



**State of the City Address
Mayor Jenny A. Durkan
Rainier Beach High School | February 20, 2018**

As delivered:

Thank you so much. Thank you for that great introduction.

Council President Harrell, Members of the City Council, fellow elected officials, veterans, community leaders, members of the clergy, and my family and friends, and thank you, Executive Constantine, for being here.

Rainier Beach High school students and staff....

Good morning! Good morning! There we go!

As I begin my remarks, I would like to recognize that the City of Seattle is named after a great Chief - Chief Sealth of the Duwamish and Suquamish tribes.

We should always remember that all of Seattle resides in the Coast Salish Territories.

To everyone gathered here, and to all those watching, and to the 700,000 people who call Seattle home:

It is an honor to be with you to deliver the first State of the City address of my term as mayor.

And don't worry: I'm not going to do five of them all over the City like I did when I was sworn in!

I am so excited to be here at Rainier Beach, where everybody is somebody.

I want to thank Principal Keith Smith, all the Seattle Public Schools officials who are here and so committed to the kids, and to the students who are hosting us here at Rainier Beach.

President Harrell, I know even though this is your district, it's hard for a Garfield Bulldog to be here. But you always put our City first!

We are here at Rainier Beach because the students here are at the forefront of change:

From advocating for social justice, to the 13th Year Promise Scholarship program, to free ORCA passes, Rainier Beach is the place where people come together to get things done.

By now, you know I am the first woman Mayor elected in Seattle in almost 100 years.

But our last woman, Bertha Landes, when she led Seattle, the Mayor didn't give a State of the City address.

I know a lot of you wish that you were living then!

So today, we are making history together:

This is the first time that a woman mayor has delivered Seattle's State of the City Address.

So to all the young women here today and any of you who might be watching:

I want you to know you are strong, you are smart, you deserve every chance to chase your dreams, whatever those dreams may be.

To launch the next great Seattle startup.

To play for the Seattle Storm.

Maybe to grow up to be Mayor of Seattle.

Or the President of the United States.

Today, we come together to celebrate our City's strengths but also to be honest about our challenges.

We are in an unprecedented – and for many, painful -- period of change and growth.

But we are strong, resilient, determined, innovative, generous and – frankly – the best damn city anywhere. (Sorry about that, teachers.)

And like so many people, I don't think we can act fast enough on housing, homelessness, transportation, racial equity and social justice – everything we need to be a better future.

You may have heard I've already earned a nickname in City Hall:

“The impatient mayor.”

Seriously, it's what they call me!

It's because I'm pushing us to take on the challenges we face:

First, we must address the crisis of affordability, the growing economic disparities, and homelessness.

This is a crisis that threatens the soul of our city.

A crisis that is bigger than us, and demands a regional response.

Second, as Seattle grows so quickly, we must deliver essential City services better and smarter.

Third, we will build safer communities and advance the cause of racial equity and social justice.

And together we will stand up for our progressive values in the face of attacks from the other Washington.

And finally, we must do what Seattle does best:

Seize the awesome opportunities we have to build a better and more vibrant City for the next generation.

Our first priority, though, must be to build a more affordable Seattle.

As a City and as a region, the crisis of affordability and the growing economic disparity, and homelessness is the central challenge we face. It's the moral challenge of our time.

We have a booming economy, thriving businesses and some of the highest wage, coolest jobs anywhere.

We are fueling the innovation economy.

Yet for too many of us – our families, our neighbors, artists and small businesses – too many are being forced out of the City that they love.

And sadly, look anywhere in our City, and you will see our neighbors living without a home.

Thousands are living in transitional housing and shelters. Thousands more are living outside on our streets.

And every three days, someone without a home dies in this City.

Every three days.

People experiencing homelessness are us: Moms and dads. Brothers and sisters. Sons and daughters.

I have focused on this crisis since my first days in office and I will continue to focus on it for the rest of my term.

Now, I wish I could stand up here and tell you we're on the brink of solving our affordability and homelessness crisis.

But I have to be honest with you:

These crises has been years in the making, and will not be fixed overnight.

While we must take urgent action to improve our City, lasting progress will take years.

There will be times when we take two steps forward and then one step back.

I know there will be times when you are frustrated with City Hall – and with me.

Believe me:

I get frustrated, too.

But no matter how daunting our challenges, what I can promise you is that as Mayor I will push three things to meet this challenge:

Number one: We have to build more low-income and middle-class housing as quickly as we can.

Two: We have to quickly provide more short term options that are safe, humane and that actually move people to long term housing.

Three: We must create true economic opportunity for everyone.

