



Mayor Coleman's Inaugural remarks as prepared for delivery
Friday, January 3, 2014
Union Depot

Thank you all for being here with me today. To all the elected officials, business and philanthropic partners, campaign workers, community members, department directors and city staff: it means so much to have you here today.

I'd also like to thank my old friend and colleague Judge Dan Moreno for honoring me by swearing me in for my third term in office. I want to thank the people of Saint Paul for bestowing upon me their trust once again.

Thank you, Carol, for that beautiful poem.

I want to thank Aidan, Molly and Connie for their love and support throughout these last eight years.

I am surrounded today by my brothers and sister and their families. We remember that four years ago, I was sworn in just a few days after my step-mother Deborah Howell passed away. My mother, Bridget, was with us then. But it would only be a few short months before we were saying our final goodbyes to her. We're diminished by their absence.

To Council President Lantry, my council colleagues, upon whom much of the credit for the last eight years of progress depends, and to our newest colleague, Dai Thao, I look forward to our work together.

And to our regional partners, including Mayor Betsy Hodges, and R.T. Rybak, welcome. Your presence here underscores the importance of our work and partnership.

It wasn't so long ago that occasions like this would include an obligatory reference to the dawning of the 21st century and all the opportunity inherent in a new beginning. Who could have imagined what the first 14 years of this much-anticipated century would bring?

We harnessed the power of science and mapped the human genome. At the same time, nature showed the world its frailty with tsunamis, hurricanes and tornadoes.

While we witnessed brave acts of heroism in the field of combat and in a plane that landed on the Hudson River, we were shown unimaginably violent acts of cowardice in Sandy Hook, Aurora and many other communities across the county.

September 11, 2001 brought the country together in an unprecedented way. But now our country is so polarized, our Congress can barely a budget passed.

Whether the signature events of the early days of this century happened in a neighboring city or halfway around the world, we in Saint Paul have been touched by them. We, along with our neighbors in cities across the globe, have struggled to understand the story behind the headlines--the “whys?” and “how comes?” so complex as to challenge even the wisest among us. Were there decisions we made or failed to make as a society—policies we adopted or failed to adopt—investments we didn’t make or relationships we didn’t build—that sowed the seeds of that which we must now resolve?

More importantly, the events of the early days of the 21st century all have consequences that will stretch well into the future. As hard as they have been to understand, we know that they were not simply moments in time. We know that they were, each in their own way, a clarion call for fundamental change. It is not too early, then, to talk about the 22nd century and how history will judge how we, in this time and place, will set the course for a new century.

I am convinced that we will be measured:

- By whether we helped make Saint Paul a great city - not for some, but for all;
- By whether we took seriously our obligation to the health of our planet;
- By whether we found strength in our diversity; and
- By whether we, as Nelson Mandela challenged us, found power in forgiveness and reconciliation.

Perhaps most fundamentally of all, we will be asked how well a child born in Saint Paul today, whatever her race or color, socio-economic status or country of origin, how well has she been prepared to lead this city--and this country--forward?

While I think there is much to be proud of in what we have done these last several years, it is clear that our work is not yet done. And while I take great pride in how far we have come, I am humbled by the tough work that lies ahead.

The last eight years have been marked by extraordinary change in Saint Paul. They have also been marked by vast challenges that have tested us as a city. While projects such as the Central Corridor/ Green Line have reshaped the landscape of University Avenue and downtown, the worst recession since the Great Depression created great hardship for too many of our families. While new restaurants and renewed vitality in the heart of our city were helping us rethink downtown’s tired old image, our neighborhoods were decimated by a foreclosure crisis that engulfed cities across America.

But Saint Paul did as Saint Paul has always done. We made the most of our opportunities and met our most difficult challenges head on. We did not let the hard realities of eight years of a difficult economy stall our progress. The investment in public infrastructure was met with private investment. New businesses opened across the city, including in areas where little such investment had been seen for decades. The sad sight of abandoned industrial buildings has been

replaced by a new generation of entrepreneurs. And bold visions for remaining sites have emerged through community dialogue and strong partnerships.

