



Tom Barrett
Mayor, City of Milwaukee

2016 State of the City
Presented by Mayor Tom Barrett

Hmong American Peace Academy
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Good Morning!

With so many great things going on in Milwaukee, it is an honor to report on the state of the city.

Thank you Principal Chris Her-Xiong and Kongcheng Thao. And thank you to the adorable performers who delighted us this morning. Let's give them another round of applause.

I also want to acknowledge Alderman Jim Bohl who represents the neighborhood we're in this morning. Alderman Bohl, thank you for being here.

We're happy to be here at the Hmong American Peace Academy. The story that emanates from this building is one that every American can be proud of. It is an American story.

And at a time when politicians are critical of immigrants and refugees, it is important to remember exactly how this program, and this school came to be.

After American troops left Southeast Asia in 1975, the Hmong, our loyal allies in Laos, became targets of the communist regime. Men, women and children escaped into Thailand and from there made their way to safe havens around the globe. Many came to the United States. At age 10, Chris and her family made that incredible journey: a journey from a war-torn country to Thailand, to Iowa, then to Milwaukee.

Chris received her college degree and in 2004 started the Hmong Peace Academy, the only Hmong school in the state of Wisconsin. The story of Chris and her family and those of her students and their families are American stories, reflective of what is good about our Country, and our city, and should add clarity to the current national debate.

The work underway here at the Hmong American Peace Academy is exceptional. This is a school where student success is paramount, where the rich Hmong culture is celebrated, and where character development is an integral part of learning. The Hmong American Peace

Academy has a charter from Milwaukee Public Schools and has grown steadily over the past decade. From K-4 through 12th grade; more than 13-hundred students learn here. It's an award winning school that's educating Milwaukee's future leaders. There is a wonderful spirit here that brings together committed teachers and administrators with engaged parents, and students giving their best efforts.

We've seen this formula work before at other Milwaukee schools such as Golda Meir, Rufus King, Ronald Reagan, Milwaukee College Prep, Bruce Guadalupe, Carmen, and more.

Let's celebrate the Hmong American Peace Academy and all the great schools in the City of Milwaukee.

Parents want the best for their children. They want good schools. And that is driving change throughout education. But we cannot just focus on buildings and systems. We must also focus on the needs of struggling students. Too many students in the City, regardless of what type of school they attend, have trouble meeting grade-level reading standards.

Through my work with Milwaukee Succeeds, we have placed a renewed focus on third grade reading levels making sure kids are on the right track to achieve in school and ultimately graduate from high school.

Thank you to Bader Philanthropies, Herb Kohl Charities, Northwestern Mutual Foundation as well as United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County, and the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, who are the major funders for Milwaukee Succeeds.

But there is more work to be done.

We need kids to be picking up books and learning during the summer. That's why I've been so committed to the library's summer reading program. We need to address the achievement gap and summer school is one way to do it.

I want to thank State Superintendent Tony Evers for convening a group of school and community leaders to start planning an expanded summer school program.

The first meeting included representatives from public, choice and charter schools and individuals from community organizations like the Boys and Girls Club and the Y. And the focus was on kids.

In the coming months, we will be planning how we can allow more students to have the option of a full-day experience to learn and explore new ideas during the summer. I will also be working with Dr. Evers and MPS Superintendent Dr. Darienne Driver to secure funding. I want us to launch an expanded Summer Enrichment Program this year.

It's a start, and I would love your help. I would love it! Thank you Dr. Evers and Dr. Driver for your leadership.

I'm also asking all of us to join Dr. Driver's call for the state to increase funding of early childhood education. Early learning must be a citywide priority; it must be a statewide priority.

The health of our babies, our young people and our families is equally important.

Last year, for the first time since we've kept records, the number of babies born to teenagers in Milwaukee dropped below 300. Since 2006, we have reduced that rate by 54 percent, and the rate for African-American teens is at an historic low.

We also saw progress in our work on decreasing infant mortality. I'm pleased to share that the overall infant mortality rate has declined to 9.9 per 1,000 births, including declines in every racial and ethnic group.

Since I became Mayor, the city's overall infant mortality rate has decreased by 17 percent. But we all know infant mortality is a complex problem that requires a comprehensive approach. We will continue our work to drive down the number of preventable infant deaths.