We cannot build a City for the future if it starts with the presumption that so many people have to stay poor.

In my first two and a half months, we've already started moving ahead on these three steps:

First, we have acted to create more affordable housing.

In December, we announced the largest single investment ever in affordable housing: \$100 million.

While there will be hundreds of new affordable housing units coming online in 2018, in four years, I want to say we built thousands, in every part of the city, at every economic level.

We need to speed up permitting, add density, and expand our housing options in every part of this City.

Like more mother-in-laws and backyard cottages.

Second, in addition to building more affordable housing, we must have more short term shelter that is both accountable and safe.

While there's no quick fixes, we can make progress.

Over the last five years, our City's annual direct investments in programs to fight homelessness have grown from nearly \$40 million to nearly \$70 million.

This year, the City of Seattle is requiring more accountability of our homeless service providers.

We will move twice as many people into permanent housing as we did last year.

To help move more quickly, I proposed legislation establishing "Building a Bridge to Housing for All."

This plan urgently does two things:

First, it seeks to prevent homelessness by starting a two-year pilot to provide rental assistance to those people who need help the most because they're on the brink of becoming homeless.

Second, it will invest millions in shorter-term, safer shelter that is more humane.

Our shelters and sanctioned encampments are almost full.

While we build more long-term housing, we need this funding to help people.

Council, let's get this passed immediately so we can help our neighbors living on the edge and get more people off our streets.

More of our neighbors need hope.

I have seen this first-hand what hope can do – if we empower people and people that work and care about our communities.

I saw this kind of hope in the eyes of mothers and children at Mary's Place when I first became Mayor.

And when I met Bobby, who had been living unsheltered, but is now living in a block project home in lower Beacon Hill, in the backyard of Kim Sherman and Dan Tenenbaum.

Good things happen when Seattle comes together to commit to hope and love.

And because our community's challenges do not stop at the City limits, we must act as a region.

That's why I'm working with King County Executive Dow Constantine – thank you, Mr. Executive, for all your work – and Nancy Backus, our mayor from Auburn, and community members from across the region. We created One Table.

And the goal: Truly coordinated, regional solutions to address the root causes of homelessness.

Because Seattle going it alone will not work.

The problem is bigger than us, and we must have regional solutions and regional resources.

That's how we're going to be able to invest more for addiction and mental health treatment.

And in alternatives to incarceration.

And for our youth experiencing homelessness.

But solving our affordability and homelessness crisis will require more than just governments working together.

It's going to take business, philanthropists, neighborhoods, people of faith, and community organizations.

It will take the continued work of the service providers and the health care workers.

It'll take every one of us stepping up and working together.

So many already are.

I want to thank the hundreds of people work long days for little pay at non-profit organizations that serve our neighbors experiencing homelessness.

And some Seattleites do all they can - like Dale Hoff, a general contractor who lives in North Seattle and is building tiny homes in his garage.

Or like a Seattle native, John, who sent me a note the first week I was mayor saying he wanted to help – and he enclosed a check for \$25.

We can only do this if we do it together. Let's do it together.

The first two steps to tackling affordability:

Building more long term affordable housing and safer short-term alternatives.

But the key to creating long-term solutions to affordability and homelessness is to create true equitable economic opportunity.

Our City's future is the young people with us today and across the City.

These are our future doctors and scientists.

Our iron workers and electricians.

Our small business owners and entrepreneurs.

Maybe the next Bill Gates or the next Barack Obama.

Right here, right now in Seattle.

If young people do their part, they have to know we will do our part.

We have to deliver on the promise of opportunity.

This is going to require taking some bold and big steps.

Of course, it is hard to do well in school or at a job, if you can't even get there.

Right now, too many students in Rainier Beach and on Lake City Way and in other parts of our City, getting to school means an unsafe trip or a long walk in the cold and rain.

That's wrong.

Here's what's right:

That every student in Seattle has access to affordable, reliable transportation.

Now, Councilmembers Rob Johnson and Mike O'Brien and others have worked to give free ORCA passes to young people for many years.

And last summer, King County Executive Dow Constantine launched a successful 50 cent youth fare project throughout the County. Let's make it better.

By this fall, we will put a free, year-round ORCA pass in the hands of every one of our 15,000 Seattle Public high school students.

And don't worry, Promise scholars: we're going to do the same for you.

We're doing this so students can worry more about their grades and less about how they get places.

So that working moms and dads can save a little money each month and know their children are safe.

I look forward to working with the City Council to make this a reality for our students for years to come.

It's the right thing to do. The time is now. We are going to make it happen.

