

Mayor Lee Inaugural Address January 8, 2016

Governor Brown. Friends. Family. Colleagues. My fellow San Franciscans. Thank you.

My name is Ed Lee.

And I am honored and humbled to serve as your Mayor once again.

You know me well enough by now to know I prefer to be measured in deeds, not words, so in keeping with that standard, I promise today to keep this speech relatively short, just like me.

It's been a long journey.

I grew up in public housing, the son of immigrants. Thank you mom!

I went to college, became a lawyer, and then a tenant activist. Sorry mom!

Eventually I moved from fighting for change from the outside, to making change from the inside.

Still, never could I have imagined I would stand here today taking a third oath of office to lead this great City.

Our life's journey doesn't always take us where we think it's headed.

And I am deeply grateful to those along the way who have guided me and counseled me and inspired me, many of you who are here today.

Most of all, I need to thank you Anita, Tania and Brianna, the strong independent women of my life for always keeping me centered and for giving me the joy each day of being a father and a husband first.

And today, after 26 years in City government, and five years as your Mayor, I wish to thank and honor the people of San Francisco.

I still believe now what I believed at the beginning of my personal journey – back in those tumultuous 1970s – that every person deserves equal opportunity and basic dignity, no matter the color of their skin, who they love, what language they speak, how much education they have, or how much money they earn.

Friends, I still believe that no place on earth better represents that ideal than our very own San Francisco.

Just ask that little boy from Mineola, Texas named Willie Lewis Brown, Junior.

This kaleidoscope of cultures and communities is who we are.

As Mayor Newsom was fond of saying, our diversity has always been our greatest strength.

Even in times of rapid change – like we're experiencing

now – we will protect San Francisco as a place where everyone belongs. A place where newcomers can arrive without fear of reprisal.

But also a place where long-term residents don't feel pushed out or passed over.

A place that celebrates its past ... but is not imprisoned by it.

A place that looks towards tomorrow boldly, without sacrificing those traits that make it wonderful today.

The soul of our City is shaped by our past and fueled by our faith in a better future.

You know, in the Chinese Zodiac, 2016 will be the Year of the Monkey.

Those born under the Sign of the Monkey are optimistic and energetic.

They are confident, inventive – but they are also restless.

That sounds a heck of a lot like San Francisco!

We're passionate about our beliefs, especially when we disagree. So that means we have pretty vigorous debates about the best path forward.

Honest debate is good for us, but progress should prevail over ideology. We need to move past pitting one "camp" against another, because it doesn't advance our common good.

After all, we're public servants. We shouldn't measure wins and losses by whether one side beats the other on a given vote.

We should measure our success by how many people we help and how much we improve our City.

When we focus on getting things done – which has always been how I go about my job – we will make progress on the major issues of our time: on housing, on affordability, on homelessness, on the safety, opportunity and well-being of our people.

We need to do more of what works, and less of what doesn't.

I'll start with a prime example.

We need to build more housing. Period.

For the past three decades or more, our very progressive city hasn't been very progressive when it comes to building housing.

Let's face it, San Francisco has always been expensive.

We live on a peninsula in one of the most beautiful corners on earth, with no room to grow outward.

As a City and region, we have simply failed to build the housing needed for the population growth that we always knew was coming.

We are all paying for that now – families, young people, long-time residents and newcomers alike.

Now it's time to fix this.

I have already announced plans to build 30,000 new homes in San Francisco by 2020, half affordable to low-income and middle-class families.

We're already committed to rebuilding and rehabilitating our public housing.

I'm also joining my colleagues in City Hall to raise the affordable housing percentages in new developments.

But I do these things not through threats or brinksmanship, but through consensus building and cooperation.

It's how we approached passing the largest affordable housing bond in San Francisco's history just last year.

So for the next four years, to every proposal, I'll apply one standard, and this is what it means to be "progressive" in San Francisco today. Here's my standard:

Does this add or protect housing for low-income, middle-income and working families in San Francisco?

If the answer is no – then I'll oppose it. If the answer is yes, I'll fight for it.

I also pledge to make more progress on another of the most

vexing issues of the past 30 years: homelessness and the tragedy of folks living on our streets.

By creating one department with one mission – to end homelessness for one veteran, one family, one person at a time – and by dedicating unprecedented resources to that mission, I know we can be successful.

We can do this because we are blessed with a strong economy.

We have the resources we need to make the City more functional, more beautiful, and, yes, more affordable.

It's why I spent my first term digging us out of the Great Recession and creating more than 100,000 new jobs in San Francisco.

In good times, we can do good things. In fact, these good times are when we must be most disciplined and prepare for the future.

