



Office of the Mayor

State of the City Address - Starlight Theater
Tuesday, March 31, 2015 - 11 a.m.
Mayor Sly James

Good morning, and welcome to Starlight Theater.

Four years ago we dumped the tradition of a post-election mayoral “gala” with tuxes, gowns, and champagne and instead had a picnic with fried chicken, beer, and blues -- right here at Starlight.

It just didn’t seem right to have a “gala” when workers’ salaries were frozen, the city’s confidence was in the dumps, and we had nowhere to go but up.

It’s fitting to come back here today, because in my mind this is where it all started.

Starlight to me today represents a change in the direction of not only what we do, but in how we do it.

A change of attitude focused on building a city for the next 50 years.

It is only logical that we would come back now, almost four years later, to report on where we are -- and where we’re going.

Thank you to the staff here at Starlight. You guys really rolled out the red carpet for us and I appreciate it.

Starlight Theater embodies what is great about Kansas City -- our parks, our arts, our partnerships -- and especially about our assets on the east side.

Speaking of the arts, thanks so much to Victor & Penny and Their Loose Change Orchestra. The band basically created its own musical style, “antique pop.”

What they did -- creating their own musical style, and building a band and a small business around it -- is what Kansas City is all about today.

Their approach exemplifies the vibrant Kansas City arts community -- and also the entrepreneurial spirit that is powering our local economy, and the arts. Thanks, guys.

And thank you to the Marine Corps Recruiting Station-Kansas City Color Guard and to the Reverend Donna Simon, of St. Mark Hope and Peace Lutheran Church for your participation today.

The Marines you saw embody the spirit of service that exists throughout Kansas City. Thank you, fellow Marines. Semper Fidelis!

And Reverend Simon is a different kind of soldier - one who fights to end economic and social injustice in our neighborhoods. I'm honored that she has joined us today.

Over the past four years, I've learned that public service as an elected official is a special responsibility, privilege and honor.

I would like to recognize all elected state, county and local officials here today, and all who are seeking public office. Would you please stand and be recognized?

Some of you get to stand again:

Being a Mayor of any city is the best job in politics. I am proud to serve with you on the Metro Mayors Caucus -- would you please stand?

Thank you.

It's always a risk to name names for fear of missing someone, but there is one group I would like to name:

Melba Curls, Ed Ford, Russ Johnson, Jan Marcason, John Sharp and Mayor Pro Tem Cindy Circo.

Ladies and gentlemen, these six members of the City Council will be leaving office this summer due to term limits. Please give them our very special thanks for their outstanding service to Kansas City.

We have not always agreed, but we have always found a way to deal with whatever was at hand -- and move forward. That is no small feat in today's hyper-partisan political discourse.

On that point, last month, the State of Missouri lost a dedicated public servant in Tom Schweich.

So much has been said about that awful situation. I can't add more to the discussion beyond what Senator Danforth said during his emotional and spot-on eulogy.

But I do hope that we can learn something from that tragic situation. For instance, that leadership is preferable to politics.

It's my hope that over the course of the next few months, more leaders emerge than politicians.

Speaking of leaders, I would like to recognize City Manager Troy Schulte, who couldn't be here today, and ask any employee of the City of Kansas City, to please stand and be recognized.

Our city staff works hard and smart for citizens, and I'm grateful.

The other group I'd like to call out are those individuals on any of the nearly 100 boards and commissions serving Kansas Citians.

Some of these panels are more prominent than others, but all of them require time, energy and hard work, and we all are grateful for your service and commitment to Kansas City.

And, of course, I would be remiss if I did not welcome and thank my family:

My wife, Licia, my mother Melva, my son Malik and his wife Jessica, my daughter Aja and her boyfriend Thomas are all here today.

I love my work, but I could not do it without the support of those closest to me -- especially, without their forgiveness for my frequent absence and the long hours.

Thank you, and I love you.

And to my son Kyle, who couldn't be here today, and to my son Eric, who will always be in my heart, I love you both.

In addition to welcoming everyone joining us at Starlight today, I'd like to welcome those who are listening to today's remarks on KKFI Community Radio 90.1 FM; or who are watching on KCPT via online livestreaming at kcpt.org.

Speaking of "online," I tweet quite a bit and I hope you follow me.

If you tweet, please share your thoughts, ideas and comments today using the hashtag #SOTCKC.

