

2016 State of the City Address – Mayor Byron W. Brown Buffalo 2016

Final Transcript for Mayor Brown's 10th annual State of the City Address

Thank you. Thank you very much. It's an honor to stand before you on this very special day, my *Tenth* State of the City address. This has been an incredible decade of growth, development and progress in the City of Buffalo. It *is* a 'special' time in our City's history – we are in the midst of a transformation that will be felt for generations to come.

As I look around this room, I see true leaders, partners and friends – and I thank you for your vision and commitment, your cooperation and support.

Thank you to our Lieutenant Governor, Kathy Hochul, for being here. The unprecedented level of investment by our State in the City of Buffalo under the leadership of Governor Andrew Cuomo has had a profoundly beneficial impact. For that, we are all grateful.

And, thank you to all of my colleagues in government – New York State Court of Appeals Judge Eugene Fahey, Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz, Congressman Brian Higgins, Comptroller Mark Schroeder, Senator Tim Kennedy, Senator Mark Panepinto, my dear friend and Assembly Woman – Crystal Peoples-Stokes, our Council President Darius Pridgen, Acting District Attorney Michael Flaherty, Majority Leader David Rivera and all of the distinguished public servants who are here today.

Finally, please join me in recognizing the First Lady of our City, my wife of 26 years, Michelle, and our son Byron, who have both always stood beside me with their love and support since the day I was sworn in as your Mayor.

The record level of attendance and support today makes me very proud. And the convention center tells us you are the 'largest sit-down crowd ever' here at the convention center. I acknowledge and I thank each and every one of you.

Just after I took office, I toured our waterfront (which looked much different then). I promised that working together we would put Buffalo on a path to prosperity.

As I prepared my remarks for today, I thought about what that promise meant ...and the undeniable progress that we have made. Ten years ago, at my very first State of the City Address, I said...

Video clip: "My vision is of a City of Buffalo that will reclaim its rightful place among the great cities of the United States."

A great city.

We knew that the City of Buffalo's future depended on our ability to stabilize and grow our economy; to stimulate development and create jobs; to build a smarter, safer, stronger Buffalo; to continue to improve the quality of life for all of our residents; to invest in our infrastructure and efficiently deliver services; and to produce the opportunities that would attract worldwide attention back to the treasures that abound across our City of Good Neighbors.

These core principles drove our progress.

In ten years we achieved what few imagined was possible. We not only stabilized our faltering economy, we grew it. By putting in place a smart and responsible fiscal team, our City's economic recovery was underway.

We committed to conservative budgeting – established a multi-million-dollar 'Rainy Day' Fund and implemented dozens of efficiency measures.

We worked successfully with the Buffalo Fiscal Stability Authority, to the point where they are now serving in an advisory role. Everyone who served on the control board, I thank you for your stewardship and guidance.

I'm proud to report that we have delivered ten consecutive, on-time, balanced budgets and lifted the wage freeze. The State of Our City is Strong!

In 2015, our unemployment rate hit 7%, lower than Los Angeles and Washington D.C.

Buffalo is ranked as the hottest construction market in the Northeast, ahead of New York, Philadelphia and Boston. Our City's residential real estate market is soaring. We are well on our way to reach my goal of 2,000 new housing units in downtown in the next two years. Investor confidence continues to grow, which is reflected in our A+ bond ratings by both *Standard & Poor's* and *Fitch* and A1 by *Moody's*, the highest credit ratings in our City's history!

And, most importantly, we REDUCED the residential property tax rate by nearly 16% and the commercial tax rate by almost 32%.

By 2008, I made a major declaration:

Video Clip: "It's now time to acknowledge that the fiscal crisis in Buffalo is over."

The crisis *was* over, but our *work* continues.

I'm announcing that once again I will NOT raise taxes this year.

We will continue to hold the line on the residential property tax rate, and again freeze assessments, keeping our commercial taxes significantly lower than other major upstate municipalities.