By far, the leading cause of infant deaths in our city is prematurity – babies who are born too small, too soon to survive. The causes of prematurity are not solely medical – they are also social and economic. That is why we are working hard to build a community of support around Milwaukee families. We do this through our home visitation programs, which last year served more than 400 families. And these programs are working.

It was almost nine years ago that Jasmine Rocha enrolled in our home visiting program. She was young, pregnant – and needed support. A City nurse became her ally, working through her health and wellness needs and also developing plans to ensure that Jasmine would feel prepared. On November 4, 2007, Jasmine delivered a healthy baby girl. She's not here today because she's in school. But the lessons learned from her home visiting work didn't end there.

Today, Jasmine is on pace to graduate with her Bachelors of Science in Nursing degree in May. Her career goal is to become a public health nurse, because she knows first-hand that home visiting programs work. Please join me in welcoming Jasmine here this morning.

My commitment to lead abatement goes back to my days in Congress and we're making great progress. In 2015, we continued to increase the number of lead-safe homes in Milwaukee through a \$3.9 million federal grant. This grant will create 710 lead-safe homes over three years.

Through this work, we have dramatically reduced childhood lead poisoning in Milwaukee. I want to thank Common Council President Michael Murphy who has been a staunch ally in improving the health of our children. Thank you Mr. President. Speaking of healthy children, I am so pleased to have Peggy Troy, Chief Executive Officer of Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, with us this morning.

Peggy and her team recently announced the new Children's Hospital Midtown Clinic.

The clinic will offer pediatric and adolescent primary care, behavioral medicine and dental care on the City's northwest side, an area that has few health care options and a large population of children. With an opening date this summer, the clinic will feature state-of-the-art technology designed specifically for pediatric patients. Thank you, Peggy, for all you are doing for the kids in this community.

By giving Milwaukee's most vulnerable children access to excellent health care, we are ensuring a brighter future for our city. And in the next school year, in addition to our Back to School Health Fair, we will be partnering to place nursing students in 24 schools.

A healthy city, by definition, has healthy neighborhoods.

In the most recent assessment, citywide property values are up -- with stability in the value of residential properties and increases in the value of commercial property.

In light of the turmoil of recent years, that is very good news. We have accomplished a lot, but we are not letting up. We put in place an ambitious and aggressive effort to sell city-owned foreclosed homes to responsible owners, and boy we have succeeded. And in 2015, we sold 511 homes to new owners – and about 60% of the buyers are owner-occupants.

We've reached an important milestone. Since my Strong Neighborhoods effort started in 2014, we now, just last week, have sold 1000 improved properties. I'd like to thank Milwaukee's newest homeowner, Anthony Banyard, who purchased home number one thousand. Please join me in congratulating him.

Think of what this means. Across a broad swath of Milwaukee, city-owned foreclosed homes had been lowering neighborhood property values, drawing down city resources to pay maintenance costs, and disrupting the character of residential areas. Now, when we get a family to own and live in a vacant home, we are restoring the fabric of the neighborhood. It's an investment in the area's future.

Thank you Alderman Ashanti Hamilton for your thoughtful work on the Strong Neighborhood program. I am very optimistic about the future of Milwaukee's neighborhoods. And so are residents throughout the city. Last year we handed off hundreds of city-owned vacant lots to adjacent property owners - who are converting them into gardens and play areas.

We've demolished nearly 600 run-down properties, making neighborhoods safer. And we've created 50 part-time jobs by deconstructing some of these properties.

We're partnering with groups large and small.

The newly-formed WestSide Partners brought together Harley-Davidson, MillerCoors, Marquette, Aurora Healthcare and Potawatomi to map a course for that area's future. They are devoting a lot of resources and energy to our West side, and I thank them for that.

Marquette President Mike Lovell and Aurora President Nik Turkal recently announced their plans to build a 12-acre, \$120 million Athletic Research Center on West Michigan Avenue between 6th and 10th streets. The development will include research facilities, health and wellness clinics and an indoor lacrosse field. This project is an incredible investment. Thank you Marquette, and thank you Aurora.

Across the City we will work with over 30 BIDS - Business Improvement Districts.

The Greater Mitchell Street BID partnered on conversion of the old Goldman's Department Store into the new Gerald Ignace Center which will expand health services to the City's American Indian Community.

The Cesar Chavez Drive BID announced its plans to install a statue of famed civil rights champion Cesar Chavez at a prominent location in the neighborhood. Alderman Jose Perez has been actively engaged in both these projects.

