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STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

Tuesday, January 30, 2018 | South Side Cultural Arts Center

Good evening. Please stand for the Presentation of Colors by the City of Fort Lauderdale Police Department Honor Guard.

[FLPD HONOR GUARD MARCHES IN; TURNS; DIPS FLAG]

Please join me in welcoming Gary Palmer and Angela Neely who will perform our National Anthem. Gentlemen, please remove your hats.

[GARY PALMER AND ANGELA NEELY PERFORM NATIONAL ANTHEM]

Please join me in welcoming Reverend Ron Perkins, Chaplain for our Police and Fire-Rescue Departments, who will deliver tonight's Invocation.

[REV. RON PERKINS DELIVERS THE INVOCATION]

Please retire the colors.

[FLPD HONOR GUARD MARCHES OUT AND CLEARS THE STAGE AREA]

[STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS]

Welcome to the 2018 State of the City Address and grand opening celebration of the South Side Cultural Arts Center.

Once again, thanks to the Friends of South Side, all of our community leaders, administrators, engineers, City staff and vendors for their tremendous contributions and commitment to completing this project.

Thanks to Gary Palmer and Angela Neely for providing the wonderful music during our reception and for the outstanding rendition of our National Anthem.

Thank you, Ron Perkins, for your spiritual guidance and support, as well as your pastoral leadership throughout our community.

Special thanks to the Fort Lauderdale Police Honor Guard for proudly presenting our colors and reminding us about the importance of patriotism, sacrifice, and the selfless contributions of our service men and women.

In fact, thanks to all our police, fire-rescue, first responders, and public safety personnel for continuing to serve, protect, and safeguard our neighbors and our community.

It is a privilege for me to recognize and thank the individuals who work for you every day to make this City great, my colleagues on the Fort Lauderdale City Commission: Vice Mayor Bruce Roberts, Commissioner Dean Trantalis, Commissioner Romney Rogers, and Commissioner Robert McKinzie. I also want to recognize Heather Moraitis, who was recently elected as our new Commissioner of District I.

Let me also recognize former City of Fort Lauderdale Mayors, Jim Naugle and Rob Dressler.

Believe it or not, the founders of our great City created the positions of Mayor and Commissioners as part-time positions. I think all of us would agree that these jobs are much more than part-time positions and none of us would be successful without the love and support of our families. I want to take a moment to offer my heartfelt appreciation to my family and the families of our Commissioners, and thank all of them for the many sacrifices they have made during our years in public office.

I would like to acknowledge City staff. Under the leadership of City Manager Lee Feldman, our staff does an exceptional job meeting the needs of our community and maintaining our high quality of life.

I'd like to congratulate Rick Maglione on being named Police Chief. Rick has done an exemplary job as Interim Chief and I couldn't think of a better choice to lead the dedicated and professional men and women of our Police Department. I know Rick will ensure that our neighbors and visitors continue to receive the outstanding law enforcement services they have come to know and expect from our City.

I'd like to recognize our Charter Officers: City Auditor John Herbst, City Attorney Cynthia Everett, and City Clerk Jeff Modarelli.

As I've said many times, Fort Lauderdale is fortunate to have some of the hardest working, most talented and involved citizens I've ever seen. I'd like to recognize and thank all of the members of our Advisory Boards and Committees. You are a dedicated group of volunteers who spend thousands of hours each year advising us on topics ranging from infrastructure and budgets to housing and sustainability.

We now have placed your recommendations at the top of our Conference Meeting Agendas because your knowledge and expertise help guide many of our most important decisions. Again, thank you for your outstanding leadership and service to our City.

I would also like to thank all of our neighborhood, civic and homeowner association presidents and officers. You are the backbone of our City and we appreciate your hands-on leadership protecting our quality of life and enhancing our community.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge any Veterans who are with us this evening. Thank you for your service to our country and the many sacrifices you make to defend our liberty and preserve our freedom.

Tonight, I am pleased to report that the state of our City is stronger than ever as we prepare to pass the torch of leadership to our next Mayor and City Commission.

