and for the housing that she recently received at one of the tiny home communities that the City just opened. She talked about her struggles with addiction, and with the recovery, and how the class gave her a reason to believe that she still had a future, and that it was worth investing in herself. She was the only woman in the class, but as I looked at the faces of some of her classmates—and there were plenty of big, brawny guys—I saw several of them wiping their damp eyes as Celina recounted her story. She concluded by talking about how she'd been volunteering to help distribute food for a local non-profit, because, as she put it, "I want to help like others helped me."

For years, Celina's incarceration and alcoholism defined her identity, and limited her aspirations. Yet on that cold, cloudy morning, an immense nobility shone through Celina's face. I saw it and others saw it as well, and those who followed her talked about how grateful they also felt—as if her gratitude itself had become contagious. I couldn't help but feel it myself, and for hours after the meeting that day, every stride I took felt a little lighter.

Celina's story is only one of many that have inspired me in recent months, but more than any other, it brought me to find that antidote to the swirl of negativity that can suffocate us in this very dark moment. That antidote is faith.

Now, I'm not referring strictly to religious faith—I'll leave the preaching to others who are better qualified to do it. In my own Biblical tradition, religious faith is described as the “evidence of things not seen,” but here, I'm actually talking about a faith supported by evidence that can be readily seen, all around us. I'm talking about a humanist faith—a faith in ourselves, each other, and in our community.

Just think about those moments—in the very depths of this crisis—when you have experienced someone else's fortitude, a neighbor's humanity, a stranger's generosity. I am so grateful to the many people responsible for these moments that I've experienced:

- I think of my neighbor Margarita, who leaves her five children every morning to work in a local taqueria, and I think of the many other essential workers like her--grocery store clerks, senior caregivers, delivery drivers, and, of course, our health care workers, who put themselves in peril daily to serve and support all of us,
- I think of high school students Neha and Eshan Rachapudi and a team of city librarians who used their public library's 3D printers to mass-produce COVID face shields for a local hospital.
- I think of the more than 3,300 proud community members who volunteered to assist in food delivery for their homebound neighbors, though our Silicon Valley Strong website
- I think of people like Jennifer Loving, who urged me to join her in fundraising to help families in need only days before the March shut-down, and with the strong leadership from Cisco CEO Chuck Robbins and other local employers, we raised more than \$25 million to help families in need.
- I think of our San Jose firefighters and police officers who responded to 1.2 million calls for service from our residents this year—while supporting response to wildfires and unrest throughout the state of California.
- The engineering and manufacturing teams at San Jose's Bloom Energy, who rehabilitated hundreds of used ventilators for overwhelmed hospitals in April, and then this month, launched free rapid COVID testing for hundreds of low-income San Jose residents.
- I think of the dozens of young people who peacefully protested on Santa Clara Street by day but then returned the next morning to join us to clean graffiti and broken glass left by a few of their less respectful peers;
- And yes, the San Jose State football team—picked by pundits to finish last— and yet completed an inspiring, surprising season that brought the first conference championship home in three decades;

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. instructed that “it is only in the darkness that we can see the stars.” And we see them clearly on this dark night—forming brilliant constellations across our firmament. It is these people and these moments that lift our spirits, that harden our resolve, and, yes, strengthen our faith in ourselves, and in each other. Like stars guiding explorers half a millennium ago, they illuminate our route ahead. The strength of others gives us strength. The struggles of others give us solace that we do not struggle alone. Through our common toils, we find uncommon valor.

These and other moments give us faith in our community. That faith strengthens our resilience in tough times—by forging our commitment to each other, and by emboldening us to adapt, try new methods, and to embrace risk. That is, our common faith breeds our spirit of generosity and our spirit of innovation. It not only allows us to not only survive in the moment, but to thrive after the crisis has passed.

Our City workforce has embraced and manifested this faith, this selfless and innovative spirit, since the very early days of this pandemic. So many of our City employees have sacrificed weekends and long nights in the Emergency Operations Center while still doing their day jobs. [SC4] Under the leadership of Kip Harkness and Lee Wilcox, these teams have redefined public service in this moment. I’d like to give a few examples, in our initiatives for digital inclusion, food distribution, and homelessness.

First, San Jose embarked on bridging the digital divide several years ago, but when the pandemic struck and schools closed, we still had 62,000 young students whose families could not afford a data plan or a laptop computer. Teams led by Jill Bourne, Rob Lloyd, and Jordan Sun accelerated partnerships with East Side Union High School District, and launched new efforts with private sector partners, distributing nearly 16,000 hot spots to families--ultimately providing more than 100,000 residents with free wi-fi connectivity in the last year or so. Within two years, our East Side initiative will bring online more than 300,000 residents at no cost—and that 300,000 is a population of a city the size of St. Louis or Pittsburgh.

Similarly, for years, food insecurity has grown increasingly urgent, but we’ve lacked a county-wide, integrated end-to-end system for delivering food provided by organizations like Second Harvest Food Bank. More than 160 San Jose employees—led by Angel Rios, Dolan Beckel, Neil Ruffino, and Andrea Flores-Shelton--stepped up to manage food distribution—not merely for San Jose residents, but for the entire county. We used GIS software to identify food providers, created an on-line distribution map for the public and for providers, and within weeks, the team was coordinating delivery of more than 2.5 million free meals per week, in addition to tens of thousands of packages of diapers, wipes, and infant formula. Thanks to the heavy lifting of partners like Second Harvest, the County Office of Education, Cathedral of Faith, HealthTrust], and on-demand delivery companies, our work together has forged a coordinated system better able to address food insecurity in the future.

