

Mayor's State of the City Address
June 25, 2018
Berkeley City College Auditorium

Thank you to Berkeley City College President Dr. Rowena Tomaneng for your warm introduction and for being a valued and active partner in our community's efforts to expand educational opportunity to all of our youth.

It is so wonderful to see so many Berkeley residents, business owners, and community leaders here tonight.

I also want to acknowledge my fellow elected officials, our City Manager Dee Williams-Ridley, and the heads of several City departments who are in attendance tonight.

I am delighted to address you tonight here at Berkeley City College, a learning community founded on the principle that all are welcome. Since 1974, this school has provided a foundation for generations of students to gain workforce training, certificate and degree programs, and prepare for

transfer to four-year universities. Our community college system is a great equalizer, enabling people of all generations to learn and grow. The values of this school align with those of our city – a commitment to diversity, opportunity, knowledge, and social justice.

Several months ago, I had the opportunity to address the student leaders of the Undocumented Community Resource Center at Berkeley City College. BCC is home to a diverse population including immigrants, refugees, and other undocumented students. These are challenging times for our immigrant community, with children facing separation from their families, protections for Dreamers being stripped away, and increasing immigration enforcement.

In 2015, students worked tirelessly with faculty to open the Center, a welcoming space for undocumented students to come together, and receive services, including academic support, legal help and mental health and emotional

support. With the increasing threats to our undocumented community, this center is needed more than ever, and represents BCC's commitment to the safety, security and success of all students.

We also picked this location because to me BCC is emblematic of Berkeley's future. Students who come here dream big, they strive for something better, and through education are working to improve themselves and create a brighter future. BCC makes that possible for thousands of young people including immigrants, students of color and first-generation college youth, like myself, as well those re-entering the workforce.

BCC is a place where people from all walks of life can come together, learn together and collaborate. It's that spirit of innovation and collaboration that defines our city. Thank you to Berkeley City College for hosting us tonight, and for your work to improve the lives of so many in our community.

Tonight, I have the honor of presenting my administration's work in our first year in office, as well as our vision for the future.

Our work would not be possible without our City Council, and our City Manager and staff who work tirelessly to make Berkeley better.

We have formed a great new partnership that is working to move Berkeley forward - and get things done. We will continue to unite our Council around a common set of priorities and to work constructively together to improve our city.

Critical to the success of our city are our staff. And I want to take the opportunity to recognize several city staff for their dedicated service. One of them is Karin Soe-Lai, who works as a Supervising Library Assistant and has been a

city employee since 1971. That is 46 years and 8 months. Thank you for your decades of service.

Another employee is Elmar Kapfer, a Supervising Civil Engineer in the Public Works Department. In addition to other projects, Elmar has been instrumental in the opening of the STAIR Center, our new low-barrier shelter, providing respite from the harsh streets for our homeless.

Elmar has gone above and beyond his assigned duties to develop, coordinate and deliver this project, which will open officially tomorrow. Every day we see the compassion and commitment of our staff to the needs of our community. Elmar's work on this project will improve the lives of hundreds of homeless individuals. Thank you Elmar.

We know our commitment also extends to the needs of people beyond our city boundaries. I also want to take this opportunity to recognize the Berkeley Fire and Police Departments who helped our neighbors in the North Bay

during the devastating fires last October. Our Firefighters responded after first working a fire that same day in Tilden Park, and then immediately left for Sonoma County. They worked in Santa Rosa's Coffey Park and were instrumental in saving homes and lives.

The crew was later replaced by Berkeley's Engine 26 who fought fires in the region for 10 more days. I just want to mention these brave firefighters by name:

Captain Kyl Fleming, Apparatus Operator Cliff Broome, Firefighter/Paramedic Michael Shuken, Captain Morgan Jacobs-Langlois, Apparatus Operator Mark Somontan Firefighter/Paramedic Matthew George and Firefighter/Paramedic Collin Quinlan.

Our brave and dedicated first responders and staff work every day to serve and improve our city. We thank you for your service.

Over the past 2 decades, the Bay Area has experienced unprecedented growth. This economic boom has resulted in new companies, thousands of new jobs and innovative technologies that have undoubtedly transformed our lives. Because of this expansion, California is now again the 5th largest economy in the world.