Gathering as the community we are -- whether on this stage, listening on the radio, watching online or tweeting ideas -- is emblematic of the state of Kansas City today.

More than ever, Kansas Citians are engaged. Technology makes this possible.

Technology, innovation and planning contribute to the success of the four E agenda I have followed since taking office in 2011.

The four Es, of course, are Efficiency, Employment, Education and Enforcement.

Through focus on these, we strive to make all that we do in Kansas City best today, tomorrow, and a generation from now.

Let's take a look at each in detail:

Efficiency:

The technological foundation I have reported in previous years continues to pay dividends in improved efficiency in Kansas City.

Recently, Kansas City launched its first-ever digital roadmap, setting goals and securing our place as a leading digital city.

It also supports Kansas City's future workforce by addressing digital inclusion and creating a pipeline of homegrown talent.

It makes Kansas City a smart city, using technology to find better efficiencies in city-service delivery.

A Smart City is a technological framework that, for starters, will bring features like interactive kiosks, mobile applications, sensory technology, and smart street lighting to Kansas City.

Kansas City is once again the envy of its peers because we do things like this, drawing deeply from our entrepreneurial spirit and our technology assets.

Technology is improving Kansas City's efficiency in many other ways.

As a result of an Open Data Ordinance passed last June, more data about our city is more readily available to the public than at any time in our city's history.

An information search that used to mean a trip to City Hall is now available online from anywhere in the world, virtually instantly.

I believe open, transparent government is fundamental to an efficient and effective democracy. The Open Data Portal allows that.

Another key metric to efficient government is citizen satisfaction. Citizens' opinions drive a cultural shift that encourages data-driven performance management to improve city departments.

The tool for that is the annual Citizen Satisfaction Survey. The results are available online to anyone at anytime.

If you go online right now, you'll see our most recent survey results show significant improvements in 61 categories.

Resident satisfaction with the "overall image of the City," has improved 20 percentage points from four years ago.

In fact, citizen satisfaction with Kansas City's image is at its highest level since the City began its current survey in 2005. Not many cities can say that.

And then there is our KC Stat program. A monthly public report on progress toward Council-established goals, available to anyone through our online dashboard.

People are noticing the way we do business at City Hall.

The Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government has recognized the way Kansas City uses the citizen satisfaction survey as part of our performance management system.

They say it is one of the most innovative programs of its kind in the nation.

It doesn't cost a dime to be a good listener. And it also happens to be the right thing to do.

Speaking of dollars and cents, just last week, Council approved the City's \$1.47 billion budget.

The starting point for this budget was the five-year Citywide Business Plan, passed by the Council last fall.

This plan drives budgeting and keeps the city focused on long-term accountability while remaining open to fresh opportunities through annual updates.

Throughout the year, staff focuses on citizen engagement to talk about city priorities.

Due to the voter-approved change to the City Charter, I work with Troy and various city staff to make sure the budget is responsive to citizen input.

It's a painstaking process and I'm not just talking about the long hours that go into it.

I'm talking about the difficult choices we have to make on what programs to fund and at what levels.

Some individuals want to break down the city budget into one sound bite or a big headline.

They claim that government spending has consistently increased over the years.

But so has the cost of goods, services, wages, and benefits.

Under my leadership, we bring people together to solve problems, and sometimes that means making a necessary investment or a tough call to get the job done.

One such important investment decision is maintaining our streets, bridges, roads and other city infrastructure.

I will not kick that can down the road and leave our aging infrastructure problems for the next generation.

We have a backlog of deferred maintenance and my priority is to deal with it.

We currently fund about \$77 million a year for all infrastructure services -- things like street overlays, snow plowing, roadway striping, signage, maintaining bridges and more.

Sounds like a lot, but it's short. Way short.

The industry benchmark for the maintenance Kansas City needs would cost nearly three times that, or \$221 million.

Kansas Citians expect better, and we need to do better.

Our City covers 319 square miles. Our municipal assets total \$10.5 billion. That's a lot of ground to cover and a lot of municipal assets to maintain.

That requires us to get creative with how we solve problems and to be wise and judicious with the funds available to us.

That brings us to the Earnings Tax.

Some call the Earnings Tax a revenue stream. I prefer to call it Kansas City's lifeline, since it covers 39 percent of the General Fund.

Clearly, the Earnings Tax is important to Kansas City. In June 2016, voters will be asked again to renew this lifeline for another five years.

