

A Time To Swing for the Fences

Thank you, Charlotte, for giving me and this City Council an opportunity to lead once again. Words cannot express my particular feelings about the honor and sense of responsibility I feel to this city, my hometown, and all who live here.

I have been a candidate for public office four times now, and I have never been so moved by a group of supporters than this year. One story, in particular, touched me so much that I am inclined to share it. While campaigning one day, I learned of the story of Bernice Henry. Mrs. Henry has a late-stage cancer. She has been sick for months but told her adult children that she had two things to do before she passed: she wanted to help her church and she wanted to vote for my campaign. If Mrs. Henry is watching tonight, I want to tell her thank you and that my prayers and those of my family are with her. Her deep faith in me and that of so many people throughout Charlotte gives me something to live up to over the next two years. Thank all of you. We put together a first-rate campaign team, led by Michael Halle, Sara Forman and a campaign committee led by Kobi Brinson. This team made more than 200,000 calls to voters and established contact with half of the eventual electorate. Despite what some suggest, this support did not come from Washington; it came from more than 300 people in Charlotte who gave of their time and energy to support our campaign – and to them I say thanks also.

Charlotte residents can look back on the past two years and be proud of what we have accomplished. I cannot remember a two-year term in which so many difficult issues have confronted a city council: a continuing hangover from the worst economic downturn in 80 years, losing one of our beloved colleagues to cancer and leading a community that hungers for solutions to long-term challenges like poverty and homelessness, education and economic uncertainty. In the two years prior to this term of Council, our community lost 27,000 jobs and slipped into negative net job growth. Collectively, we have played our cards as well as they could be played.

- We secured 14,000 new jobs and, despite those who doubted the resilience of this community, we obtained net positive job growth.
- Knowing that the city of Charlotte could play a role in education, we staved off library closures, kept school resource officers and, for the first time ever, moved forward with a plan to push competition for afterschool dollars – to expand the reach and effectiveness of public dollars committed to that purpose.
- City employees, including police officers and firefighters, have taken a hit. Our newest public safety workers have not received the steps contained in the public safety pay plan, and the Efficient and Effective Government Task Force identified our public safety pay plan as unaffordable over the long-term. At the same time, these officers have led our city to the lowest crime rate in 30 years. They deserve not only our thanks but a pay plan that is sustainable and rewards them appropriately for the dangers they face every day.

- We maintained our AAA bond rating while reduced property tax rates to a revenue neutral level.
- We implemented a recycling program that saves us \$40 million over ten years and restructured debt to save taxpayers money.
- We moved forward with plans to expand our transit system.
- We formed a first-of-its-kind coalition on housing, bringing Mecklenburg County, the faith community, the philanthropic community and the business community to the same table. This coalition helped us to expand the capacity at McCreesh Place, to support Moore Place, a facility that will house 90 chronically homeless residents and provide the wraparound services they need and to provide more housing for abused women and their children. We are just beginning this collaboration but the early results are encouraging.
- We landed a major political convention, placing our city, state and greater southeastern region on an international stage we've never occupied – and we did so on a bipartisan basis.

At a time when many residents have been afraid of the future and uncertain, the city government has been a stabilizer.

Over the next two years, city government must transition – from a model of stability into a model of stability that promotes even more opportunity. We must shift from playing defense to offense and strengthen our ability to attract and grow jobs. It is time to swing for the fences.

There are three ways in which I want us to swing for the fences in the coming two years.

We must swing for the fences when it comes to regionalism. When it comes to regionalism, most of us agree that it is important but as citizens we may not know just how important. Let me applaud the work of groups like the Metropolitan Transit Commission, our Regional Roads Committee, the Centrolina Council of Government and elected officials and other leaders serving on area Metropolitan Planning Organizations and Rural Planning Organizations in our region. Our cooperation is likely one reason why our area received a \$5 million sustainability planning grant. That's the good news. The bad news is that federal transportation spending is likely to decline in future years. Most of the pain will begin in the next fiscal year. U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood has visited our region at least three times over the past two years, and every time he has emphasized regionalism as an imperative. Put bluntly, unless we worker even harder to speak as one voice as a region, we will risk losing federal dollars to regions that do. That's one reason why mayors from across the seventeen county region have been getting together informally to discuss how we can join our voices together and promote stronger regional cooperation. I want to thank Concord Mayor Scott Padgett for being with us tonight. His presence, not only as a regional mayor but also as the Vice-Chair of the Metropolitan Mayor's Coalition, sends an important signal about how closely tied together we are. Over the next two years, I want to push our region to develop a single voice, one that connects the cacophony of local issues into a symphony of shared priorities. Working with Patsy Kinsey, who represents us

on the COG, and David Howard, who represents on MUMPO, I believe we can create a platform upon which regional transportation priorities are established over the next two years.