In Berkeley, we are seeing enormous growth and change in our Downtown and throughout the city, with new businesses, restaurants, and a new hotel soon to be under construction.

But the benefits are not being shared by everyone. In fact, they are being shared by a dwindling few. In addition, the racial diversity that we pride ourselves for, which is represented in our city's seal, is threatened by the rising cost of housing and growing inequality.

Depending on where you live in our city, and the color of your skin, you have a lower life expectancy, have higher

rates of asthma, heart disease and diabetes, have a higher likelihood of being stopped by a Police officer, and may be less likely to succeed in our schools.

This brings us to a critical question:

What kind of a city do we want to be 10 or even 50 years from now?

Will we continue to be a city where all people have the opportunity to call home, or will we be a city where the people who serve us food, make us coffee or build our homes cannot afford to live here?

Will we be a city where the less fortunate live under bridges, in our parks and on our streets, and everyone else does their best to ignore them?

If we are truly to be a city which prides itself in justice and equality, we must ensure that every person and every child has an equal opportunity to reach their dreams.

Bay Area cities are very good at attracting talented workers from across the world to take lucrative positions in fast-growing tech-savvy companies. Yet we need to do more to help existing residents access quality jobs in the innovation economy and in the industries that support it.

We know that disparities in opportunity begin at birth and continue throughout childhood. That is why 10 years ago, the City of Berkeley and Berkeley Unified School District launched the 2020 Vision for Children and Youth, to close the still persistent achievement gap among our African American and Latino students.

This initiative is unique in terms of city-school district partnerships because it is a collaboration of many different partners, our School District, UC Berkeley, Berkeley City

College and many non-profit organizations. It is also unique because it is a common vision for the type of society we want to create.

It is about dismantling hundreds of years of structural racism, segregation and oppression, and building a new paradigm, one of more equitable outcomes for our children, regardless of their race, ethnicity or income.

Our 2020 vision consists of some 30 innovative programs, which help students from Pre-K all the way to high school and beyond.

There are programs like BRIDGE that provides intensive, school-based services to low-income students starting in the 9th grade, and BUILD, which matches literacy tutors from Cal with 3rd graders who are struggling to read. They are programs like BioTech Academy which provides 2 years of hands-on biotech class work and “real-world” paid internships in the bioscience industry, and the Berkeley

Promise, a mentoring and academic support program that targets first generation college students, which we launched last December.

Because of these programs, more of our Latino and African American students are continuing to college or vocational programs.

One of these is Gema Morales, a senior at Berkeley High School. Growing up, Gema, whose family is from Michocan, Mexico, didn't know anyone who went college or worked in a job that required a degree. When my office staff met her, she said something that was both shocking and poignant. She said that for many years, she didn't think "that college was for people who looked like me."

But after enrolling in BRIDGE, Gema's entire worldview changed. She not only received help with homework, test prep and personalized advising, but got a chance to go on

field trips to universities and take workshops on internships and financial aid.

Thanks to BRIDGE, Gema is now headed to UC Riverside, where she plans to study Political Science. Her story is not an anomaly for the program. For the third year in a row, all of Berkeley High's BRIDGE students, were accepted by at least one 4-year university.

And thanks to the tireless work of my staff, BCC and Berkeley Community Fund, the Berkeley Promise has recently partnered with the East Bay Community Foundation which will allow this wonderful program to expand in the coming years. Our goal is that the Promise can eventually support over 100 students a year as they move through Berkeley City College and on to 4-year universities.

We have also recently connected the UC Berkeley School of Education with BUSD to support the professional

development of our teachers so that they can utilize the best teaching practices to reach all students in their classrooms.

And while I am thrilled about the opportunities Vision 2020 and Berkeley City College are creating for our youth, I am worried about our city and our region's future.

20% of Berkeley's residents are living below the poverty level (twice the national average) and many renters are paying more than half of their income on their housing, leaving little for other expenses.

While housing costs have risen dramatically, wages have also not increased. This has resulted in growing income inequality in our city.