As many of you know, this is my final State of the City Address. It has been my distinct honor, privilege, and pleasure to serve as your Mayor for the past nine years. When I was first sworn into office on March 17, 2009, we were facing the challenges of the Great Recession. But even during those very difficult times, there was a sense of optimism and confidence that our City possessed the diverse range of skills, talent, and resources to overcome the challenges we faced. That optimism and confidence proved to be true, and we have had a wonderful, prosperous and successful nine years.

Tonight, I want to focus on the amazing community spirit that binds us. I want to focus on the civility, good intentions, forward-thinking, and respect that we share.

The grand opening of the South Side Cultural Arts Center is symbolic of our journey together. The City's decision to accept responsibility for the historic preservation of South Side School was made years ago, before the arrival of those in office now.

This facility is a great example of meeting a challenge in a manner that is only possible with consensus building, collaboration, and collegial determination to get the job done.

Together, we have learned that historic preservation can often be a long, arduous, and costly mission – but it can also be an extremely worthwhile mission. Tonight, that mission has been accomplished and we now have a community jewel; a cultural oasis that will serve this and many generations to come.

Let us take a moment to applaud and thank the many folks, past and present, whose heartfelt debate and persistence brought this historical gem back to life, and as the Friends of South Side like to say, made an old school house rock again!

Let us feel the presence of the children that learned and shaped their futures here. Let us remember the dedicated teachers, administrators, coaches and involved parents of years ago. And now, let us envision the inspiration that this symbolic icon will bring to so many generations for years to come.

Times have changed and so have our challenges. Last week, I read an alarming report that almost 60 percent of Americans do not have \$1,000 in the bank for emergencies. According to Bankrate, only 39 percent of survey respondents said they would be able to cover a \$1,000 setback using their savings. Almost 60 percent of Americans would have to borrow money for emergencies, if they could qualify for credit.

As I hear some folks lament about growth in our City, I think about the families and children that rely on our strong economy to survive. I think about those who do not have \$1,000 for an unexpected medical bill; a child with an illness; or, an unexpected car or plumbing repair.

Tonight, I would like to express my gratitude and support for the private and public investments that have improved the quality of life in our City for the youngest among us to the oldest among us.

Sustainable development, redevelopment, and smart growth are the lifeblood of our economy. Over the past nine years, investments have strengthened Fort Lauderdale's leadership position in the region and fueled our economic resurgence in all sectors of the economy.

Our unemployment rate, now at 3.4%, is near its lowest level in over a decade and remains lower than national, state and regional averages. The latest job figures show our labor force was over 1 million strong, with 16,622 new jobs created over the year. Employment in the construction sector was up 10.5 percent; education and health services jobs grew by 6.3 percent; and service sector jobs increased by 6.2 percent.

Sustainable growth puts our children and grandchildren in position to land excellent, high paying jobs without leaving the City of Fort Lauderdale. I am proud that Fort Lauderdale now scores well among the Best Cities in the America to start a career.

Over the past nine years, the City of Fort Lauderdale has received international recognition for being a high-energy community with a fierce passion for protecting our quality of life, while promoting powerful economic development initiatives.

For example, while we continue to experience steady growth, the City Commission has been keenly aware of the need to protect green space for future generations.

Over the past nine years, we have opened 17 new City parks and refurbished an additional 25 City parks.

We have added new multi-purpose athletic fields, established nature preserves, and constructed community centers. We have expanded our tennis courts and baseball fields, erected gazebos and shade structures, built dog parks and walking trails, installed exercise equipment, opened the state-of-the-art Orange Bowl Field at Carter Park, and refashioned Mills Pond Park with new soccer and lacrosse fields.

“Boundless” playgrounds, like the one right here at Hardy Park, have been created in neighborhoods throughout our community to provide engaging, healthy exercise for children of all ages and abilities.

We have expanded our after-school programs to provide our youth with healthy, supervised programming and initiated our popular Club 55+, which offers adults endless opportunities for recreation, leisure and social engagement.

The City remains committed to expanding green space and nowhere is this more evident than in the Las Olas Beach Park project, a \$49 million initiative currently underway that will bring two new waterfront parks to our award-winning beach, along with open and inviting gathering places, a tree-lined promenade, landscape and streetscape enhancements, pedestrian connections, and a state-of-the-art parking facility.

Since taking office, this Commission’s top priority has been public safety. Through the exemplary efforts of our Fort Lauderdale Police Department, we continue to provide our neighbors and visitors with the highest level of professional law enforcement services.