We put away rivalries that pitted the central players in this metropolitan region against each other and recognized that, together, we can compete against any region in this nation, if not the world.

We live in a world where the majority of residents live in cities for the first time in history. Cities must be vibrant, attractive places if we are to compete for a young, talented pool of workers who decide first where they are going to live and second where they will work. We fully understand now what we only partially understood a few short years ago; great transportation networks that include light rail, buses, street cars and bike paths aren't some Portlandic vision of utopia, but are necessary amenities of a world-class city.

We know too that a commitment to the environment and sustainability is a fundamental cornerstone of who we are as a city. And for a city that boasts of the most miles of shoreline upon our country's greatest river, this is doubly true.

And we recognize that sometimes doing the outlandish is not just about watching athletes hurtle themselves down quarter-mile long tubes of icy bumps and jumps, but rather tells the story of a city willing to take chances and test limits.

Just as the first years of this century have challenged us, they have also given us reason for hope and confidence that we are on the right path.

U.S. manufacturing is on the rebound as entrepreneurs figure out how to harness the power of new ideas, new technologies and new challenges to rebuild the economic infrastructure of our country.

Americans of all backgrounds came together to elect the first African American President of the United States, sending a firm signal that a child's race or social class no longer limits the heights to which he or she may ascend.

Marriage equality is the law in Minnesota and 18 other states, eliminating one more barrier to freedom and equality for every single person and creating a place for all families in our midst.

At the many colleges and universities throughout Saint Paul, people from across the globe are preparing themselves to be world leaders, dedicating themselves to developing more sustainable means of generating power, untangling the mysteries of disease, giving expression to the human experience and, sometimes, setting an example by being the first member of their family to go to college.

While there is great reason for the spirit of optimism that fills our city, we are at our best when we challenge ourselves to do better. It was in this spirit that we said the Central Corridor must and will serve those who are most in need of first-class transit systems. This led to the inclusion of three additional stops along the line. It also led to an unprecedented effort to help businesses

along the corridor survive construction and thrive along the newly-reconstructed University Avenue.

Our willingness to challenge ourselves led us to say we would become the greenest city in America. We met this challenge several decades ago with the creation of District Energy under George Latimer's tenure. We continued by making the RiverCentre complex among the most energy-efficient convention centers in the country, examining all of our buildings for energy efficiency and working with our community partners such as Xcel Energy to help homeowners lessen their energy consumption.

Together we have faced many challenges. We have overcome them. Our city has thrived. But as we head deep into the 21st century, we must confront a challenge as old as the country itself.

While we believe ourselves to be a society where all are created equal, one need only examine our classrooms to understand this isn't true. With our children of color graduating at half the rates of their white peers, we can no longer accept this historic inequality. We see the effects of the achievement gap continuing in the workplace where the unemployment rate for people of color is twice that of white people.

But I see in Saint Paul a city willing to meet this challenge. I see a community no longer willing to perpetuate patterns set long ago. And I see a people who fundamentally understand that a just community is an inclusive community where all thrive with true equality of opportunity. It begins with education.

I have often said that education is my crime fighting strategy, my neighborhood revitalization strategy, my economic development strategy. Whether we meet the fundamental inequity in education head-on and close the achievement gap while raising outcomes for all children will be the true measure by which my administration and our city will be judged.

I place this measuring rod before us today knowing full well that it will be the most difficult work we have ever done.

The gaps in our community exist in spite of the hard work and many millions of dollars directed at its resolution. We must examine the origins of the disparity we see and not be afraid to attack the systemic causes – whether they lie in institutional racism or inadvertent perpetuation of inequality.

Our most important work begins with providing children, from the day they are born, the resources they need to be successful. We know the hard work of teachers in our classrooms. But success in the classroom begins long before a child ever steps into kindergarten.

Recent studies show that children from lower-income families, by the time they are 18 months old, already have millions fewer words spoken to them than their middle-class and wealthier future classmates. They enter kindergarten with severely limited vocabularies, challenging the whole education system to make up for lost time.