As inequality rises throughout our region and state, we must make sure that our community remains a diverse, thriving, safe and welcoming city for all. I hear regularly

from people who grew up here and who work in this community for years that they simply can't afford to live here anymore. Our artists and teachers have been pushed out by higher and higher rents.

But I'm proud to say that my administration and my fellow elected officials at City Hall are working to broaden opportunity, and to make this city more affordable and accessible for all.

Over the past several years, we have approved over 2,000 units with an additional 1,600 units currently under construction or recently built.

I am thankful that last year the City Council made the city's largest investment ever in anti-displacement measures, including eviction defense and emergency rental assistance, to help keep people in their homes.

Because of this and our ongoing collaboration with community groups like the Eviction Defense Center and the East Bay Community Law Center, many longtime residents facing eviction have been able to remain housed.

Wendy V. is one of these people. Last year, Wendy, who has lived in her apartment for the past 18 years, was told her rent was going to more than double. This happened after the death of her longtime partner, when her landlord discovered that she was a subtenant and not officially on the lease. The East Bay Community Law Center took on Wendy's case and advocated for her, ultimately helping her stay in her apartment. Without it, Wendy would have had no choice but to move in with a relative or a friend, or out of state where she had no connections, severing ties to her community.

They are people like Judith Allen, who was being harassed by her landlord to move out just as she was

going through chemotherapy. The Eviction Defense Center issued a letter demanding the landlord stop the harassment, to perform much-needed repairs and eventually helped her stay in the unit. Judith told us that without the Eviction Defense Center and the Berkeley Rent Stabilization Board, she would have easily ended up on the streets.

I'm thankful that these community organizations do this critical work each and every day.

Key to keeping our city diverse and affordable is the creation of new low-income housing. Unfortunately, we have seen shrinking funding from the federal government, and deep cuts to our Section 8 program. This makes it increasingly harder to provide affordable housing, despite the growing need for it.

The City Council has advanced several new projects to expand affordable housing including the 142-unit Berkeley

Way development, to create affordable housing, supportive housing for the homeless and emergency shelter.

We will also be launching a Small Sites Program this fall to help non-profits acquire and rehabilitate existing multi-unit buildings to preserve affordability and prevent displacement. While there are many exciting initiatives, what we lack are the resources to implement them.

That is why I am excited to announce that the City Council will be advancing this next month a package of measures for the November 2018 ballot to address our housing and homelessness crisis. They include a \$135 Million Dollar General Obligation Bond for Affordable Housing, as well as a 1% increase in the Real Property Transfer Tax on properties over \$ 1 Million Dollars, to fund homeless services.

With this package - funding the construction of new affordable housing, the supportive services to help our homeless transition to self-sufficiency, and the resources for expanded emergency shelter, Navigation Centers, and mental health services - we can stem the tide of homelessness.

Of course, one of the terrible effects of our unaffordable housing market is an increase in the number of people living on our streets. According to unofficial estimates, there are roughly 1,000 homeless people in Berkeley. More than 600 are unsheltered.

It's no secret that in recent years we haven't been able to provide the services needed to adequately serve this community - alleviate their suffering - and to move them from the streets to housing.

This, in my view, is simply unacceptable. It is a great failure of our society that we have allowed this

humanitarian crisis to grow so far out of hand - not just in our city, but across our country. And that is why it is a top priority of my administration to address the crisis of homelessness in our City.

After much research and consultation, we launched an exciting new initiative, the Pathways Project. The goal of Pathways is two-fold: to address the crisis on our streets, and reduce the impact of encampments on businesses and residents.

To address these two goals, I am very happy to report that tomorrow we will open the Pathways STAIR Center, the city's first ever year-round, low-barrier shelter for the homeless.

At the STAIR Center, people will be able to stay for up to six months in a service-rich environment where mental health, drug treatment, employment assistance and housing navigation will be provided. At the end of their

stay, clients will be connected to housing, and provided rental subsidies to keep people housed.

The STAIR Center is one piece of the Pathways Project, and Berkeley's efforts to address the homeless crisis.

One of the most common misconceptions about the homeless is that they choose to be on the streets. The sad reality is that many have simply been priced out of their homes, even those who are working. Others lost their jobs as a result of addiction or mental health issues. We know that by building more affordable housing for the extremely low income and increasing case management, we can give people not just a hand out, but a hand up.