We also have to double down on job creation in those parts of our City that have been most left behind - particularly in our communities of color.

You know, our economy is changing more quickly than we can adjust to it.

Many jobs of today will disappear and many jobs of tomorrow have not even been invented yet.

But they're going to be here in a blink of an eye.

In the next five years, Washington state alone is set to create 740,000 job openings – 740,000 job openings – most of them will require a post-high school education.

But today, almost 70% of Washington high school students don't get post-secondary credentials by the age of 26.

That is wrong.

We need to help Seattle high school graduates get those jobs.

We must harness the brilliance in our schools to shape the new economy.

We can do this. I know we can.

This starts with my Seattle Promise College Tuition program.

We need to make college a reality for every Seattle Public School graduate by investing in two free years of college education and support.

This builds on the success of the 13th Year Scholarship program, expands it, and reimagines it.

So if you're a 13th Year Scholar and you're here this morning, could you please stand?

Seattle, this is our progressive values made real.

Thank you, Scholars.

And Promise Scholars: I'm thrilled to tell you the City can commit to a 14th year for you.

The Seattle Promise program will help and economically empower our next generation.

It will open doors.

Many will be the first in their family to go to college.

Barriers to college often span generations, and for too long have held back communities of colors, immigrants, and refugees.

Seattle Promise will change the lives of our young people, and those young people will change our city.

You already heard how it changed the life of Diana Batista, who introduced me.

And it has changed the lives of people like Musa Abdi and Abdiasis Ibrahim.

Both Musa and Abdiasis grew up in refugee camps in Kenya.

They were lucky to move with their families to Seattle.

The transition is never easy.

Both worked hard and ended up enrolling at South Seattle College as 13th Year Scholars.

That's right. And that year of free college helped change the arc of their already incredible lives.

Today, Musa is enrolled in UW's Public Health Program.

And Abdiasis is studying Bioengineering at UW.

Musa's headed east of the mountains to WSU, where he has been accepted into the pharmacy program.

And Abdiasis? He plans to apply to medical school next year.

Now Musa couldn't be here today - he's got a big chemistry exam!

But Abdiasis is here, back at his alma mater, Rainier Beach.

Can you stand up just for a minute? You're an amazing young man.

This is what we can do for our young people. This shows just two people who can show the power of what free college can do – for them, for their families, and for our cities.

[Audience member: Yes we can!]

That's right: yes we can.

And that's why I am committed to expanding what already works for the 13th year. We are on the path to two years of free college and support for every Seattle Public Schools student.

And college is just part of it.

We have to create real career paths for our City's young people including more registered apprenticeships, internships, and good summer jobs.

Just last week, I joined with the County and the Port of Seattle to announce more investments in workforce training.

But we won't stop. Our kids have to have a shot at any job in this town they want to have.

They can build the buildings, work in the buildings, or own the buildings.

Another key, obviously, to opening doors to opportunity is our Families and Education Levy.

And I'm so happy to have so many of the committed School Board here, and the Superintendent.

In the coming months, we in the City will have a lot of conversations about it.

During those conversations, I want you to know what are my three core priorities:

1. Preserving pre-k and early learning. Kids have to come to kindergarten ready to learn.
2. We must try new approaches to close the opportunity gap for students of color. We have one of the worst in the nation and what we're doing is not working quickly enough.
3. We've got to make sure every kid in Seattle Public Schools has the opportunity to go to college free. Because just like real education doesn't start at age 5 – it doesn't end in high school.

If we focus on these three things with our levy, we will be creating real economic opportunity for the next generation.

Economic opportunity and fairness also means we will keep protecting our workers through fair wages and fair rights.

Seattle led the way on the \$15 minimum wage.

Now, it's time to lead the way on a Domestic Worker Bill of Rights.

This year, I intend to work with Councilmember Teresa Mosqueda, employers, labor, and others to make this a reality.

The time for talk is over. It's time to get it done.

These are the steps I will take to combat the challenge of affordability and build economic opportunity for us.

And every day, I will live up to my nickname, the "Impatient Mayor."

So let's talk about the second priority: the need to deliver basic City services.

Just as our growth has made it hard for the middle class, it has made it hard for our City workers to deliver their basic services.

We have to work harder and we have to work quicker. After all, you pay our bills.

And to our City employees, I know we need to give you a safe place to work, free of discrimination and harassment.

We have a lot of important work to do together.

To deliver clean and reliable electricity.

To make sure the garbage, compost, and recycling gets picked up.

To fill the potholes. (Applause.)

Okay, we know the priority within the priority....