We've been good stewards of this critical resource by making changes like improved budgeting and fiscal management since the last Earnings Tax vote.

We've also strengthened the City's credit rating by reforming our pension plans and fully funding pension obligations for the first time in a decade.

We have also figured out better ways to listen to citizens and improve engagement, things like Citizen Work Sessions.

We're making budget decisions more closely aligned with citizen input.

Public-private partnerships are also a primary method for getting things done around City Hall. With such partnerships, we use fewer government resources -- and better leverage each dollar.

Partners like the Women's Foundation, Central Exchange and UMKC's Women's Center.

We partner with them for Women's Empowerment, or WE for short -- which is a very special initiative to me -- as it should be to all men interested in a better city.

I've been lucky enough to be surrounded by many intelligent, hard-working women in my personal and professional life -- women who deserve equal access to opportunity and equal pay for the work they do.

Unfortunately, in 2015, we still have a ways to go. That is why WE developed a blueprint with research-based, data-driven strategies.

The blueprint is just over a year old, and every single component of the blueprint has been accomplished or is in progress in a significant way.

Again, Kansas City is the leader.

Seven cities, the state of Missouri and two private companies have called to ask us how we did it, and how they might implement their own women's empowerment programs.

I'm looking forward to September 18, when we will conduct WE 2.0, a hackathon to discuss key issues that continue to challenge women in the workplace.

Through a public-private partnership with The Wells Fargo Foundation, we will announce the recipients of \$500,000 in grants to organizations who work tirelessly to end homelessness -- especially those working to end homelessness among our military veterans.

Another public-private partnership -- one that improves Efficiency and another E agenda priority, Employment -- is the Mayor's Office of Civic and Community Engagement.

Last November, I appointed the Summer Youth Employment Commission to involve leading business and civic leaders to research and identify more summer jobs among corporations and community partners.

Speaking of summer jobs, the City's Bright Future Summer Employment Program, now in its 11th year, will hold its Bright Future Jobs Fair on April 25th at the UMKC Student Union.

The City hires around 100 youth each year at this fair, I hope to see lots of private employers there, too, to meet eager teens and young adults looking for summer work and internships.

Last February, I was invited to the White House as President Obama unveiled My Brother's Keeper, a program to implement what he calls "cradle to college to career" strategies to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color.

My Brother's Keeper has six goals. They're listed on the screen.

As I learned about each of them, I was struck by the fact that Kansas City is a leader in many areas.

One of the President's goals is particularly close to my heart: Reading at grade level by third grade. More about Turn the Page KC, our early childhood reading program, a bit later.

Inspired by My Brother's Keeper, we pulled together several stakeholder groups last August for a meeting that included a sometimes-pointed discussion about race, inequity and strategies for improvement.

At that meeting, it became very clear that this was the first time many of those organizations had ever actually talked to each other.

From that realization, the Youth Services Roundtable was born.

The Youth Services Roundtable keeps those groups and many individuals connected to discuss urgent topics, like summer employment.

The Youth Commission, formed last June is comprised of 10 talented and community-minded young people and a few adults to create an action plan to better engage the youth of Kansas City.

We have engaged youth since the summer of 2012, when tensions began to boil over on the Plaza.

With their input on the type of fun and safe, summer activities they preferred, we now have Mayor's Nights and Club KC, including involvement with organizations like Arts Tech, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and the Plaza Branch of the Kansas City Public Library.

Combined, Mayor's Nights activities served nearly 6,000 basketball, volleyball and soccer athletes ages 10 to 25.

Last summer alone, Club KC served more than 10,000 Kansas City 12-18-year-olds. And youth crime dropped 18% while Club KC was in session.

Efficiency is about saving money and adding value to government services.

However, being efficient also means forming partnerships that increase the reach and impact of our efforts.

Employment:

A government that efficiently leverages every dollar can more aptly invest in job creation strategies.

That brings us to employment, another E in my four-E agenda.

In today's world, a well-trained workforce is not an amenity. It is a necessity.

That is why we must close the digital divide.

Digital connectivity is expanding thanks to Google Fiber and other firms who are now adding high-speed internet service.

We are working with my Challenge Cabinet, the Kansas City Public Library, Literacy Kansas City, KC Digital Drive, Connecting for Good, and Urban Tech -- to narrow the digital divide.

To take full advantage of the bigger digital pipelines for which Kansas City is becoming nationally and even internationally known, we must make computers, the internet, and digital literacy training accessible to all.