Stories are numerous here in our city, like that of Jared Jeffrey, a 31-year-old now living at the Men's Shelter in Downtown Berkeley. Jared used to be a licensed nurse. But he lost his license after getting addicted to pain medication. He then got another job, as a security guard,

but could not afford the rising rents in his apartment, which he shared with 6 people. With the help of the Berkeley Food and Housing Project, Jared has recently started a construction apprenticeship with the RISE Center and is working on rebuilding his life.

They are people like Bruce North, who has been looking for work ever since getting out of jail a year ago. Bruce is 55 and has experience working in Information Technology. But because of his age and his criminal record, employers have been hesitant to hire him. He receives SSI, but it's not enough to cover even a room for rent. So he has been staying at the Men's Shelter and volunteering at a local organization during the day. Bruce wants to be a contributing member of our society, but whenever he tries, his past catches up with him.

With additional funds, we can help people like Bruce and Jared get their lives back with subsidized housing, supportive services and employment training.

My administration has been working tirelessly to develop a comprehensive plan to end unsheltered homelessness in Berkeley. Our plan, soon to be announced, will within 5 years guarantee either shelter or housing for the over 1,000 unhoused individuals in our community.

Imagine a future where we can provide shelter for the majority of our homeless.

We believe with the Housing package we are placing on the November 2018 ballot, and funding leveraged from state, county and private sources, we can create the permanent supportive housing needed to break the cycle of homelessness.

I believe that our entire city benefits when more among us have access to safety, to shelter, and to a roof over our heads. These things, I believe, are basic human rights.

Economic prosperity is also key to Berkeley's future.

Our unemployment rate is just 3.2 percent, the lowest it has been in many years, and lower than both the county and state averages. Our vacancy rate Downtown is under 5 percent, the lowest of any surrounding city.

Berkeley's innovation sector is very active. Our city is now home to at least 10 co-working spaces that host more than 750 businesses in over 70,000 square feet of office space.

As the home of the flagship campus of the University of California and the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, an incredible amount of research and innovation is occurring in our community, and we want to capture and incubate those research spin-offs right in our own city.

That will require creating more office space, and continuing the kinds of initiatives like the Berkeley SkyDeck, a co-working and innovation space. We also

want to encourage worker cooperatives as a tool for upward mobility.

Part of Berkeley's unique character are our small, locally-owned businesses. However, Berkeley has long had a reputation of being difficult for businesses to locate.

I am proud to say that our Office of Economic Development is working tirelessly to make it easier to start a business in our city. Over the past year, they conducted many interviews with business owners and applicants to better understand what they need to succeed. With that in mind, the city has recently voted to streamline our permitting process.

This means that OED will have a dedicated staffer who can provide support for existing and prospective entrepreneurs in the entitlement process. Most importantly, that person will be a single point of contact for applicants - from the early stages of an application through

the occupancy and opening, and provide expertise, capacity and resources for entrepreneurs.

We are also piloting a new small business assistance and retention program, to help small businesses at risk of displacement or closure. We do this through training in marketing, sales, budgeting and succession planning.

A safe city is also key to Berkeley's future. We are fortunate to have one of the best Police Departments in the country. Berkeley has a long history of progressive and innovative policing.

However, it has been a challenging time for our Police Department. We are facing a significant staffing shortage due to retirements and transfers to other agencies. While this problem is not unique to Berkeley, it is having an impact on our ability to serve our community.

As Mayor, I am committed to working with our Chief of Police to provide the funding and support needed to recruit and retain police officers. We must also reduce the impact of mental health calls on our Police Department. Our proposed Transfer Tax Measure will provide funding for expanding mental health outreach and crisis response, relieving some of the burden our Police Department currently faces.

Lastly, we need to build greater trust between law enforcement and our community. While most Berkeley residents have great appreciation for our Police, we know that mistrust does exist with certain groups, particularly communities of color. I am committed to working with our Police Department to not only stabilize our Police force, but also expand our community involved policing program.