A famous California philosopher once said: “Fiscal discipline is not the enemy of our democracy but its fundamental predicate.”

That philosopher was none other than our Governor, Jerry Brown, speaking in his State of the State in 2014. Thank you, Governor, for swearing me in today, and for setting such a good example for us.

You are right. Strong finances enable governments to do great things.

History tells us that those who prepare when waters are calm are the most resilient when the storm surges.

From a place of strength, we will prepare for our future.

City leaders: our responsibility is to leave San Francisco a more affordable, more resilient City for our kids and future generations of newcomers.

Let's make smart decisions now that will prepare us for tomorrow.

Let our common goal be to make San Francisco strong enough to weather any storm on the horizon.

I know it's sometimes hard to keep this perspective. Taking care of tomorrow seems wrong when there are real problems today.

Like you, I'm not satisfied if Muni trains are too crowded, or a homeless person spends a night outside in the rain.

I'm not happy about traffic and congestion, even if I know we're right to be building a new subway, we're right to be replacing all our sewers.

I'm especially un-happy, heartbroken really, when I see somebody lose their apartment, or get priced out their neighborhood.

I won't stop until we build better trust between law enforcement and the communities they're sworn to protect,

especially young men of color.

We can do better. We will do better. That's why I ran for a second term.

Now is the time to plan for a Resilient City.

I don't mean just preparing for the next big earthquake – although that's an important part of resilience.

I also mean preparing our people, our economy, and our institutions to withstand future shocks – no matter if these challenges are natural disasters or economic slowdowns.

Resilient people means good education, good jobs, and housing people can afford.

Resilient economy means a diverse workforce and strong foundation of industries.

Resilient institutions means strong City services, a City government with deep ties and trusted bonds to the community, strong cultural organizations, and responsible financial planning.

I challenge everyone here in the Rotunda today to join me in creating a Resilient San Francisco.

I also recognize that we can't do it alone.

No, colleagues, we are part of a region. We may be the economic center of that region, but we are far from the only player in it.

There are nine counties and more than 100 cities that comprise our Bay Area. Each community with its own values and its own leaders.

But with this diversity, we also acknowledge that we have one future, and it's a very bright future indeed.

The decisions we make in San Francisco – on housing and transportation, for example – have tangible effects on our sister cities to the north, east, and south.

When we build better transportation links, our neighbors benefit. And if we don't build more affordable housing, the markets tighten everywhere around the Bay Area.

All of this is true in the reverse too, of course. We depend so much on the transportation and land use decisions of our neighbors.

Our problems are linked, and so are our solutions.

I am already focused on a number of solutions that are broader than San Francisco.

A second BART tube, an electrified Caltrain and completing the Transbay Center for, yes, one day, Governor, High Speed Rail.

A statewide effort to raise the minimum wage to 15 dollars an hour.

And measures to get dangerous guns out of the hands of

dangerous people. Thank you Senator Feinstein, thank you Lieutenant Governor Newsom for your leadership on this in the face of unconscionable opposition from so many Republicans in Congress and the NRA.

But we must do far more together as a region.

I have spoken extensively with my colleagues in Oakland and San Jose, Mayors Libby Schaaf and Sam Liccardo, and other regional leaders.

I know they share this vision for cooperation.

Over the next four years, we will convene the Bay Area's mayors, council members and supervisors to work on a shared vision of our region's future for the 8 million people who live and work here.

Because, ladies and gentlemen, we are living in this incredible place at one of the most special moments in our history.

The eyes of the world are focused upon us because of our innovation, our culture and our economic vitality.

And in San Francisco, we have a tremendous opportunity, even responsibility, to demonstrate how a successful city can also be a progressive city.

A city that doesn't fear its future, but invents it.

A City that doesn't resist change, but creates it.

We know this because...ladies and gentlemen...the civil rights leaders, the hippies, the feminists, housing activists, LGBT activists, immigrant activists, AIDS activists and the environmentalists, all these folks that I came up with.

‘They,’ ‘we’, are now leading this city. The outsiders have indeed become the insiders.

San Francisco represents our better selves, our best qualities – tolerance, creativity, innovation and hope.

And I know I’m a little biased, but if you ask me, that’s why we’re still the greatest city in the world.

The work of the past five years has set us up for a prosperous future in a Resilient City where everyone belongs.

A city that embraces the change we see in the world, and harnesses it for a better future for our people.

I’m invigorated, I’m energized, I’m ready to get back to work.

We’re clear about our values, we’re clear about where we’re going.

My fellow San Franciscans, let’s roll up our sleeves and get going, together.

Thank you.