Since 2012, Buffalo has experienced \$5.5 billion in economic development activity. Investment in the City is higher than it's been in decades and the fruits of this investment have visibly changed our City's skyline and have impacted every neighborhood. From the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus to Larkinville to RiverBend, from the Buffalo Creek Casino, to Canalside, New Era, to Compass East and Bak USA, from ECMC to IBM, to the Northland Corridor and the new global headquarters of Delaware North...the *momentum* is undeniable.

Please join me in recognizing Jeremy M. Jacobs Jr., The Jacobs Family and the Delaware North representatives who are here today as the company continues to celebrate its 100th anniversary.

The strength of our city determines the strength of the region.

That was four years ago. Since then a city-owned *parking lot* was transformed into the \$200 million dollar HarborCenter, with the investment by Terry and Kim Pegula. I am grateful for their partnership as we continue to work together on the future development of Canalside.

There is an extraordinary range of projects underway that will bring jobs and new life to every neighborhood. And, the new loan fund created through the Buffalo Building Reuse Project will spur even more development and job creation. First Niagara, HSBC, Key Bank, Evans Bank, M&T Bank and New York Business Development Corporation have combined to commit an additional \$10 million to the fund. I thank Dottie Gallagher-Cohen and the Buffalo Niagara Partnership for its collaboration on this initiative.

SolarCity is in the process of hiring its workforce on remediated land we purchased and later sold for this development. I thank Governor Cuomo for his leadership and investment in this project as part of the Buffalo Billion, which is bringing 3,000 jobs to Buffalo.

We recently reopened the third major block of downtown Main Street to cars. This project has played a key role in stimulating over \$500 million in private investment along Main Street. We need to acknowledge our United States Senators Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand and our Congressman Brian Higgins for their support of federal funding to help us keep this important project moving forward.

More than 440 construction workers just put shovels in the ground as part of Buffalo Seneca Creek Casino's expansion, which will create up to 300 additional jobs at the casino. I thank the Seneca Nation, its President Maurice John, and the Seneca Gaming Corporation for their partnership.

And today, I have another major economic development project to announce. There's been talk of a major supermarket coming to downtown Buffalo and today that becomes a reality. We've chosen Ciminelli Real Estate Corporation as the developer for the highly anticipated 201 Ellicott Street project. They will advance our vision of turning this City-owned land into a mixed-use development that includes housing AND YES a supermarket.

Tops Markets has been selected as the preferred supermarket operator.

Please join me in recognizing Paul Ciminelli and the entire Ciminelli Team, including Ciminelli Real Estate Corporation, LPCiminelli and Allpro Parking, for putting forth a great proposal. Thanks also to Frank Curci and Tops for collaborating on this exciting initiative that will further strengthen our City.

For the past ten years, we've been focused on economic development and job readiness, partnering with organizations like the Buffalo Employment and Training Center. Since 2006, more than 22,000 meaningful job opportunities have been provided to our City's young people through my Summer Youth Employment and Internship program.

This year, I'm adding funding to create 50 additional jobs, bringing my administration's total commitment to youth employment to over \$10 million since 2006.

Economic development also includes growing Buffalo's film industry. With crews spending over \$16 million on productions last year, a 70% increase from 2014, more than 1,000 City residents worked in film. As this industry grows in Buffalo, we'll continue to fund the Buffalo Niagara Film Commission and continue to market our City as a world-class location for film and TV production.

When it comes to creating jobs and spurring economic development, we've done a lot but there's more to do.

I welcome the conversation about making sure that there is a job for *everyone*, because ten years ago the conversation was about how to create a job for *anyone*. Today, we are not just talking about where our kids have moved for work, we are talking about our kids coming back.

So today, I'm dedicating the funds raised at this event to strengthen our existing job readiness programs.

We would not be in this enviable position, without the cooperation and solidarity that has been demonstrated by our labor unions in reaching our shared goals over the past several years.