Those same children from lower-income families are also deprived of quality out-of-school time experiences and enriching summer experiences that sustain the in-school learning. Thus, teachers find themselves constantly fighting to overcome a lack of opportunity that children have outside the classroom.

This in no way negates the need for high-quality teaching. And our teachers must build their capacity to reach the increasingly diverse students they encounter in their classrooms every day. But, like any great recipe, you cannot add more of one ingredient hoping that no one notices you forgot the others. The success of our students can only happen when we recognize the complexity of all that creates it. We all play our roles in this process.

Whether you are a business that can supply a young person with a summer job, a retiree that can spend time reading to children in an after-school program, or an artist that can help unlock a child's creative passion, you can—we all can, and must—play a role.

We have seen the beginnings of success. Our Sprockets network is opening doors across the city for children to have enriching out-of-school-time activities.

The Promise Neighborhood is demonstrating the importance of all partners working together to change outcomes for children in the Frogtown and Summit-University neighborhoods. Under the leadership of Superintendent Valeria Silva, our schools are making great progress. Schools like Washington Technology Magnet are a great example of it. With the largest extended day program in the state – a program required of all students – Washington Magnet has seen MCA math scores increase 13 percent in one year. Despite having more students with individual education plans and students receiving English language learning services than any school in the State of Minnesota, 99 percent of their students graduated last year.

While we may not understand all the reasons why the achievement gap exists, we clearly understand the urgency with which we must confront it. We cannot be satisfied with incremental progress that condemns yet another generation of children to low achievement.

Let us rededicate ourselves here, tonight, to this endeavor, least we, as a generation, be judged lacking.

Recently, I met a man who looked to be in his late eighties. He was severely disfigured, blind and needed assistance getting up and out of his chair. He was assisted by another gentleman who wanted to introduce him to me. He told me that the older man had been in Patton's army, serving in Europe on D-Day, when he was struck by a mortar and nearly died.

This man has carried the reminders of his sacrifice with him every day for nearly 70 years. After speaking to him for a short time, I thanked him for his service. I was reminded of why his generation has come to be known as the Greatest Generation.

As I walked away, I asked myself how our generation will be judged against the high standard set by this gentleman and those like him. But I realized that was the wrong question. While I believe that this country is capable of another "Greatest Generation," we come back to the question for us here today: Are we raising the next such group of young men and women who will meet head-on the great challenges of their time and win the battle here and across the globe?

I do not mean militarily. Rather, will our children be ready to confront the challenges they face; whether on the environment or poverty, inequality or hunger, the homeless person looking for shelter at a newly rebuilt Dorothy Day Center or the ills confronting millions across the globe living in slums so vast few in this nation can even imagine?

In this task of guiding this next generation, I think not of my father and mother's generation, but that of my grandparents. For it was they who truly knew hardship, not of growing up in the Great Depression but of raising a family in the midst of it; not of fighting a war, but of sending children off to it, fearing every knock at the door year after year. They came, many of them, from other countries. They knew the hardships of a new land or of speaking with an odd accent. But they knew as well the great hope of this city, this state and this country.

No, our quest is not to be the next greatest generation. But we will be great if we give rise to a generation of children, well-educated, prepared for challenges we cannot foresee, and as diverse as the great city they come from.

This is our task. Our success will be determined by others. We can only judge our efforts. And by that measure, we cannot fail.

Over the last several years, I have had the opportunity to work on the job sites of Habitat for Humanity as a new home has arisen to provide comfort and shelter for a family struggling to make their way. On those projects, people from all stations in life come together to build a community. I have worked with CEOs and city workers. I have worked with legislators and laborers. And I have worked alongside the future homeowner who isn't waiting for someone to provide for them, but is grateful for the support of a community that cares.

When all work together to build that house, we make a small corner of Saint Paul a better, more welcoming, safer place to raise a family.

Let us all lift our hammers together to build not just one home, but a city that welcomes all, provides for all, cares for all. That is the Saint Paul that I believe in. That is the city I lead. It is the city we have all built together. And as with all good construction projects, let us assess our work so far. But rather than admire the half-finished job, let's keep building until our work is done.