We're doing that with two initiatives:

Earlier this month, I traveled to Washington, D.C., for President Obama's announcement of the White House TechHire Initiative, a program that includes Kansas City and 18 other cities and 2 states.

Working with the Full Employment Council, Think Big Partners Kansas City, Metropolitan Community College and the University of Central Missouri, we are launching Reboot U., an accelerated, job-specific training curriculum and internship program.

In addition, we're making tremendous strides in bringing LaunchCode to Kansas City.

LaunchCode brings together workforce agencies, city governments and learning programs on one side with tech employers on the other.

Together, they evaluate the skills of workers and provide learning to fill company workforce needs.

According to the latest available data from the Kauffman Foundation in 2013, Kansas City had more than 7,400 net new jobs among businesses younger than five years old.

As long as I am around, we will continue to foster our entrepreneurial mindset, fueled by assets like the Kauffman Foundation, KCSOURCELINK, Think Big Partners, and the Sprint Accelerator.

We'll do it with programs like LaunchKC, which today will begin accepting applications for \$50,000 grants from early-stage tech entrepreneurs.

Up to 10 start-ups will receive these grants at Techweek Kansas City next September.

We can hope that there will be another Cerner, or two, among them.

With programs like that, Kansas City's employment picture is very bright.

I intend that this means all of Kansas City, especially those neighborhoods that are full of long-overlooked opportunity.

That's why the City, in partnership with the Mid America Regional Council, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), the Urban Neighborhood Initiative and the Greater Kansas City

Chamber of Commerce have joined together to drive neighborhood revitalization east of Troost to Prospect.

We all know there have been many ideas and plans for equalizing the east and west sides of our city.

Through these collaborative efforts, we will turn these ideas and plans into action.

One such plan is catalytic urban re-development.

It will be a long-term, strategic and holistic approach.

Now is the time to build on developments east of Troost that we discussed last year, like the new Aldi grocery store at 39th and Prospect, the Police Department's Leon Mercer Jordan Campus at 27th and Prospect, Beacon Hill and the dissolution of the 9-year-old housing receivership.

That is why the City is a key partner in both a Promise Zone Designation application and a Choice Neighborhoods Grant application, which would revitalize Northeast and Eastside neighborhoods, much like catalytic urban re-development.

We are one city, and we can either pull each other down or build each other up.

We often build each other up in focused ways, such as the Supporting Kids Foundation, a local charity that helps offset the financial burden to local families with a child diagnosed with cancer.

Because no one budgets for cancer.

With groups like that, large and small, as long as I am Mayor, my focus will be on building up all of Kansas City.

There are a few different ways to grow a prosperous, agile economy.

We've talked about job creation and job training, but there is also the notion that investment follows infrastructure improvements.

Look no further than downtown Kansas City for a case study of that fact.

Within blocks of the KC Streetcar route, new investments since 2012 are at \$1 billion. And that's before the first passenger is even on board.

45 projects have BEGUN CONSTRUCTION since August of 2013, of which 23 will not received incentives.

As important as bricks and mortar are, intangible creativity has been a linchpin of the Kansas City economy.

This year, we've acted on one of the key recommendations of the Mayor's Task Force for the Arts.

We opened an Office of Cultural and Creative Services.

Megan Crigger has joined the City Manager's staff as our first Director of Cultural and Creative Services.

Megan is focusing on arts education, capacity-building for organizations and individual artists, neighborhood development, tourism, and community partnerships that promote arts-related economic development.

Welcome to our team, Megan.

And welcome also to Stephane Scupham (SCUP-um).

Stephane has joined as the newly re-created Kansas City Film & Media Office, housed at Visit KC.

Welcome Stephane.

I am also very grateful that Bob Langenkamp, an experienced city planner, has accepted the top leadership position at the Economic Development Corporation.

With 26 years within and leading our City Planning Department, I am confident that Bob has the leadership and depth of experience to guide the EDC and the statutory agencies that embrace AdvanceKC.

Although AdvanceKC is still in its infancy. Bob is precisely the type of steady, experienced leader we need to guide that highly strategic effort.

Thank you, Bob.

Given our tech industry growth, entrepreneurial roots, innovative programs and fresh leadership, the Kansas City employment picture is bright.

Still, there is one barrier to economic vitality we need to knock down.