To deliver fire and police services that keep everyone safe.

In a growing city like ours, none of that is easy.

But here's the good news:

There are 11,000 public servants trying to make our City a better place to live.

These are people like Seang Ngy, who works at our City's Department of Transportation.

Seang has been working for the people of Seattle for almost two decades.

And do you know where he was on December 24th as the snow began to fall?

Many of you were with family, sitting down with loved ones, but he was somewhere else:

Like more than 50 of his colleagues at SDOT, he was working to make sure our streets were safe to drive on.

He came in early to make sure that the snow plows were ready.

Then he worked all night long on a shift in his snow plow to make the streets safe and passable.

Like so many in City government, he knew many people were depending on him - and so he delivered.

To all City employees, to my amazing Cabinet, we expect a lot from you, but we know you can do it. We know you'll get it done.

We also know that our City departments will have to do more with less.

Our significant economic growth has allowed us to increase our spending in recent years.

But these boom times won't last and our current spending isn't sustainable under our current projections.

Unfortunately, a deficit is on the horizon.

That's why in preparing next year's budget, I will be asking all the City's departments to recognize we have to live within our City's means.

That requires some tough choices about where we invest, and where we have to cut.

Just as our City's growth has put new pressures on our City's services, it's also put it on our transportation system.

We will get this done.

It's no secret that our traffic is bad and our buses are full.

The bad news is traffic will get worse before it gets better.

Mega projects will lead to mega gridlock.

The good news is, more people are using transit, and fewer people are driving alone in their cars.

We need to keep that trend going.

Though traffic will get more challenging, I pledge to you that we will continue to get more creative, we will make necessary investments, and we will improve these numbers.

To find ways to bust through gridlock, and make it safe for pedestrians and cyclists.

Along with delivering basic services, we will deliver the most essential service of all:

A safe and just community.

Keeping our City safe is an enormous task:

Last year, our Fire Department responded to nearly 100,000 incidents.

Including 17,000 fires.

They transported 6,000 people in potentially life-threatening situations to the hospital.

Our Seattle Police Department responded to more than 400,000 calls - and took more than 1,200 guns off the street.

Our fire and police departments have saved lives, helped victims and worked with neighborhoods on strategies to make everybody safe.

But despite the hard work, the sacrifice of our first responders, we must acknowledge that parts of our City do not feel safe and that too many young people taken by violence.

All too often this is because of gun violence.

We will not accept this.

Seattle residents must be safe in their neighborhoods and in their homes.

Our kids must be safe on the way to school and in their schools.

Schools are meant for joy and learning. They are not meant for lock downs and mass shootings.

Together we will fight for commonsense gun safety laws to protect our City, our neighborhoods, our schools, and our children.

We will also continue to fight for racial equity and social justice.

In one of my first official acts as Mayor, I reaffirmed our City's commitment to the Race and Social Justice Initiative.

And I will push it until my last day in office.

Because we cannot have true economic opportunity unless we stand with community-based organizations and dismantle structural racism.

We must be honest that it's real and we have to have the courage to face it.

Or we will never defeat it.

A safer and more just City also requires a police department that protects, serves, and is trusted.

In January, we took another step toward achieving this goal of reform for our Seattle Police Department.

That step came when a federal judge confirmed that we have made important progress under the consent decree.

It came after decades of community organizations demanding change, and hard work by SPD officers and civilians.

Our improved use of force policies and require training de-escalation and helping people in mental crisis.

We now have rigorous investigations when force is used.

And community-led accountability when things go wrong.

And yet we're not done.

We must continue to get better. Lasting reform requires deep cultural change.

A critical next step is having the right permanent Chief of Police - someone who is committed to the reform process that we have begun.

And I want to ensure that your voice, as residents of Seattle, is heard in the Chief selection process.

Our search committee reflects our city and they will have a number of community events throughout our city.

But beginning today, anybody here or listening can go to seattle.gov and take a survey to tell me what you think we need in a new Chief.

We have a lot of work to do.

Are we up to the daunting task of building this safer, more just, more inclusive city of the future?

Absolutely.

We will do it because we are guided by our shared values.

Standing up for those progressive values is the fourth focus of my time as mayor.

We believe every person is born with dignity and promise, and they deserve real respect and real opportunity.

A person's value is not based on her net worth.

Or the country of birth.

Or the color of skin.

Or the gender of the person they love.

We believe we're all better off when prosperity is shared, and is not just for the few.

And we know – we don't just believe - we know that we are stronger when we are a truly inclusive place.

Those are American values, and those are Seattle values.