Our current collective bargaining agreements are saving taxpayers money through provisions like self-insured health care, new prescription drug plans, and new residency requirements for our firefighters and police officers.

I'm extremely proud to announce that over the last several years, we have reached negotiated agreements with EVERY labor union that represents members of our City's workforce. Please join me in recognizing members of Buffalo Professional Firefighters Local 282, the Buffalo Police Benevolent Association, members of Local 650, Local 264, Local 264-T, Local 26-51, Local 17, and those from our Crossing Guards Association.

Thank you for working with our Law Department and for negotiating, in good faith, agreements that are a national model for how to best serve your members, your community and your City. We have come a long way, and I thank all of your members for their hard work and dedication.

A great City is smart. It's safe. And it's strong.

Video Clip: "We will not be turned back. We will not be stopped. We will not be discouraged in our mission to keep moving our great city forward."

A good education is important to our young people having a good future. For years we supported the Buffalo Public Schools in a variety of different ways.

Working with the Common Council, we've provided \$1.3 million in funds to Say Yes, for scholarships and academic support. And, it's working. Last year, the Buffalo Public schools graduation rate increased to 61%, a 10 year high for Buffalo. And, nearly 3,000 students enrolled in college and post-secondary programs over the past three years.

Going forward, I will continue our partnership with the Buffalo schools by supporting Superintendent Kriner Cash's new 'Educational Bargain for Parents and Students'. Thank you Superintendent Cash for being here today.

- We will work with the school district to ensure safety for students before and after school, by increasing funds for Peacemakers.
- We will again provide 500 tablets for graduating Say Yes Scholars.
- We'll provide financial incentives to 200 Buffalo senior citizen volunteers to tutor students, in partnership with the Buffalo Public Schools, Say Yes and Read to Succeed.
- We'll also partner with the Buffalo Schools and Say Yes to provide incentives to 200 students and families who demonstrate good attendance or show the greatest improvement in attendance, because our children can't learn if they're not in school.

I'm going to ask city employees to take their commitment to the future of our children even further. We will recruit city lawyers to volunteer in the Say Yes legal clinics, and we will recruit city employees to mentor Say Yes Buffalo Scholars.

Thank you David Rust and Gene Chasin from Say Yes, and all of our partners in education for being here today.

Since 2006, my administration continues to focus on two equally important goals: to keep neighborhoods safe and to build solid police-community relations.

Our crime rate has dropped 32 percent. And, just last year, we saw the 'lowest crime rate' in the city's recorded history. From our Zero Tolerance policing policy, to beefing up our narcotics division, to adding more surveillance cameras, to removing over 14,000 illegal guns, our strategies are producing results.

We were the first city in the region to equip our police and firefighters with Narcan, which they've administered more than 600 times, saving lives. Please join me in recognizing the outstanding men and women of the Buffalo Police and Fire Departments.

This year, we're going to provide all of our officers with the latest technology. Today I'm announcing that every on-duty Buffalo Police Officer will be equipped with an iPad. This state-of-the-art technology will increase efficiency and help our officers solve crimes more quickly.

An important national discussion on police-community relations has been underway, and in Buffalo, we've stood together and listened to each other to gain a better understanding of our public safety needs. As a result, we've implemented plans to improve policing and better serve the needs of everyone in our city.

We've placed an emphasis on reestablishing community policing to improve dialogue between our community and police officers. We hold monthly meetings at each district police station, as well regular meetings with the Concerned Clergy, and Block Club leaders.

Yes, we will continue to dedicate funding to the Buffalo Peacemakers, who have been a tremendous asset, defusing potentially violent situations and working with residents and law enforcement to make our community safer. I thank Rev. James Giles and the Peacemakers who are here with us today.

And in a related initiative that will increase diversity in the police force, last month the first recipients of my 'Buffalo Police Department 21st Century Scholarship Program (BPD21C) entered the Police Academy at ECC North Campus.

BPD21C is a creative, first-of-its-kind program that is designed to recruit the next generation of police officers that reflect the diversity of our city.