Walnut Way's Wellness Commons organized the community to recruit Outpost to the neighborhood and help launch The Juice Kitchen, a local business providing healthy options to the people of the neighborhood. And I can tell you firsthand that their smoothies are great!

To all the Business Improvement Districts, thank you for believing in and investing in our Milwaukee neighborhoods!

Recently, Mark Mone, Chancellor at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee has been busy too. Under his leadership, the \$80 million Kenwood Interdisciplinary Research Center opened. It's the first new academic building on the UWM campus in 20 years. This amazing facility houses state-of-the-art research labs, and space to support Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics programs. This is a fantastic addition to Milwaukee's eastside, and a wonderful asset to the City's research and start-up efforts. Thank you Chancellor Mone and UWM.

I love libraries.

Libraries are neighborhood jewels with amazing resources.

They help develop a child's language, reading, critical thinking and imagination. They bridge the digital divide, improve access to information and make a connection to the outside world.

I'm pleased to announce Superintendent Driver, Library Director Paula Kiely and I have accepted President Obama's Connect-ED Library Challenge and together we will work to make sure every school child in the city has a library card; we want them to have the opportunity to learn and thrive with access to the City's impressive library system. And impressive it is.

We just reopened our completely renovated Tippecanoe branch. Let me tell you, this is not your grandma's library. There you'll see a beautiful community room, a secret outdoor garden for story time, books, computers, DVD's, and more. I want to thank Alderman Terry Witkowski who oversaw this renovation every step of the way.

Next up are Forest Home and Mill Road Libraries. And there you'll see the same innovation and quality design that residents have come to expect from our libraries.

I'm proud to say we are on track to fulfill my vision to upgrade every one of our neighborhood libraries by 2020. It's far more than books. We're connecting, teaching, convening. We're nurturing, answering, enlightening. Our libraries will remain vibrant, well-funded and well-cared for.

As we continue to build a stronger Milwaukee, many good people are not sharing in the opportunities in the recovering economy. We are fighting back to change that.

Our workforce investment board has been a leader---a strong partner---in connecting people with work.

In 2016, we're renaming our workforce investment board to more closely match its mission. From this point forward, it will be known as EMPLOY MILWAUKEE. And we're going to continue to bring workers and jobs together through my Mayor's Manufacturing Partnership Initiative.

Now I have some really good news to report. And I want you all to listen. At the end of 2015, there were more Milwaukee residents working than in any year since 2001. That's really good news.

But we know there are impediments and challenges for some of our neighbors when they seek employment. That is why I created the Compete Milwaukee initiative. As part of Compete Milwaukee initiative, we're helping to place individuals in short-term jobs within City departments, and create positive momentum.

These are workers who might have a barrier to employment – perhaps a lack of experience or a criminal conviction – that makes their job search more challenging. We have created opportunities for about 200 Milwaukee residents in this transitional jobs effort, and a number of these individuals now have private sector jobs. That means they're earning wages, paying taxes, maintaining dignity, adding to the economy, and showing there is a path out of joblessness.

I want to acknowledge Alderman Russell Stamper for working with us on Compete Milwaukee. He's been a great ally.

One of these workers is with us here this morning. Please join me in welcoming Jacqueline Matheny. Jacqueline participated in our Compete Milwaukee program. Her responsibilities included inspecting city-owned properties. She has since gone on to full-time employment and credits Compete Milwaukee with providing her an opportunity to gain valuable work experience. Congratulations, again, Jacqueline.

Earn & Learn, a program dear to my heart, continues to offer Milwaukee young people their first job--- an on-ramp to lifelong success.

We all remember our first jobs---and how important those jobs were for our careers. I want every Milwaukee young person to have that first job experience that teaches basic workplace lessons---and provides a paycheck.

Since 2005, nearly \$25 million has been raised to employ Earn & Learn teens in Milwaukee. That's a lot of hope and opportunity. More than 25,000 teens have been hired.

But it's not just the kids.

Milwaukee workers are changing our downtown skyline. And the most prominent part of that change is the Northwestern Mutual Tower. As the building rises, so does the investment in Milwaukee residents.

Nearly 30 percent of the project contracts have been awarded to local small businesses, totaling over \$100-million.