Seattle will stand up to be a safe and welcoming city - especially with Donald Trump as our President.

Our immigrant and refugee neighbors believe in the promise of America - and we will deliver on that promise.

All of our children shouldn't just feel welcome here, they should thrive here.

And unlike the other Washington, we actually believe in science, and we know climate change is real.

It's hurting our economy, it's threatening this gorgeous place we love, and it's jeopardizing our children's' futures.

Seattle has become a national leader in carbon emissions reduction, protecting our environment, and boosting clean energy.

You know, the City of Seattle is leading the way. We have one of the largest electric vehicles fleets in the entire country.

But there is more we can do, and must do.

That includes making sure our buildings are as green as possible.

In the coming months, I'll propose legislation to create a new, City-wide pilot that will encourage the building of 20 of the most sustainable buildings anywhere.

We'll show it can be done to scale and we'll create a new model for green cities.

And when we talk about the environment, we will not forget that the burdens of environmental disaster almost always fall on those who are most marginalized.

True environmental progress means environmental justice and livable communities for people of color and for people who are struggling in our economy.

South Park, Georgetown, South Seattle – I have heard you.

I know efforts of groups like the Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition, the Duwamish Valley Youth Corps and advocates like Paulina Lopez are so vital to making Seattle a better, more just place to live.

Thank you. Thank you for your work, and thank you for demanding that we listen.

Unfortunately, this President and his administration want to keep taking our City backwards.

In my first two and a half months, they have already threatened our City with multiple legal fights.

So to the lesser Washington, let me be clear:

When the lives of people and the environment we cherish in Seattle are under attack, we will never, ever back down.

You won't win against me.

Against our City Council.

Against our Attorney Pete Holmes.

And you won't win against the City of Seattle.

So just be smart: keep your hands off Seattle.

Here in Seattle, we don't wait for others to tell us what our future is going to look like.

We don't wait for a better future to come to us.

We invent it. We make it happen.

We create it.

We build it.

And that's the fifth and final priority during my time as Mayor:

Seizing the awesome opportunities we have to build a more vibrant City for the future.

We have always been that City that invents the future.

And we always will be.

We're the city that didn't just survive a Great Fire, we got better.

We were the jumping off point for the gold rush.

We pretty much invented and then re-invented air travel
(first the airplane and then booking it online).

Coffee on every corner.

The personal computer revolution.

The cloud.

Bone marrow transplants.

And today in 2018, we are literally re-building, re-inventing and re-imagining our City for the future.

Just look at our waterfront.

The next year will be the Year of the Waterfront.

We already opened up Pike Place Market's MarketFront project. If you haven't been, go.

And we broke ground on rebuilding the new concert pier at Pier 62. Looking forward to it.

In 2019, the Alaskan Way Viaduct will finally come down, and it will be amazing! I know, get the last few rides in, but it will be amazing.

It will open the door for a "Waterfront for All":

20 acres of new parks and public spaces. It'll reconnect Elliott Bay with downtown and with our maritime heritage.

It'll make our city a global city of the future. Everyone will know Seattle by its waterfront.

Another amazing opportunity: Seattle Center.

In December, I signed an agreement that paves the way for the rebirth of Seattle Center as a vibrant economic, arts, and cultural engine for decades to come.

It will include a new, modern arena.

And, as I said that day, that agreement is the best path to recruiting and bringing an NHL team to Seattle.

And to making sure that the Seattle Storm play at Seattle Center into the next generation.

And yes, to bringing back our Sonics.

Rainier Beach, can you imagine Nate the Great Robinson playing in gold and green in our hometown?

And already, we have taken another big step down the path of bringing professional hockey to Seattle:

The application has gone in to the National Hockey League.

And I'm telling you, mark it your calendars:

Starting March 1 at 10am, you can make your deposit for season tickets.

So let's meet there when the puck drops!

In close – it is true.

What you've heard is true: I love Seattle to my bones.

And the main reason I love this City is the people who live here, and that we do the right thing, because it's part of who we are.

And I know we will do the right thing and build a more affordable, inclusive future.

Will it be easy? No.

It will take grit.

It will take a willingness to try new things, to innovate, and to really understand what is working, and what is failing.

Above all, it will take all of us working together, knowing that we can be better, and asking how we can do it better.

Know this, Seattle:

I will bet on you every time.

I will stand with you every time.

And I will work with you to realize that future our children deserve.

So let us resolve together that next year, we can look each other in the eye and say:

The state of our City is more just.

The state of our City is even stronger.

That life for all who call Seattle home is better because of our resolve, our actions, and our love.

Thank you so much, Seattle.

###