BPD21C has the potential to become a national model for other municipalities. We have received strong statements of support from the US Department of Justice, US Conference of Mayors and national law enforcement organizations.

I thank ECC President Jack Quinn for his partnership. And, I especially thank Police Commissioner Dan Derenda and the Concerned Clergy for making this a resounding success.

A few weeks ago, the Police Commissioner and I presented each one of our 53 scholarship winners with a Challenge Coin to commemorate the importance of this opportunity, investment and challenge.

Each of our scholarship winners will receive 30 college credits when they successfully complete the program and graduate in June. And, they will all have acquired valuable leadership training, life skills, and readiness for careers in public safety and public service.

Our hope, and our mission, is to help these 53 impressive men and women, successfully chosen from 550 applicants, eventually become police officers, and become ambassadors and guardians over our great City.

I ask them to stand and accept our congratulations and support.

When I think about “great cities” across the United States, I think about all of the things that bring “quality” of life to City living. The culture and the communities. The arts and entertainment. The sports and recreation. The history and architecture. The beauty and vibrancy of our natural and manmade wonders. These are the heartbeat of a great City. And if there is anything that is undeniable, the HEARTBEAT OF THE CITY OF BUFFALO has never been stronger.

Video Clip: Montage of Quality of Life initiatives

We’ve invested over \$40.5 million in our cultural institutions, community centers and historic buildings over the last decade. The visitor experiences at the Buffalo Science Museum, Colored Musicians Club, Marcy Casino, Kleinhans Music Hall, Darwin Martin House, Coca Cola Field, The Buffalo History Museum and Martin Luther King Park are better than ever.

Shea's Performing Arts Center is celebrating its 90th Anniversary this year. I would like to take a moment to thank my friend, Tony Conte, who is retiring from Shea’s after 15 years at the helm as President and 30 years as a volunteer. Thank you, Tony, for your decades-long commitment to Shea’s and to Buffalo’s theater district.

We’ve attracted major new sports tournaments and our entertainment venues continue to thrive. Buffalo’s impressive ‘Outdoor Museum’ continues to grow as we place public art across the City in partnership with the Albright Knox Art Gallery and Erie County.

Our City’s magnificent network of Olmsted Parks and parks citywide make Buffalo a premiere destination to live, work and visit. Last year, Delaware Park was named one of the world's Top 10. By the end of 2017, we will have completed over \$51 million in park improvements.

Like our parks, the Buffalo Zoo continues to grow in popularity and because of that I’m pleased to announce a plan to provide 150 additional parking spots to the Buffalo Zoo through a partnership between the Zoo, the Olmsted Conservancy and the City of Buffalo. I thank Donna Fernandez and Stephanie Crockatt for their leadership.

This spring, we will finish over \$8 million in repairs to the Ferry Street Bridge, making one of Buffalo’s crown jewels more accessible. Historic Broderick Park served as the final stop on the Underground Railroad and for many played an important role in their passage to freedom. We’re completing a \$2.4 million redevelopment of the park, greatly enhancing this prime cultural and waterfront destination.

Through projects big and small, we’re making sure that the ‘quality’ of what’s being built is better than ever. The Green Code will help us achieve this when it’s adopted later this year as the first new zoning and land use plan for our city in 63 years.

We’ve worked tirelessly to continue to improve our City so that every resident and visitor has access to the peerless activities that Buffalo has to offer. The North Buffalo “Rails-to-Trails” project has become a popular new site for hiking, cycling and spending time outdoors.

By the end of this year, we will have developed over 90 miles of bicycle lanes, in our effort to become a nationally recognized '*Bicycle Friendly Community*', through implementation of the City's Bicycle Master Plan. Thank you to Justin Booth and members of GoBike Buffalo for your advocacy and support.

Canalside continues to amaze our residents and visitors alike. It has developed at an impressive pace, setting yet another attendance record last summer, with over ONE MILLION visitors.