Let's swing for the fences and study consolidation. Charlotte citizens and residents of the county all have an interest in good government. Our residents are sitting at their kitchen tables thinking about how to do more with less.

Why would we not examine ways to make local government work better, perhaps even less expensively, for the people who pay the bills? I have mentioned consolidation many times, and tonight I tell you that within the week, I will put before this City Council an action item to initiate a full political consolidation study. This study would use much of the research from the last effort as a starting point. While offering a starting point, I recognize that many things have changed and would expect the commission to engage the public in its work. This commission would have a fixed window of time to study this issue, would give us an up or down recommendation and, if they support it, a specific plan. We should and need to include our surrounding towns and residents in this process. I am also committed to identifying private funds to support the work of this commission. If they decide against pursuing it, the commission would dissolve, and we would turn our focus back to functional areas like permitting. Either way, the citizens win because they will know we are leaving no stone unturned as we all work our way through the most challenging economic environment in more than 70 years.

Let's swing for the fences when it comes to Charlotte's children. Last week, this City Council approved modest changes to our curfew ordinance. As a society and a community, we have a much easier time telling children what not to do than guiding them in the right direction. There is no substitute for a caring and responsible parent or adult in a child's life, nor is there a replacement for a quality education. Charlotte, meet Jarvis Williams. Jarvis is a senior at Phillip O. Berry Academy. He is the product of a single parent family and works to help his mom pay the bills and to save for college. Jarvis has worked in the Mayor's Youth Employment Program for three years and spent last year working for the Charlotte Regional Partnership. He is fluent in Spanish and is an Eagle Scout. The youth employment program has given Jarvis a pathway to introduce career options that he may never have considered. In fact, five of our ushers tonight are alums of the youth employment program. They are examples of what our community can produce when we set our collective minds to it.

I am immensely proud that, in the same year when our schools drew national acclaim as the best urban school district, the Charlotte community could pull together to launch an effort like Project Lift. We need to do more lifting; we need more Jarvis's. Over the next two years, I challenge us to connect 4,000 Charlotte kids to career paths and job training.

The Mayor's Youth Employment Program is on track to place 300 kids in jobs this coming summer, an all-time high, and we have a plan to join with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System, working in 10 schools, to provide job training to 800 kids.

We will work with our partners at Discovery Place to expose 1000 kids to new careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

Through other efforts, we can create 3,260 opportunities for kids to lift their ambitions and strive for a brighter future.

If we're going to arrest 4,000 kids, let's put 4,000 kids on a pathway of success.

I concede that putting 4,000 kids in a position to succeed is not building a new road or a skyscraper or a train. Those things are great to build, too. But unless we recognize that, in the 21st Century, we will be defined by how we develop people and their talents. City Council members James Mitchell and Patrick Cannon know this. They have been working on these issues locally and nationally for years. I am counting on them to help us get there.

To that end, we will also prompt changes to our workforce development system. Beginning in January, we will start expanding the number of satellite facilities to help our jobless connect to resources from 10 to 30 by June and 40 within the next two years. For young people, we will also appoint a workforce development board focused on youth job training. I have asked Patrick Graham of the Urban League of the Central Carolinas to lead this new board and charge it to examine the reach and effectiveness of resources used to support youth job training. If programs are ineffective or insufficient in scale, then this board needs to work to fund programs that do work and do reach larger numbers of young people.

On a personal note, I want to thank my family for supporting me through this incredible journey. My grandmother grew up in Carthage, NC and was born more than 94 years ago. She had 14 siblings and lived with the indignities of racial segregation. She has lived to see her grandson lead the largest city in North Carolina, an achievement she did more to make possible than I did. My mother never allowed me to think of myself as challenged so I did not – although many of you will disagree! Thanks, mom. To Samara and my children, you have given this community so much, and I thank you for it. They have endured personal sacrifices and the professional sacrifices I have made to be here. I wonder sometimes whether my kids know how hard I am working so that their future will be at least good as the one I expected. I want that future not only for them but for every Charlotte child and family.

God Bless Charlotte.