During this Commission’s tenure, our Police Department was re-accredited by the Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation, meeting hundreds of stringent standards across all facets of the organization.

Community building efforts were expanded through crime prevention and outreach programs including National Night Out, the Teen Summit, Explorers, Community Police Forums, Citizens on Patrol, a Gun Buyback program, and a Medication Take Back program.

We increased our police presence throughout our neighborhoods including opening new substations on Sistrunk Boulevard and in the Harbor Shops.

Successful action plans were implemented to take down the pill mill epidemic and win the war on Flakka, and we are now using the same passion and fervor to tackle the opioid crises.

In an unprecedented example of cooperation, the Commission agreed to a new police union contract in 2013 that is estimated to save \$161 million in pension costs over the next 30 years.

The City’s continued support of the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show has helped it achieve its prestigious standing as the largest boat show in the world, generating an astounding economic impact of \$857.3 million. Recent approval of the Bahia Mar site plan and long-term lease agreement was critical to ensuring that the Boat Show remains in the City of Fort Lauderdale for years to come.

Recreational boating and yachting are part of the fabric of our community and the marine industry is a vital pillar of the economic foundation of our City, region and state. We cannot overstate the importance of keeping the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show here as our annual, world-class, marquee special event.

In addition to the Boat Show, other initiatives we have spearheaded since taking office to support this vital economic engine include:

Establishing a Foreign-Trade Zone for the marine industry, the first of its kind in United States, that allows facilities to defer, reduce or eliminate Customs duties on foreign products;

Renovating the 15th Street Boat Ramp and renaming the complex "Cox's Landing" in honor of our late Mayor and marine advocate Robert O. "Bob" Cox;

And launching numerous canal dredging projects to improve the navigability of our inland waterways and canal network.

Tourism continues to flourish as our area hosted 16 million visitors during the past year, who pumped \$14 billion into our economy. AAA Travel named Fort Lauderdale the #2 Domestic Vacation Destination for 2017 and AMG/Parade media ranked us as one of the Top 10 Best Florida Beaches for Families.

We are excited about the newly opened Conrad Hotel, and other major beach projects, including the Paramount Fort Lauderdale Beach, Four Seasons Hotel and Private Residences, Gale Boutique Hotel and Residences, Auberge Beach Residences, and Las Olas Ocean Resort. Collectively, these projects are positioning Fort Lauderdale as a prime destination for luxury hotels and residences.

In addition to the beach, Master Plans for our downtown urban core have come to life with new condominiums, rental properties, hotels and office space.

Downtown Fort Lauderdale was recently named "South Florida's Latest Hotspot" thanks to our unique urban lifestyle with dining, entertainment and cultural amenities all within walking distance of work, home and places of worship.

Both the South Side Cultural Arts Center and the new Broward County Courthouse provide a preview of how redevelopment and new development will lead to new opportunities on South Andrews Avenue. To help facilitate this corridor, South Andrews Avenue was re-zoned and codes were revised to help facilitate new development and the repurposing of older buildings.

And the future of Fort Lauderdale's Sistrunk Boulevard has never looked brighter. Following completion of a \$15 million infrastructure project, the corridor is attracting interest from a wide variety of investors. The City has approved a new YMCA, an 11-story 142-unit residential complex, and a family-style chicken wings restaurant and sports bar. Additional plans being discussed for Sistrunk Boulevard include a marketplace and microbrewery, a residential apartment complex, senior living facility, blues club, performing arts center, retail center and commercial office complex.

Together, we continue to create excitement by hosting, participating in, and supporting numerous signature events including the Sunday Jazz Brunch, Starlight Musicals, Orange Bowl New Year's Eve Downtown Countdown, St. Patrick's Parade and Festival, Sistrunk Parade and Festival, Tortuga Music Festival, Fort Lauderdale Air Show, Riptide Music Festival, Great American Beach Party, Christmas on Las Olas, FAT Village monthly ArtWalk, and a wide array of events along our reinvigorated downtown Riverwalk. We are also proud to be home to one of the top spectator events in the entire world, the Seminole Hard Rock Winterfest Boat Parade.