These companies now have the chance to grow and prosper because of Northwestern Mutual's investment in Milwaukee. The work with these businesses is only part of the story. Because of Northwestern Mutual's commitment to our City's "resident preference program", more than 200 Milwaukeeans – largely unemployed or underemployed people – have worked more than 46 percent of the construction hours on the tower. These local workers are earning wages, gaining experience, and contributing to the local economy.

I'm very pleased work has started on another Northwestern Mutual project, a 33-story residential, retail and parking building.

And the list goes on. 833 East Michigan is nearing completion. So is the new hotel in the 3rd Ward. Big investments – and big plans – are in store for the downtown Post Office and the Grand Avenue.

The Night Market on West Wisconsin Avenue has brought a great combination of vendors, entertainment, diversity and energy to this city hot-spot. If you haven't done so already, I strongly encourage you to enjoy a Night Market later this year. You'll love it!

We are a proud partner with the Bucks Arena Project, and I want to thank the members of the Milwaukee Common Council for their thoughtful vetting of this project.

What that led to was the engagement of community leaders on the future of downtown which is very positive and encouraging. An accomplished and renowned planner, Toni Griffin, is bringing downtown leaders together to chart a course for its future with an emphasis on inclusivity and the surrounding neighborhoods. Thank you, Toni for your work. And thank you also, Alex Molinaroli of Johnson Controls, and Julia Taylor of the Greater Milwaukee Committee for your leadership on this important effort as well.

And good things are happening on the near South Side as well. Freshwater Plaza at First and Greenfield will feature a new neighborhood grocery store, and the nearby Zurn headquarters is under construction.

All across Milwaukee new housing is being constructed and home owners and businesses are making sustainable investments. Since 2004, more than 14,000 new housing units have been built or are under construction. This includes affordable housing units, the downtown housing renaissance and homes in every aldermanic district.

On the northwest side of the City, HellermanTyton and Direct Supply are thriving---adding employees and increasing business. My administration and Alderman Bob Puente are finding ways to partner with these companies and others so that their growth can take place right here in our City.

Milwaukeeans are investing in a more sustainable future as well. You can see the results of our sustainability work in every corner of the city.

You'll find new energy in the Menomonee Valley, where we've recycled polluted land into an eco-industrial district, where urban bike trails co-exist with new manufacturing operations.

The Green Corridor on the south side showcases community gardens, green infrastructure, and a solar flower on the south side. We've partnered to create three urban parks for residents to enjoy: the Rotary Centennial Arboretum, Lakeshore State Park, and Three Bridges Park. And in the last five years, nearly one hundred homeowners have installed solar panels in five neighborhoods.

And, on the north side, my HOME GR/OWN initiative has turned 20 vacant lots into pocket parks and community orchards. I want to thank Alderman Mark Borkowski who offered solid suggestions for Home/Grown at just last week at one of our committee meetings.

No issue is more important to me or to the people of Milwaukee than public safety. The work the men and women of our police and fire departments perform is key to a safe community and I'm proud of them. Let's give them a round of applause.

Let me give you an example of innovation that's promoting public safety. When the Fire Department found it was returning to the same addresses repeatedly for emergency medical responses, it developed a more proactive approach. Now, instead of waiting for an emergency call, another 9-1-1 call, our paramedics are scheduling visits to at-risk residents. It's a more efficient use of our resources and just as important, we're helping those who need it the most.

The Police Department has taken an ambitious stance toward the promising Trauma-Informed Care. We've partnered with Milwaukee County to make sure children and families impacted by violence and exposed to trauma get the help that they need.

We've made great strides in implementing Crisis Intervention Training department-wide, so that officers are prepared to handle interactions with residents in the most challenging and mentally stressful situations.

The department is on-track and on-budget to have every police officer outfitted with a body camera by the end of this year. We've rolled out 1200 body cameras already and they have proven helpful in addressing citizen concerns and citizen complaints.

2015 was a challenging year for Milwaukee. We were not alone, as many American cities experienced an increase in gun violence. After several years of continual reductions in crime, we experienced significant increases in nonfatal shootings and homicides. But it has not deterred our officers who took more than 2,500 guns off of our streets in 2015, that number went up 9% over the previous year.

It's a fact: too many criminals are armed. We need to look closely at what has changed and take every possible step to get guns out of the hands of criminals and put particularly violent criminals who use guns in prison. There are too many suspects and victims with criminal histories. We introduced legislation to provide certainty in sentencing for VIOLENT felons who then commit a crime with a gun when they've completed their sentence. Chief Flynn and I went to Madison, testified and the legislation is now law.