Finally, we are working to create a resilient and sustainable future for Berkeley. Last year, I unveiled

Vision 2050, a community initiative to develop a long-term green infrastructure plan.

I am excited to announce that we have launched Vision 2050, bringing together a Task Force of experts in civil engineering, clean energy, sustainability and green infrastructure. This group will study how to make our city more resilient, climate smart, safer and more technologically advanced.

This includes upgrades in infrastructure, improved urban design and implementation of technology that allows us to reduce Green House Gases and be more energy efficient.

And similar to 2006's Measure G, we have placed an advisory measure on the November ballot to support this initiative. The goal is to prepare Berkeley to be the City it can be in 2050, not the city that it was or has been.

This month, Berkeley began its partnership with East Bay Community Energy, which will give business and eventually residents the option of up to 100 percent of their power from clean energy. This exciting step means that our consumers save money while reducing their carbon footprint.

There is no doubt that over the past year, our city has faced a number of challenges, not least of which were the protests and clashes that occurred on Berkeley's streets. And even though these are trying times, it is moments like these that bring out the best in people.

These events tested Berkeley, as we worked to balance the rights of protesters to express their views with our desire to show the world that these hateful message were abhorrent to us and our values.

In doing so, we worked with community and faith-based organizations and UC Berkeley to reaffirm our city's values

of sanctuary, diversity and inclusivity. We worked with local artists Miriam Stahl and Lena Wolf to create the “Berkeley Stands United Against Hate” campaign, which printed more than 20,000 posters. As I go around Berkeley, I still see these posters in windows. It fills me with immense pride in how our community rose up and peacefully opposed the hateful message of these groups.

During those difficult days earlier this year, our Police Department faced tough situations, and I want to commend Chief Greenwood and the officers of the Department for their excellent work. Our police made arrests, confiscated weapons, and ensured that the situation did not escalate further, which would have put more people at risk.

And although there was a lot of disagreement about the appropriate course of action, I believe that a non-violent response was the best response, despite the anger that many of us felt after the violence in Charlottesville.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said that:

“to meet hate with retaliatory hate would do nothing but intensify the existence of evil in the universe. Hate begets hate; violence begets more violence. Instead, we must meet the forces of hate with the power of love; we must meet physical force with soul force.”

I believe we did that here in Berkeley. At the counter rally held just a few blocks away from here. Thousands of Berkeley residents and others from the region came out with signs, songs, speeches and other forms of creative expression that condemned the hateful rhetoric of the alt-right. It was a beautiful event and made me so happy to be Mayor of this city.

Last year during my State of the City Address, I called on our city to make a renewed commitment to our

progressive values in the face of a hostile Federal administration, and to show the world what we stand for.

I am proud that Berkeley is a leader in the resistance.

When the federal government separates immigrant children and cruelly imprisons them in internment camps, we will speak out.

When ICE comes into our community, we will provide sanctuary.

When the federal government reneges on its global commitment to address our climate crisis, we will lead.

While the Trump Administration retreats from the challenges of our day, America's cities—great engines of innovation and diversity—must lead.

We also have a responsibility to speak out against injustice, to demand change, and to lead on the progressive issues of our time.

We must serve as a beacon of hope in the darkness.

Despite tremendous challenges facing our nation and our city right now, I remain hopeful for Berkeley's future.

We have risen to the occasion over this past year and begun work to address the long-standing challenges of affordability, inequality, poverty, and opportunity.

In Berkeley we do not turn our back on the least fortunate but work to give people a hand up. And each and every day we are working to create an equitable city:

- a city where young families, teachers, and service workers can afford to call home

- a city where all young people graduating from high school or college feel optimistic about their future
- a city where communities of color feel safe, welcome and can still afford to live here.

We are a proud Sanctuary City and we are committed to defending the safety and rights of our immigrants, refugees and other vulnerable communities.

We are a community where people who need help with housing, food or other basic needs can get it.

We are a city that retains the diversity that makes our city such an amazing, innovative and dynamic community.

I am optimistic that working together we will continue to build a city that puts fairness, inclusivity, justice, and compassion at the center of everything we do.

In closing, it is the greatest honor of my life to serve as Mayor of this amazing City.

Thank you all so very much!