Protecting lives and property at these events and throughout our City are the men and women of our Fire Rescue Department. As one of the busiest departments in the nation, Fort Lauderdale Fire Rescue responds to more than 53,000 calls per year.

We have opened seven new fire rescue stations and currently have an eighth station under construction. A ninth station is in design, and a location for a tenth station has been identified.

Our Fire Rescue Department is one of only 32 departments out of 47,000 nationwide to achieve both an Insurance Services Organization Class 1 rating and national accreditation from the Commission on Fire Accreditation International. The accreditation impacts everyone because insurance companies use ISO information to help establish premiums for fire insurance, generally offering lower premiums in communities with better protection.

Last month, we were proud to join with our Fire Rescue Department along the banks of the New River to christen our newest firefighting vessel. Fireboat 49 is a 43-foot jet driven vessel that will provide the latest advances in maritime firefighting, emergency response, and rescue intervention.

The primary goal of our Department of Transportation and Mobility is to create a pedestrian-friendly, multi-modal city; a connected community where we focus less on moving vehicles and more on moving people. A place where our neighbors are able to walk, bike, and use transit to get to and from their many destinations.

The City Commission adopted Vision Zero Fort Lauderdale, a community action plan geared toward achieving zero fatalities and severe injuries on City streets. We are already seeing positive results of our efforts, including a 30% decrease in deadly crashes in 2017 and a 67% decrease in driving under the influence deadly crashes.

We recently held the ribbon cutting for the NE 13th Street Complete Streets Project. This City and county funded initiative added bike lanes, on-street parking, a round-a-bout, landscaping, street lighting, improvements to stormwater drainage, and a beautiful Unity Beacon at the intersection of NE 13 Street and NE 7 Avenue.

The Dixie Highway Complete Streets project is scheduled for completion in March. This initiative includes bike lanes, traffic calming, new sidewalks and crosswalks from NE 13th Street to the Middle River.

The Brightline rail system has been successfully launched between Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach, offering commuters a quick, convenient and comfortable transportation alternative. The City continues to work with Broward County, the Florida Department of Transportation, the Metropolitan Planning Organization, and other partners on the Wave project.

Our Department of Sustainable Development includes the Economic & Community Investment Division, Building Services, Urban Design and Planning, and the Community Enhancement Division. The Department has focused on quality of life initiatives that make a positive, direct impact on everyday life in our City.

The City has worked closely with Bob Swindell, president of the Greater Fort Lauderdale Alliance and Dan Lindblade, president of Greater Fort Lauderdale Chamber of Commerce, to actively recruit and retain businesses. Together, we have successfully recruited the Sixt Rent a Car North America Headquarters, Uniform Advantage Headquarters, Hotwire Communications, JetSmarter, Sato Global Solutions, and many others. In case you haven't heard, earlier this month, Amazon selected our region as one of 20 finalists for its second national headquarters, a mega-project that is expected to bring 50,000 high-paying jobs and \$5 billion in investment to the winning location.

One of the ways we have created the right climate for this type of major investment is by keeping our tax rate low. Fort Lauderdale's property tax rate is the lowest among the 25 largest cities in Florida. Our millage rate of 4.1193 has not changed for 11 years.

Our homeless assistance initiatives are making a difference in the lives of individuals and helping to make our public spaces more comfortable for everyone to enjoy.

Fort Lauderdale is partnering with Operation Lift Hope on the Crisis Bridge Housing Pilot Program, a unique public/private partnership that provides temporary housing and support services to homeless Veterans, families, and children until an appropriate permanent housing solution is achieved. This comprehensive approach unites Fort Lauderdale, Broward County, law enforcement, faith-based organizations, businesses, non-profits, local agencies and community stakeholders in a collective, holistic solution to end homelessness for Veterans, families, and children.

In addition to Operation Lift Hope, we are providing the most vulnerable homeless in our community with housing, medical, and social services through our Housing First program, and our Rapid Rehousing Program continues to assist families with rental deposits, rent payments and emergency assistance.

Our Sustainability Division completed the City's first energy performance contract to implement energy and water conservation at the City Park Garage and in other facilities in an effort to advance our goal of achieving a 20% reduction in electricity and a 20% increase in water conservation by the year 2020.