We are not doing our young offenders any favors if they commit multiple car thefts and they are free to continue to break the law. Our car theft arrests are up, our police pursuits are up; but the disincentives to stop engaging in criminal behavior, have not sunk in. The entire juvenile justice system, including the county and state must focus on this issue and must engage the Milwaukee Police Department to find solutions. Lives are at stake.

Violence has a significant impact on the public health in Milwaukee. We have built a strong coalition around sexual assault and domestic violence, and have developed partnerships that are building collaboration and supporting youth-led initiatives to end violence.

I'd like to recognize a longtime city employee and director of the Office of Violence Prevention, Terry Perry. She has worked tirelessly to address the issues of domestic violence and sexual assault. Thank you.

I want to mention the new Sojourner Family Peace Center. I visited there just last week with the County Executive. Sojourner brings together resources for families facing difficulties. Counseling, health care, police, prosecutors, and shelter are all under one roof. It is an absolutely amazing place. If you haven't been there you should go.

Not surprisingly, we are now building a broader coalition to support our work around youth violence prevention and youth development. The best work always begins in our neighborhoods. I see the impact of organizations like Running Rebels, the United Community Center and We Got This.

Our emphasis will be on youth development and preventing youth violence because we need to ensure that every young person can achieve their goals and build a successful future.

We're able to make these important investments in health, neighborhoods, libraries and public safety because we've laid a solid fiscal foundation. Through our disciplined approach, we have managed our City's finances with a focus on maintaining valuable city services and positioning Milwaukee well for the future. Unlike cities throughout the country, we've done all of this without laying off a single police officer, firefighter or closing any libraries. And, my 2016 budget provides a tax levy freeze. I want to thank Alderman Nik Kovac, the Chair of the Council's Finance Committee for his willingness to work with us and his thoughtful approach to the budget process.

Let's talk about our infrastructure investments have reduced replacement cycles. Funding for streets, street lighting, water mains, and sewers has increased by \$40.6 million since 2004. That's nearly 95%. Neighborhood investments like these pay dividends for residents and small businesses alike.

The positive momentum we're experiencing has drawn the attention of Washington D.C. Most recently, we were the recipient of a \$30 million Choice Neighborhoods grant that will help transform a part of the northwest side of Milwaukee, including Westlawn. We've brought more than 25 partners to the table who are focusing millions of dollars in additional investment in the area.

People are transforming our City and I'm proud to be leading efforts that have brought so many people to the cause of making Milwaukee an even greater city. So let's talk about a few of our all-stars:

It's people like Patty Pritchard Thompson who is a constant cheerleader for her Bayview community, and events like Chill on the Hill.

And Zeynab Ali, a remarkable young woman who attends St. Joan Antida High School and works on youth violence prevention efforts.

And, whenever I am around Andre Lee Ellis, I'm inspired by his enthusiasm and his work on the front lines leading young boys into successful lives.

It's people like Michelle Quinn, who is turning an abandoned south side property into her professional office ...

And Ivan Mejias, who is a leader in charting the future for Walker's Square ...

It's Westlawn resident Jackie Burrell - there's no bigger champion for the folks there ...

It's people like Officer Michael Ward, who personally bought and distributed school supplies for kids on the northwest side ...

And, Officer Carla Lehman who formed a special relationship with a Milwaukee mom and her children and helped them find permanent housing.

The people who have done this great work are with us this morning. Stand and join me in acknowledging all of them.

It's all about people. We started this morning hearing from Kongcheng. He came to my attention because he sent an email to City Hall. He asked some important questions about crime and safety--fundamental questions about where Milwaukee is heading. But more importantly he is part of the future of this city. It's young people like Kongcheng that make me so optimistic that 20 years from now Milwaukee will still be a city where caring people are making a difference.

More good things are happening in Milwaukee than in any city in this state.

Of course we have our challenges. But together, we have put Milwaukee on a strong foundation and we can address and overcome anything that stands in our way.

Milwaukee is positioned for greatness. We have solid infrastructure, growing businesses, cultural assets and natural beauty.

But most importantly, we have YOU—hard working, ambitious, creative, and dedicated people—who will define Milwaukee's future.

I have faith in our residents, and I have faith in the future of this great city.