And, the search for a new home for the historic 1924 Carousel, built right here in Western New, is over! I'm pleased to announce that the City will sell a parcel of land at Canalside to the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation, giving the carousel a permanent home. I thank Robert Gioia, Chairman of ECHDC, and the Board and members of Buffalo Heritage Carousel, for their hard work and outreach throughout the community to gain support for this project.

Now, to move our great City forward, we can't ignore the importance of innovation in government, maintenance of our infrastructure, and initiatives that make our City more sustainable.

We improved access to City services by investing in technology and purchasing new equipment to improve government operations. We've made it easier for our residents to do business by implementing an on-line payment system; we enhanced efficiency by installing GPS in our snowplows and garbage trucks; and we modernized the fleet of the Buffalo Fire and Police Departments.

Our 311 Call & Resolution Center has proved to be a valuable tool for citizen engagement, handling over 2 million calls since 2006.

We continue to streamline our permit operations to expedite construction projects. We will allocate \$300,000 for new software to speed up permitting.

And, as we finalize the transition of adjudication of traffic violations from the state, I'm pleased to announce the nomination of Justice Rose Sconiers as Judicial hearing Officer of the City's Traffic Violations Agency.

By championing bold public projects, we have seen scores of private investment follow. Over the past ten years, we've invested over \$530 million on infrastructure projects, allocated over \$100 million dollars to demolish more than 5,700 blighted properties, and improved dozens of neighborhoods after conducting 241 Clean Sweeps.

Today, the signs of progress are everywhere. From neighborhood paving projects to the redeveloped Fillmore Avenue Corridor, to the award-winning parkway on Ohio Street, the improvements have been dramatic.

We'll continue to install energy-efficient LED streetlights. And, we're moving forward on the Niagara Street project, which when combined with improvements to Court Street and the Genesee Gateway, will attract increased investment and job creation.

After a year of planning on the Northland Corridor Redevelopment Project – a critical step in transforming the Delavan-Grider neighborhood on Buffalo's East Side – I'm proud to announce that I'm providing an additional \$4 million to this project. With these additional funds, along with \$44 million from the Buffalo Billion, we will begin construction this summer. This investment will bring hundreds of new job opportunities by creating 'Advanced Manufacturing and Clean Energy Training Centers' that will be a game-changer for this community.

We're moving forward on plans for a new Public Works Campus to combine seven existing facilities into one. This campus will house our municipal snow plowing; garbage collection; paving and construction vehicles; administrative offices; animal shelter; and auto impound. The consolidation will improve efficiency and reduce costs.

Looking forward I am asking every resident of Buffalo to protect our environment by making recycling a priority. We're recycling more, but we can and must do better. In 2011, the recycling rate was 11% and today we are at 26%, closing in on our goal of 34 and More! This year - I will announce a new recycling incentive, so that our residents can earn rewards for filling up those recycling bins.

Looking back over the past ten years, we have so many more reasons to "believe in Buffalo". I have always prioritized the need to drive our city forward by creating opportunity for all people.

Video Clip: "We're all part of this city. From the East Side to the West Side, whether a new immigrant or returning veteran, let's work together to make Buffalo a shining city of opportunity for everyone."

From day one, my commitment to equal opportunity has been clear. We have diversified city leadership, staff and membership on Boards and Commissions, and we've hired the most diverse workforce in our City's history. We have incorporated community benefit agreements in most major development projects to create opportunities for minority and women owned businesses and workers.

Buffalo must be a city for everyone. And that's why we're putting shovels in the ground on affordable projects for working families and our seniors. We've strategically committed \$32 million for affordable housing projects that has leveraged \$210 million, creating over 1,200 new housing units for city residents. These include the Bellamy Commons Redevelopment on Jefferson Avenue, currently under construction.

We will not let properties sit abandoned in our neighborhoods. I'm going to increase our efforts to demolish or find a productive reuse for properties that are abandoned and neglected.