Our entire community will suffer as long as there are Kansas Citians who work hard for 40 hours a week and still don't bring home enough money to provide for their families.

Last fall, I visited Pastor Donna Simon's church to meet with fast-food workers fighting with others across the nation for a living wage.

We live in the United States - the nation of plenty. Yet, we expect people to provide for themselves and their families on \$7.65 an hour. That doesn't add up.

Workers like LaToya Caldwell deserve better.

LaToya has worked at Wendy's for six years.

Two years ago, LaToya made \$9.29 at Wendy's, but she had to go on early unpaid maternity leave, and the company hired her back on at \$7.35 an hour.

She's been stuck at that wage ever since.

She struggles to raise four children between the ages of 12 and 2 on minimum wage, and two of her boys are special needs.

Moms like her need a fighting chance.

LaToya is here today, along with her fellow changemakers in this movement. Let's give them a hand.

Economic data shows that productivity has grown since the early 1970s while the value of the minimum wage has stayed flat, or even fallen.

As a result, our nation has created a growing class of service workers and laborers who are not paid enough to support themselves and their families.

No one in THIS country should work 40 hours a week and STILL have to raise their children in poverty.

The State of Missouri must not only raise the minimum wage, but it must examine the eligibility requirements for safety net programs that keep people like LaToya from falling through the cracks altogether.

Period. End of story.

Education:

I promised you last year that my office would be engaged in education unlike any mayoral administration before. We have not backed down from that promise.

In my four years in office, I've read with children in 80 schools I visited.

I can tell you firsthand there are some great schools, excellent teachers and thousands of joyful children in this city.

The common perception persists that there are no good education opportunities in Kansas City, Missouri, but that's just wrong.

There is no better evidence of that than this:

Last week, Kansas City Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Steve Green was named by his peers recipient of the 2015 Pearce Award for Superintendent of the Year.

Congratulations, Dr. Green!

Other evidence of Kansas City's educational leadership abound.

KCPT recognized Turn the Page KC for helping third graders read proficiently at the third grade level.

The White House invited us to be on a panel with Mayor Angel Taveras of Providence, Rhode Island, to discuss local efforts and strategies to bridge the word gap.

These honors and others are all good news, but we still have a ways to go.

I firmly believe education is an opportunity to be seized and leveraged into jobs, health, and happiness.

Two opportunities, actually:

1) Opportunities to increase quality seats and grow individual student achievement, particularly in reading.

2) Opportunities to close the educational gaps between kids in poverty and kids who are not.

28 schools in Kansas City, Missouri, serving nearly 18,000 children, beat the state average in both reading and math. These are schools with quality seats.

Right now, these schools serve 28% of the students in Kansas City.

That's short, but there are more on the horizon. For example:

A group of active parents formed Midtown Community Schools and selected Citizen of the World -- a charter school with a proven track record in Los Angeles and New York City. They plan to open two elementary schools in midtown Kansas City in the fall of 2016.

Hale Cook, a once-vacant Kansas City Public School building, is now a diverse and thriving school of more than 120 students from pre-kindergarten to second grade.

The North Kansas City School District is offering an innovative year-round curriculum at two elementary schools.

Hickman Mills recently broke ground on a beautifully renovated Ervin Early Learning Center, which will serve nearly all the 4-year-olds in the district.

And a potential innovative initiative between Kansas City Public Schools and the Urban Neighborhood Initiative plans to bring another proven charter school to Kansas City as part of the Purpose Built Communities concept.

Those are all "quality seats," and Kansas City students need more innovative ideas like that.

That's why I implore our city's educational leaders to open their minds and their hearts to more collaboration between charter schools and our public school districts.

I'm talking here, of course, about the effort between Academie Lafayette and Kansas City Public Schools

Let's set aside adult politics -- and most especially let's set aside racial politics -- and talk and work together to provide the best classrooms and the best education that we can possibly can for EVERY student, regardless of race or zip code.

It's an innovative idea, I know. And a challenging one.

But school leaders need to find a way to bring proven, data-driven successful teaching methods to all our students.

As far as growing student achievement, I believe that's the new metric of educational excellence.

In fact, many Kansas City schools are doing just that, and have been doing that for two straight years. See the list right behind me.

I particularly want to point out four schools with students in at-risk categories who are EXCEEDING the state's growth expectations.

These students, who receive a free or reduced lunch, are from a minority racial or ethnic background, are English Language Learners or are students with disabilities.