Our Public Works Department repaired or replaced over nine miles of sidewalks, resurfaced over six miles of streets, micro-surfaced over four miles of roadways, and oversaw the completion of the beach renourishment project from 18th Street to Terramar Street.

Our City management and staff were well-prepared for Hurricane Irma and provided outstanding service to our neighbors before, during, and after the storm. Through an organized, disciplined, and professional approach, we were able to maintain water and wastewater service during and after the storm. In the weeks following the storm, we were successfully able to clean-up and remove nearly 500,000 cubic yards of Hurricane debris.

I am proud of the way our City responded under extremely difficult and stressful circumstances, but I am even prouder of the many acts of kindness, compassion and support I saw throughout our community. The goodness of people often shines through in the most challenging times and nowhere was this more evident than in our City as we worked together, stayed together, and recovered together.

Recognizing that portions of our infrastructure are approaching the end of their expected life cycle, the City is taking a proactive and strategic approach to maintaining water and wastewater infrastructure with an overarching goal to be a more sustainable and resilient community.

At our Commission meeting last week, we approved issuing \$200 million in revenue bonds to fund priority water and sewer infrastructure improvements throughout our City. The \$200 million bond issue will be earmarked to fast-forward many of the improvements and upgrades identified in the Comprehensive Utilities Strategic Master Plan.

Our plans have garnered national attention from Wall Street's leading credit rating institutions, which have already signaled their confidence in our Water and Sewer Bonds. Standard and Poor's (S&P) assigned a AA+ rating to the new bonds, and at the same time, affirmed its AA+ rating on the system's current revenue-secured bonds.

According to S&P, the AA+ rating reflects – and I quote - “very strong financial management,” “very strong operational management,” “low industry risk,” “a strong market position,” and “a very strong liquidity and reserve position.”

The S&P report follows a highly favorable report from Moody's Investors Service two weeks ago. Moody's assigned an Aa1 Rating to Fort Lauderdale's Water and Sewer Revenue Bonds citing the strength of the City's quote “well-managed” utility system, “healthy financial position,” and “exceptionally strong” economy and tax base.

These outstanding reports from the world's leading credit rating agencies signal a virtual “Seal of Approval” for the City's disciplined and vigilant financial management.

Our high credit ratings will translate into taxpayer savings of millions of dollars on reduced interest rates, as we invest in massive water and sewer infrastructure improvements in every corner of our City.

The bond issue will supplement an already aggressive Community Investment Program. The “Go Big, Go Fast!” infrastructure improvement initiative is a comprehensive, citywide plan for investing over \$460 million in water and sewer projects. The initiative, launched about six months ago, has already shown great progress with a critical \$14.1 million investment in sewer infrastructure nearing completion.

The Public Works Department is also leading the way toward improving the City's resilience to flooding and sea level rise. Our nationally recognized experts in the City's Sustainability Division, led by Dr. Nancy Gassman, have successfully heightened public awareness on the need for strengthening seawalls throughout our City.

The Department has also installed 136 tidal valves, with an additional 14 installations planned for next year, and they have completed 17 stormwater improvement projects from Phase I of the City's Stormwater Master Plan.

Together, we have accomplished a great deal and, today, Fort Lauderdale is very well-positioned to meet the challenges of the future.

When we took office nine years ago, we made a commitment that no neighborhood would be left behind. The accomplishments and achievements of this Commission are a reflection of that commitment and a fulfillment of that promise.

In closing, I want to take this opportunity to thank you for helping to create the sense of community spirit that has and continues to lift our entire City.

In Fort Lauderdale, we do not have government shut-downs or threats of government shut-downs.

Though we share our differences, we have chosen to be united, not divided.

The City of Fort Lauderdale is on the right track. Together, we stand at the pinnacle of success.

In summary, the State of Our City is great, and the state of this Mayor is extremely grateful!

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve our community and thank everyone that has advised, assisted, served, and sacrificed along the way.

It is my hope and prayer that our City will remain focused on our mission and united in purpose as we continue to build community and work together to make Fort Lauderdale the best place to live, work, play, visit, and raise a family.

Thank you and may God bless all of you for your compassionate service, your unselfish dedication and support, and your unwavering commitment to work in partnership with us to improve our quality of life now and for generations to come.