So too, homelessness has long ravaged our city—and coronavirus has made survival even more perilous for those unhoused who crowd in our shelters and our encampments. A team led by Jacky Morales-Ferrand, Ragan Henninger, and Kelly Hemphill rolled up their sleeves with the County and nonprofits like HomeFirst to bring more than four thousand, three hundred unhoused residents off the streets into motel rooms or converted shelters countywide, and to enable another 1,533 of our unhoused to find permanent apartments. Teams led by Jim Ortbal, James Stagi, and

Matt Cano partnered with Habitat for Humanity to rapidly build prefabricated emergency housing for more than three hundred unhoused residents on three separate sites. New residents have already moved in to the first site on Bernal Road-- not in the four years it typically takes to develop an apartment project, but in four months, and at 1/5 the cost of a typical development. Two more sites will open in the coming weeks.

Our digital divide, food insecurity, and homelessness aren't new problems, and they're certainly not unique to San Jose. Yes, the pandemic has brought new urgency--but we have found new solutions. For example, we've begun to tackle the deluge of trash and blight that resulted from our shut-down orders with the help of our unhoused residents, they've been paid to remove 3 ½ tons of trash while they're getting housing, and learning job skills, and getting back on their feet. San Jose Fire Chief Robert Sapien's team has continued improving their emergency response times despite force-depleting wildfires throughout the state. They've done it by deploying signal pre-emption software, business intelligence tools, and data analytics. To help our struggling small businesses, we're opening our parks, and parking lots, paseos, and plazas to help more local retailers and restaurants survive through our al Fresco initiative. We're also working with partners to help immigrant-led businesses develop an online presence and launching the #ShopLocalSJ campaign to leverage our collective buying power to support them. These and other examples show how we can focus on nimbly adapting to survive today, while better positioning San Jose to thrive when this pandemic has passed.

In the weeks ahead, we'll maintain our focus on helping struggling families and small businesses survive. As the first mayor in the United States to announce an eviction moratorium in March, I'm pushing to extend the state legislature's own moratorium, to avoid the "eviction cliff" that's looming for tens of thousands of our families. In my role as chair of the California Big City Mayors coalition, we'll also urge Congressional leadership to return to the negotiating table to deliver a more robust package of relief for local communities. And yes, we'll focus on staying safe: after my own transgression at a Thanksgiving dinner with my wife and six family members, many residents confessed to me that they too have strayed from one health order or another during this pandemic, so let this be a moment for all of us to recommit to do better for each other.

Yet we must also prepare for the future. Well after this pandemic has passed, we will continue grappling with chronic crises of affordable housing, homelessness, climate change, and a widening economic divide. Our ability to innovate and adapt today, however, gives us hope--not merely for a return to a "new normal," but for a "better normal," in the words of the co-chair of our Silicon Valley Recovery Roundtable, Lisa Su. How can we achieve this "better normal?" With the same resilience—the same generous, innovative spirit—as our community has shown throughout this pandemic. I'll describe our post-pandemic plans early next year, when this current surge has passed, to get people back to work as quickly and safely as possible. I'll focus on how we'll support small businesses, while pushing ahead with construction of major infrastructure.

Of course, we will also engage proactively in confronting racial injustice and to promote long-overdue healing. We'll begin by engaging with our diverse community and dedicated police officers to embark on an effort to "reimagine" policing, starting with how we might differently respond to calls for service that don't involve violent crime. We'll push ahead with essential reforms in the 9-point plan that I presented last summer, such as moving internal misconduct

investigations out of the police department and into the Independent Police Auditor's office and improving transparency and accountability of arbitrations of police discipline.

In all of the focus on policing, however, we must not overlook the crux of racial injustice in our nation: in the unconscionably persistent nexus between race and poverty. San Jose's moral stature will be measured by whether and how we can overcome our nation's generational economic apartheid, to enable every child to benefit from the prosperity of our Valley. We must recommit to much of the work we've started in the past half-decade to expand opportunity for our youth of color—through San Jose Learns, which targets after-school educational programs for our elementary school students living in our least affluent neighborhoods, and Coding 5K, to engage thousands more junior high students in free coding and computer science classes in our libraries. We must expand summer jobs for our high school students engaged in San Jose Works and propel more of our first-generation college students to success by leveraging college scholarships and mentoring through San Jose Aspires. Let's make San Jose the first city in America where no child's trajectory is constrained by her zip code, immigration status, or race.

We have much work to do. But to roll up our sleeves and work together in the New Year, we must resolve to come out of our corners. We must set aside all the negativity and incivility pervasive in this age of social media. We must decline to be swayed by the loudest, artificially amplified voices of every angry pundit, troll, and naysayer that engages in what David Brooks calls “the fantasy that the other half of America can be conquered, and when it disappears, we can get everything that we want.”

Our faith demands more. It demands that this New Year, we resolve to listen more, and to yell less. To forgive more, and to judge less. To debate without demonizing. To speak our truth and stand our ground, without disparaging the motives of those who disagree with us.

Our faith instructs that while we remain physically apart, we still live in one community, one city, together. It summons the collective resilience needed to emerge stronger from this pandemic—but only if we're working together.

When our days have passed, and history recounts our toils to future generations, a very different narrative will emerge than that which we read in our own time. It will tell our progeny about our common faith—one that inspired us to overcome our physical separation to act collaboratively, to give boldly, and to adapt courageously. That narrative will reveal how we've endured fires that forged a stronger alloy--and created a “better normal” --together. This is our moment to write a new chapter for our City, to define our generation's special place in history, and to lead a badly ailing nation on a path of healing.

Happy New Year to you and your families, and God bless our San Jose community.