The second educational opportunity we have is closing some gaps: The word gap, the support gap, and the awareness gap.

Children in low-income families hear 30 million fewer words by age three than children in middle and high-income families.

This word gap leads to an alarming achievement gap — in school and in life.

Last August, my office and Turn the Page KC partnered with the Family Conservancy, along with special guests from the U.S. Department of Education and National League of Cities, to garner more community support for the Talk, Read, Play with your Child Every Day campaign.

More than 30 organizations so far have committed to promote the Talk, Read, Play objective of closing the 30-million word gap.

Turn the Page KC supports Talk, Read, Play because early childhood reading helps third graders read proficiently at grade level.

I'm grateful that more than 600 volunteer "page turners" have joined me and Turn the Page KC to read with children once a week in schools and in after-school programs.

Most recently, Live KC and GEN KC has helped fill the support gap by signing up more than 150 Page Turners.

Live KC and GEN KC include young professionals who seek to enhance livability and community involvement in KC. Instilling a love of learning in the next generation certainly does that.

Two additional opportunities are on the horizon to support our classrooms: Literacy Lab and City Year.

Literacy Lab is an evidenced-based program that can increase students' reading levels by an average of 1.5 grade levels in just 42 hours of instruction.

Turn the Page is working with Kansas City Public Schools and Hickman Mills Schools on an ambitious plan to integrate 28 Literacy Lab tutors into 12 schools that need the most additional support.

City Year marshals Americorps staffers -- a highly trained army of, diverse, passionate young people in recognizable red jackets -- to help students who are at greatest risk of dropping out.

I expect I'll be telling you about initial successes of City Year and Literacy Lab next year.

The final gap we need to close in education is the awareness gap.

Few are aware, for example, just how big a problem we have with the reality that students change schools, sometimes three or four times in just one school year.

No surprise: These students typically are not reading at grade level, and they probably aren't learning as well as they can or should.

To address this issue, my office and Turn the Page KC are joining forces with America's Promise Alliance to host a mobility summit this fall.

This Student Mobility summit will bring together leaders in education, housing, city government, refugee resettlement, youth services, homeless support and transportation to see how we, as a City, can curb the root causes of family mobility.

The other awareness gap we need to close is a common understanding of what kids need to know when they enter kindergarten.

Fortunately, the Greater Kansas City Chamber has adopted Kindergarten Readiness as a Big 5 initiative.

Turn the Page KC is working with the Chamber, school districts and early learning organizations to create a citywide consensus on this important educational factor.

Armed with that, we can better understand where our resources are most needed.

By seizing achievement growth opportunities and filling educational gaps, we are making a difference for kids, and for the future of Kansas City.

Enforcement:

Finally, Enforcement is perhaps the E agenda item that has been on everybody's mind the most in the past year.

The troubles we've witnessed in Ferguson, Missouri have placed a strong focus on the issues we still have to overcome as a nation and right here in Kansas City.

Ferguson reminded me of the emotions that this city and the entire nation experienced when Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. I was also reminded that strong communities overcome adversity not by violence, but by upholding strong virtues.

Last November I asked that our community, rather than fight with our fists, fight to eliminate the conditions that led to the death of Michael Brown.

That is the opportunity that events like Ferguson presents to us -- to have an open dialogue about race and community relations in our City.

The Kansas City Police Department, under the visionary leadership of Chief Forte, and through community policing, its Citizens Police Academy and other public outreach has opened doors and increased understanding. Thank you, Chief, for your leadership.

The heart of my enforcement agenda is Kansas City No Violence Alliance, more commonly referred to as KC NoVA.

KC NoVA is gaining attention across the state and the nation. Just a few weeks ago, we welcomed a delegation of St. Louis officials to Kansas City to share the methods of NoVA with them.

We discussed with them how KC NoVA uses data-driven analysis of social networks to focus resources on the very small number of individuals who commit most of the violent crimes in the City.

Our Governing Board is highly collaborative and includes KCPD, probation and parole, the Jackson County Prosecutor, U.S. Attorney, ATF, FBI, social services, UMKC, and the City.

Our comprehensive approach to violent crime cut the number of homicides to its lowest level since 1972, a 42-year low.

Last year, KC NoVA implemented a pilot project called Teens in Transition to apply the focused deterrence model to the youngest members of our community most likely to commit violent crime.