My Law Department will now be taking property owners who abandon their properties to court, and will transfer these properties to the City. We will begin with one abandoned property in

every Council district. Once transferred, we will work with lenders, like the Neighborhood Assistance Corporation of America, to provide financing for homeowners. I thank Bruce Marks of NACA for their partnership.

Another big step toward building a City of Opportunity for all means connecting our residents with training for real career opportunities, and breaking down barriers for the hiring of minorities, women and immigrants.

Over the past year, members of the Racial Equity Roundtable have done extensive work and will be releasing a series of initiatives to build a shared future, tackle the issues that divide us, and eliminate disparities that prevent our collective progress.

I thank Alphonso O'Neil-White and Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker for their leadership in this effort.

If you look around the room you can't miss all the Buffalo Opportunity Pledge banners. Since last year, more than 5,000 individuals, 335 businesses, corporations and organizations, representing more than 165,000 people who live, work or attend college in the City of Buffalo have signed the pledge. All expressing their support for diversity, inclusion and equity. This successful campaign is co-sponsored by IBM, Lamar and AT&T.

To continue building on our efforts to provide opportunities for all people, in the public and private sectors, I've appointed Attorney Crystal Rodriguez to a cabinet-level position as our City's first Chief Diversity Officer.

In our work to ensure that immigrants and refugees get the support they need, our Office of New Americans just released the New Americans Study, a comprehensive report on best practices which will serve as a resource to local employers and entities working to make Buffalo a more welcoming city. Our office of New Americans will also partner with our local court system to improve recruitment and training for qualified court interpreters. This unique partnership, led by Judges Susan Eagan and Lisa Bloch Rodwin, is the first of its kind in the State. Thank you for your leadership!

Every person who labors on our behalf deserves to be able to properly care for their family, and to live without worrying about how they will make ends meet. I announced at the beginning of this year that 360 dedicated men and women, who earn the minimum wage working for our City, will see those wages increase annually until they reach \$15 dollars an hour. These workers will receive the first wage increase on July 1st.

And, I'm extremely proud of the fact that we will open the Beverly Gray Business Exchange Center this year. The East Utica Street center is a very important component of my vision of a great City. It will serve as a resource center for the development and growth of minority and women-owned businesses.

The federal Small Business Administration is a member of the Beverly Gray Steering Committee. And, I'm pleased to announce, we just signed an agreement with the SBA to

strengthen small business development in Buffalo. Thank you SBA Regional Administrator Kellie LeDet and District Director Frank Sciortino for being here today.

I'm also delighted to announce that two of Buffalo's respected leaders have agreed to serve as the Center's Co-Chairs. Alphonso O'Neill White and Acea Mosey are two innovative leaders who have committed to help raise the needed funds to sustain the Beverly Gray Business Exchange Center.

A great City honors and remembers the legacy of our visionaries, our leaders, our benefactors and our champions. We recognize those who always believed, and inspired all of us to believe in our greatness.

I invite Mary Wilson and her guests from the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation to please join me on the stage.

It is my absolute honor to present this Key to the City of Buffalo posthumously to Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. And to ask Mary Wilson to accept this as a small token of our appreciation for the everlasting contribution that she and Ralph Wilson have made to our City.

RALPH WILSON WAS ONE OF OUR CITY'S GREATEST CHAMPIONS.

His vision illuminated our landscape.

His humanity enriched our community.

His integrity exemplified our values.

His passion inspired our loyalty.

AND his generous heart earned our love.

Mary, please accept this Key to the City of Buffalo from me on behalf of a very grateful City, in honor of the everlasting contributions of the Wilson Family.

Applause

In closing, I am so grateful to all of you for helping to make this incredible journey possible.

As your Mayor, I'm even prouder today than I was a decade ago.

Today, we are attracting worldwide attention for the progress we are making.

Yes.

The State of our City is strong.

And I believe the best is yet to come.

With your dedication and support we remain destined for greatness.

Thank you. May God bless you and may God bless the City of Buffalo.

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