Teens in Transition, offers social services and other supports that we hope will keep those teens out of trouble.

Michael Toombs, an artist specializing in interactive community-based art, and his staff coached the youths in anger management and similar coping skills. They provided

opportunities for on-the-ground experience with time management, team building and community action.

KC NoVA client advocates delivered one-on-one intensive case management, helping solve problems related to education, housing, job training and employment and dispute resolution.

Last summer's pilot project yielded remarkable results. For nine weeks last summer, the group met at the Arts Tech Building in Kansas City. Programs were offered from 3 to 6 p.m. on weekdays, a window known to be high-risk for problems.

To instill a productive mindset in these young people at risk, participants were paid a modest hourly wage -- \$7.65 -- for up to 14 hours a week for time they spent working in class and in the community.

They recorded their work on timesheets and if they were late, their pay was docked.

By last August, of the 24 teens that started the program, 20 successfully completed Teens in Transition.

An evaluation conducted by UMKC also showed that, on average, participants were significantly less likely than non-participants to have police contact.

My office has committed \$60,000 of its budget to scale up Teens in Transition during the summer of 2015. Every bit helps, and as I've always said, I make decisions based on facts and data.

The facts in this case tell us that some children as young as 13 years old are being caught in the cycle of violence.

The data from Teens in Transition is clear - it's working and deserves to be scaled up.

Certainly, 2014 was a turning point for violent crime in Kansas City. But I'm not satisfied. None of us should be. There is more work to be done, and much of it centers on gun violence.

Kansas City has also joined Cities United - a national partnership between Mayors and other partners.

I'll be in Philadelphia next month for discussions with those Mayors from around the country as we look for pragmatic and effective ways to end this slow motion mass murder.

Of course, one tangible solution remains elusive, and that's taking guns out of the hands of idiots. That's why earlier this month, I traveled to Jefferson City to support legislation to create an armed offender docket pilot project in Jackson County courts.

This bill would create a pilot program in our courts to adjudicate those offenders, especially repeat offenders, who use guns when they commit crimes.

The political climate in Jefferson City hasn't been conducive to common-sense gun regulation. But this isn't about restricting the rights of people to lawfully keep guns.

The armed offender docket legislation is about protecting the right of six-year-old Angel Hooper to go to the store without being shot to death while her dad held her hand.

It's about protecting the safety of children like 3-year-old Damiah White, who was gunned down in her own home along with her mother, while her 11-month old brother was left to wander around in that house on his own.

And it's about Ka'Vyea (Ka-VEE-a) Tyson-Curry, the 10-year-old boy who was paralyzed after bullets hit him, and then, killed his father, while they were outside of a local gas station.

While I'm proud that we were able to limit the number of homicides in Kansas City, each death is one too many.

I reject the false argument that placing common sense limits on how guns are regulated somehow robs people of second amendment rights.

We place limits on who can drive and yet all those who do so responsibly maintain the right to do so.

The time is now to get guns out of the cars of young gang bangers, out of the hands of felons, and out of the hands of the mentally unstable.

We no longer have idiots just shooting other idiots. They're killing our kids and destroying families.

That simply cannot continue.

Conclusion:

Hang tight, I'm going to get sentimental for a moment.

Kansas City, thank you for giving me the amazing opportunity to serve as your Mayor for the past four years.

I've learned more about myself and other people than I ever could have imagined.

I know I have the best job in politics and while I'm sure some of you don't agree with everything I do -- my daughter is sitting in the front row shaking her head in agreement right now.

I hope you know I have given my best each and every day when I leave home and go out to serve the City I love so much.

And I hope you know that I will continue to do that until my days as your Mayor are over.

I am very proud to be the Mayor of a city that is clearly reinventing itself.

Flyover country no more, Kansas City is the center of the American renaissance.

We are the city other cities now look to for ideas on how to fight crime, get kids reading on grade level, innovate government processes and grow the economy in all the right ways.

Last fall, the Royals became "America's Team," so I wrote an open letter to our country embracing their enthusiasm, touting our charm, our edginess, and our unique amenities.

I had never been so proud of this city.

That pride didn't really center on baseball. It centered on Kansas City finally taking its rightful place on center stage.

Ladies and gentlemen, the state of our city is full of opportunity.

I assure you, I will continue to seize each and every one with your help and support.

Stand up and be proud. Kansas City has arrived.

We aren't going anywhere but further to the top.

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